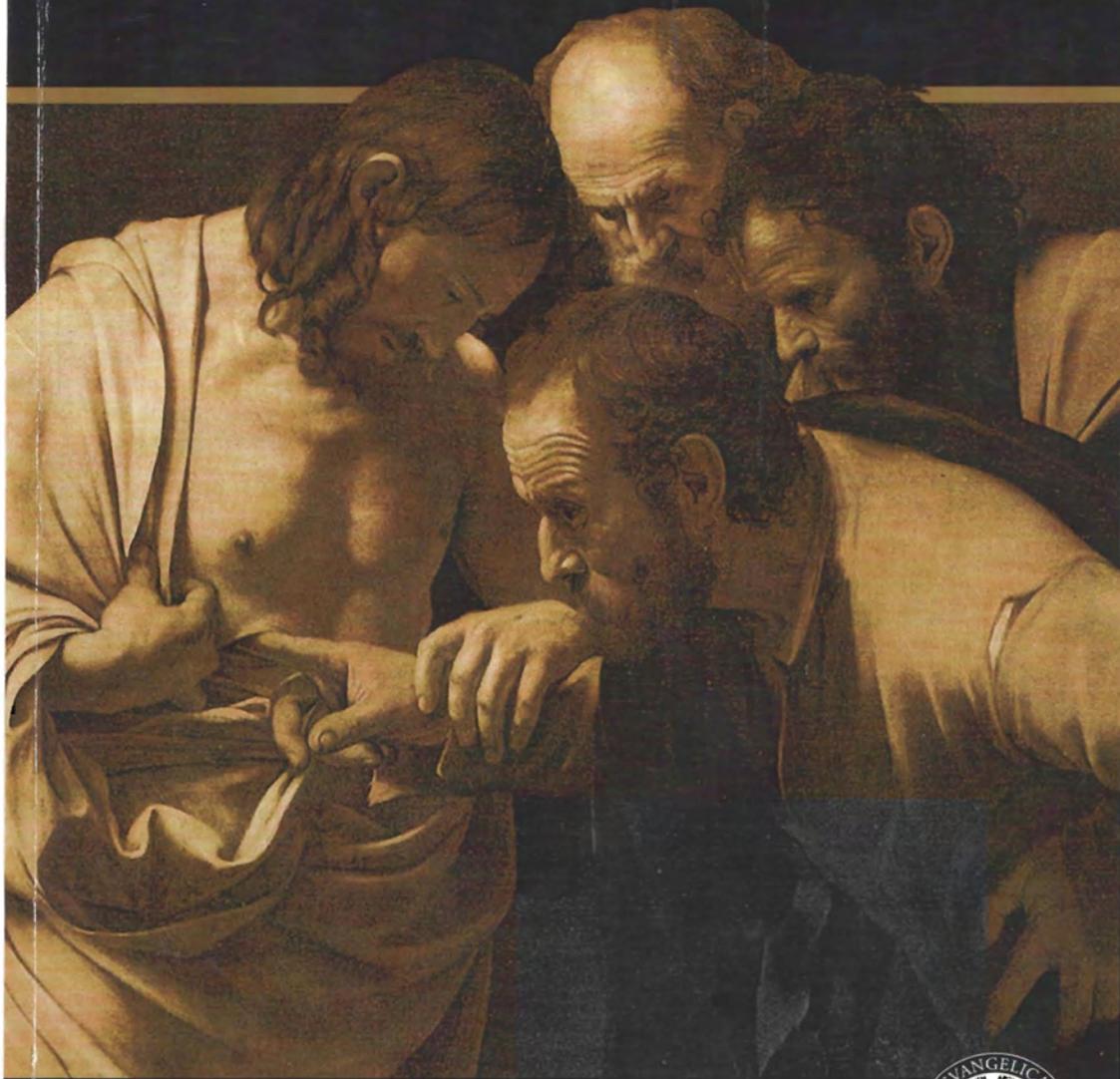


Providing a forum for scholarly articles
contributing to the defense of the historic Christian Faith.



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CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

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CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

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3. Cogency of argument
4. Clarity and conciseness of literary style
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6. Overall apologetic relevance

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2. Transliterate Hebrew and Greek words according to the key found in *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.
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CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS JOURNAL

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INTRODUCTION

IN THIS ISSUE of our *Journal*, we explore one of the “hot-button” topics among conservative Christians today: the age of the earth. Solid, Bible-believing Christians who believe in the inerrancy of Holy Scripture currently hold differing positions as they approach this critical issue.

Some of the most important thinkers in the young-earth creationist community have employed a version of apologetic methodology called Presuppositionalism. In the following pages, six scholars interact with important questions. Does a presuppositional apologetic lead one to a young-earth position? What role, if any, should general revelation play in apologetic encounters with unbelievers? When, if ever, is it permissible to allow data from outside the Bible to interpret the Bible?

The three positions that are discussed are Classical Apologetics & Creationism, Young-Earth Presuppositionalism, and Covenantal Apologetics & Old Earth Creationism. Each contributor presents his position, then has a response from each of the other contributors, and closes with a reply. Three guest reviewers have been selected by the contributors to give their thoughts on all of the material presented.

It is our prayer that as you read the articles in this issue of the *Journal*, you will come away with an even greater appreciation both of the important issues that are at stake and the fact that these are disagreements among devout fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

The philosophical approach each contributor utilizes as he deals with the issues under discussion makes for the lively, irenic, and hopefully constructive, interchanges contained in this volume.

Richard Land, D.Phil., Editor-in-Chief

Floyd Elmore, Ph.D., Executive Editor

CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS AND CREATIONISM

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

AS A PHILOSOPHY and Christian Apologetics professor, I am very interested in the differences between various apologetic methodologies. Over the past few years I have become increasingly concerned about the degree to which the apologetic methodology known as Presuppositionalism has become prevalent within Young Earth Creationism (YEC).¹ By this I mean that strategic leaders of Young Earth Creationism are doing apologetics (and teaching others to do apologetics) by means of the Presuppositional Apologetic methodology (or some modified version thereof). My concern arises largely as a function of my objections to Presuppositionalism as such and not from objections to Young Earth Creationism. I seek to document the presence of Presuppositionalism in the thinking of such Young Earth creationists as Ken Ham and Jason Lisle and to offer a response to their

¹ I would like to thank Eric Gustafson, Director of Development at Southern Evangelical Seminary, for drawing my attention to this issue and for suggesting to me the title “Young Earth Presuppositionalism.”

Richard G. Howe is Professor of Philosophy and Apologetics and Director of the Ph.D. program at Southern Evangelical Seminary.

views.² I am also concerned with the template “God’s words vs. man’s words” as a way of assailing certain apologetic issues, including, but not limited to, the debate between Creationism and Evolution and the debate between Young Earth Creationism and Old Earth Creationism.

APOLOGETIC METHODOLOGY

The issue of apologetic methodology has to do with this question: what is the proper way for Christians to defend the truth of the Christian faith? The two main answers to that question are (1) the Classical Apologetics (or the Classical method), in terms of which the Christian is to marshal arguments and evidence (philosophical, historical, and more) demonstrating that the Christian faith is true and (2) Presuppositional (or the Presuppositional method), in terms of which the truth of the Christian faith is demonstrated in showing that Christianity must be presupposed before any knowledge or reasoning (even reasoning against Christianity) is possible.³

Those who espouse the Classical method generally accept (to various degrees and with various qualifications) the legitimacy of human reason and, thus, often seek to engage the unbeliever in rational discourse together with a proclamation of the gospel. Those who espouse

2. My main sources for Ken Ham’s thinking in these matters consist of a talk on apologetic methodology he gave at First Baptist Church, Woodstock, GA, as well as a panel discussion on the Trinity Broadcast Network (available at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gueGotRqbM>> (accessed July 29, 2013 and other places) in which he participated with Hugh Ross. Other participants were Sean McDowell, John A. Bloom, Eric Hovind, Ray Comfort, with the moderator, Matt Crouch. In the interest of completeness and coherency, I will try to unpack and extend Ham’s position perhaps further than a strict limit of his words might seem to warrant. My sources for this unpacking and extending will consist of certain of Ham’s defenders and other interested parties who have interacted with me on my blog (<<http://www.quodlibetalblog.wordpress.com>>) regarding this matter. I will let the reader decide whether such unpacking and extending are faithful to Ham’s methodology. Even if I have gone beyond that to which Ham would comfortably subscribe, my characterization of this issue is indeed found in other relevant YEC sources who marshal Presuppositionalism in the service of YEC, including Jason Lisle, *The Ultimate Proof of Creation: Resolving the Origins Debate* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009) (—thanks to Lalo Gunther of the Institute for Creation Research for the gift of this book); select internet videos of Lisle, and Tim Chaffey and Jason Lisle, *Old Earth Creationism on Trial. The Verdict Is In.* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2008).

3. Other expressions are used by Presuppositionalist for their system, including the ‘Transcendental method’ and ‘Reformed Apologetics’. This last expression should not be confused with the Reformed epistemology of Alvin Plantinga.

the Presuppositional method deny that the faith can be defended by an appeal to some area of “neutral ground” from which the Christian can move the unbeliever by a series of arguments utilizing a set of (relatively agreed upon) “facts.” Instead, Presuppositionalism maintains that since our understanding and interpretation of these “facts” is part of what is in dispute, something else is necessary for the unbeliever to realize *antecedent* to the understanding (or interpretation) of these “facts,” viz., that unless the Christian faith (or the Word of God) is presupposed, then these “facts” are not (consistently)⁴ intelligible at all.

MY COMMITMENTS

My concerns arise from two commitments I have, to wit, I am a Young Earth creationist, and I am a Classical apologist. As a Young Earth creationist, I regret that Young Earth Creationism is being done a disservice when it is tethered to what I consider to be an illegitimate apologetic methodology. As a Classical apologist, I desire to show Young Earth creationists that the Presuppositional method not only does not serve to convince detractors that Young Earth Creationism is true, but it scandalizes Christians in what constitutes sound apologetics in the first place. This is not to say that every aspect of the Young Earth Creationism case is undermined by its Presuppositionalism. It is to say that the way they sometimes employ their presuppositional arguments runs into problems. I will try to show that often their Presuppositionalism collapses into the very Classical method that they say they reject. In addition, there are the problems of equating the “preconditions of intelligibility” with “biblical principles,” confusing ontology (or metaphysics)⁵ with epistemology, juxtaposing “God’s

4. I add the qualification ‘consistently’ because (as I will show later) the Presuppositionalist grants that the unbeliever knows some truths (albeit incompletely). It is just that the unbeliever does so in violation to (i.e., inconsistently with) his own unbelieving world view.

5. Since ‘ontology’ (or ‘ontological’) and ‘metaphysics’ (or ‘metaphysical’) are often used interchangeably in this context, I shall do the same notwithstanding their different uses in other contexts. Some credit Christian Wolff (1679–1754) with introducing the terminological distinction, seeing ontology as a subset of metaphysics. Frederick Copleston comments: “The influence of Scholasticism can be seen in Wolff’s division of philosophy. The fundamental division, which goes back, of course, to Aristotle, is into theoretical and practical philosophy. Theoretical philosophy or metaphysics is subdivided into ontology, dealing with being as such, rational psychology, concerned with the soul, cosmology, which treats of the cosmic system, and rational or natural theology, which has

words vs. man's words," and displaying an inconsistency in their methodology.

CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS

Classical Apologetics is often grouped with Evidentialism. This is understandable since the Classical method shares a lot in common with Evidentialism. Some apologists who consider themselves Classical might not strive to maintain any principled (or practical) differences between the two. However, I contend that the Classical model points to an important arrangement of evidences and arguments that sets it apart from other methodologies. It is characterized by three levels: philosophical foundation, the existence of God, and the truth of Christianity.⁶

Classical Apologetics: Philosophical Foundation

The first level maintains that philosophy is essential in establishing the foundation for dealing with unbelievers who might bring up certain challenges, including the challenge that truth is not objective or the challenge that only the natural sciences are the source of truth about reality.⁷ Thus, when encountering the unbeliever (and sometimes even a fellow believer), the Christian must (if the occasion demands it) defend that reality is knowable, that logic applies to reality, and that morally fallen human beings have some capacity to cognitively understand (even if they morally reject) certain claims of the Christian faith.

as its subject-matter the existence and attributes of God." (*A History of Philosophy*, 9 vols. (Garden City: Image Books, 1985), bk. 2, vol. 6, pt. 2, chap. 5, §2, p. 108.)

6. For an annotated bibliography on Christian apologetics go to <<http://www.richardghowe.com/apobib.pdf>>. For a model (among many) of how a more classical style of apologetics can be done see Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004) and J. P. Moreland, *Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1987). For an extended treatment of how Classical apologetics differs from Presuppositional apologetics, see 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, Academic Books, 1984).

7. For a helpful treatment of postmodernism and a defense of the notion that truth is objective, see Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2000). For other recommend resources to help with philosophical issues, see the "Philosophy" section of my "Annotated Bibliography on Christian Apologetics" referenced in note 6.

It might also be necessary, depending upon the assumptions of the unbeliever, to delve into issues regarding the nature of reality itself.⁸ The apologist would not necessarily need to deal with these matters in as much as many unbelievers already work with these normal, rational commitments. Only in those cases where the unbeliever (or believer) has been unduly influenced by postmodernism (the idea that truth is relative to the individual or culture) or scientism (the idea that only the hard sciences can deliver truth about reality) or some other false philosophical system would the apologist have to deal with these issues.

Philosophy also is essential in dealing with certain interpretive issues of the Bible. Two areas come readily to mind. The first has to do with the principles of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics), generally considered. The second has to do with specific interpretive issues dealing with the nature of God Himself. Here, then, is where the Classical model is relevant to issues within the body of believers and where it intersects with my concerns about Ham and Lisle.

Every reader of the Bible has some method, whether consciously or unconsciously, of how to interpret it, which is to say that every reader of the Bible has some hermeneutic. The question is where does one get one's principles of hermeneutics? It is impossible to get one's principles of hermeneutics from the Bible itself. This is so because if one could understand the Bible in order to get these hermeneutical principles, then he understands the Bible *before* he has his principles of understanding the Bible, which means he would not need the principles he was seeking to get from the Bible. On the other hand, if he thinks he cannot understand the Bible without some principles of understanding the Bible (and I would argue that this has to be the case), then that means he could not understand the Bible enough to get the principles themselves if he was committed to the notion that he gets those very principles from the Bible. Either way, he runs into an impossible situation. We see, then, that it is impossible to get all of one's principles of interpretation of the Bible from the Bible itself, even if he can get some of them. Instead, they have to come from somewhere else.

8. Such issues would include the nature of universals, the essence/existence distinction, hylomorphic (form/matter) composition of sensible objects, and relationships of the metaphysic constituents of sensible objects, including substance, accidents, and properties.

The reader might be expecting me to argue here that these principles must come from philosophy. This is not my position. Instead, these principles of hermeneutics are grounded in the nature of reality itself. To be sure, reality is what it is because God is who He is and creation is what it is because of how God created it. In all of this, I am not suggesting that one has to do an in-depth examination of reality in order to somehow excavate principles of hermeneutics so that he can then begin to understand his Bible. Rather, I maintain that, in many, if not most, instances, such principles of understanding are very natural to us as rational creatures created in the image of God (in a way analogous to how we naturally perceive the physical world around us with our sensory faculties). It remains, however, that there are occasions where a more in-depth philosophical examination of the issues is warranted. This is increasingly so as false philosophies grow in their influence on people's thinking.⁹

The second interpretive issue has to do with the specifics of what the Bible says about the nature and attributes of God. Without a sound philosophy, the student of the Bible would be unable to ground the classical attributes of God, including God's immateriality and infinity. This is so because many passages of the Bible speak metaphorically about God as having various bodily parts. Unless there is some way to judge that such passages are figures of speech, one runs the risk of falling into heresy.

Consider the problem lying behind Henry Morris' comments: "[The words of Genesis] describe and present a Being whose power is limitless and whose knowledge is all-encompassing. Neither you nor I can experience such a condition, and therefore, we must either accept (believe) that there is an all-powerful and all-knowing God, transcendent to the universe, who is the First Cause of all things, or we must reject the existence of such a Being and retreat into our own experience and intelligence."¹⁰ The problem with how Morris characterizes the Genesis text is that this same Genesis narrative says that

9. For an essential reading on the philosophical issues underlying hermeneutics, see Thomas A. Howe, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation* (n.p.: Advantage Inspirational, 2004).

10. Henry Morris III, "The Genesis Controversy" in *Real World Christianity Conference Program of the Nineteenth Annual National Conference on Christian Apologetics 2012* (Charlotte, NC), 25.

Adam heard the sound of God “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8).¹¹ How could this God walk in the garden without legs? If He has legs, how could He be transcendent to the universe? With such descriptions, how can Morris so confidently assert that God is transcendent to universe, or, more troubling, how can Morris so confidently assert that the Genesis narrative presents God as a transcendent being? It seems clear that it does not.¹²

It will not do to appeal to other verses of Scripture to adjudicate the matter. While I appreciate the “analogy of faith” principle and believe that it is valid as far as it goes, it has its limits.¹³ I believe K. Scott Oliphint overstates the situation when he says, “As Turretin notes, given the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, interpretation of Scripture is given to us by way of other Scriptures. We do not need another external source in order to compare and bring together the truth as God has given has given it to us in his Word.”¹⁴ As an example, one might suggest that we can know from John 4 that God is Spirit and therefore He cannot literally have bodily parts. Thus, they might say, when Genesis 3 talks about God walking, it must be speaking metaphorically (if it is not a Theophany). The problem with this response is that there would be no way to judge whether the Genesis passage is to be taken as metaphor and John 4 is to be taken as literal or whether John 4 should be taken as metaphor and the Genesis passage is to be

11. *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). All Scripture references are to this version unless otherwise indicated.

12. Some may think that Morris can get off the hook by claiming that these specific descriptions are a Theophany (an appearance of God in human form, referred to by some as a Christophany). Even if I conceded that this explains the narrative here, there are many other physical descriptions of God, some of which cannot possibly be explained as a Theophany. Consider Ruth 2:12: “The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” or Ps. 17:8, “Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me under the shadow of Your wings.”

13. For a brief discussion of the principle, see Thomas A. Howe, “The Analogy of Faith: Does Scripture Interpret Scripture?” *Christian Research Journal* 29, no. 2 (2006): 50-51. The article is available for download at <<http://www.equip.org/articles/the-analogy-of-faith>>(accessed 07/30/13).

14. K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2006), 24. As a Reformed Christian, Oliphint is showing his fidelity to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which says, “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.” (I, IX)

taken as literal. We can only defend the fact that the above verses are indeed metaphors and John 4 is literal by an appeal to reality. When we read in the Scriptures “For you shall go out with joy. And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you. And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (Isa. 55:12), we know that this is metaphor precisely because we know from reality that mountains cannot sing and trees do not have hands. Our ability to know this is because of our simple apprehension of the nature of mountains and trees by means of our sensory faculties. But our knowledge of the nature of God (i.e., whether He does or does not have bodily parts) cannot be done directly by our sensory faculties. It requires more actions by the intellect. These actions constitute doing philosophy (or, more precisely, metaphysics). We can know by sound philosophy not only about what the nature of God must be like (and thus we know He cannot literally have such bodily parts) but also certain solid principles of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics). This is not so say that a believer cannot understand his Bible without formal training in philosophy. It is to say, however, that sound interpretations can only be rigorously defended against heretics and critics with some training in sound philosophy.¹⁵

Neither will it do to try to appeal to the literary genre to settle the matter. Some might suggest that we can know the meaning of a given text in terms of the literary genre within which the text is found. While the literary genre can be essential in some instances to shed light on one’s total understand of a text (especially in considering the significance, as opposed to the meaning), genre analysis has its limits. This is so for several reasons. First, while poetry might alert us to the possibility, if not likelihood, of the presence of figures of speech, we have to consider the fact that such figures of speech can also occur with historical narrative, as is the case with our Genesis 3 passage. Second, there would be no way to even know that the literary genre of a passage is unless we are able to understand the passage in the first place. One would have to know a passage was saying in order to be able to

15. The same reasoning helps us understand Jesus’ statements that He is the door (John 10:9) and that He is the true vine (John 15:1). Because we know what the nature of a door is and what the nature of a vine is, together with knowing what the nature of a human is, we know that Jesus must be speaking metaphorically. But to know, reflect upon, and develop a coherent system of thinking about natures is to do metaphysics (philosophy).

discover whether it was poetry or historical narrative. Thus, an appeal to the literary genre, while relevant broadly considered, is not enough to settle the issues I am discussing here.¹⁶

The problem is not merely academic. There are teachers within the ostensive Christian community who embrace such heresies as God being a finite, limited being. Consider these words by Word of Faith teacher Kenneth Copeland:

The Bible says [Isa. 40:12] He measured the heavens with a nine-inch span. Now the span is the difference, distance between the end of the thumb and the end of the little finger. And the Bible says, in fact the Amplified translation translates the Hebrew text that way: that He measured out the heavens with a nine-inch span. Well, I got a ruler and measured mine and my span is eight and three quarters inches long. So then God's span is a quarter-inch longer than mine. So you see, that faith didn't come billowing out of some giant monster somewhere. It came out of the heart of a being that is very uncanny the way He's very much like you and me: a being that stands somewhere around six-two, six-three, that weighs somewhere in the neighborhood of a couple of hundred pounds, a little better, has a span of eight and, I mean nine inches across; stood up and said "Let it be!" and this universe situated itself, and went into motion. Glory to God! Hallelujah!¹⁷

The same problem is also exemplified by Finis Jennings Dake, the editor of the *Dake Annotated Reference Bible*.¹⁸ I have been dismayed at how many Christian bookstores that sell this Bible despite Dake's views that God is a person "with a personal spirit body, a personal soul, and a personal spirit, like that of angels, and like that of man except His body is of spirit substance instead of flesh and bones."¹⁹ Dake also argues that "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all present where there are beings with whom they have dealings;

16. For a discussion about the relationship between genre and meaning see Thomas A. Howe, "Does Genre Determine Meaning?" *Christian Apologetics Journal* 6, no. 1, (Spring 2007): 1-19.

17. Kenneth Copeland, *Christianity in Crisis* Audio Tape (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993).

18. Finis Jennings Dake, *The Dake Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville, GA: Dake Bible Sales, 1991).

19. Dake, *Reference Bible*, New Testament, 97.

but they are not omnibody, that is, their bodies are not omnipresent. All three go from place to place bodily as other beings in the universe do."²⁰ He undoubtedly says this because of how he takes those verses that speak of God in bodily terms. He argues,

God has a personal spirit body (Dan. 7:9–14; 10:5–19); shape (Jn. 5:37); form (Phil. 2:5–7); image and likeness of a man (Gen. 1:26; 9:6; Ezek. 1:26–28; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9). He has bodily parts such as, back parts (Ex. 33:23), heart (Gen. 6:6; 8:21), fingers and hands (Ps. 8:3–6; Heb. 1:10), mouth (Num. 12:8), lips and tongue (Isa. 30:27), feet (Ex. 24:10), eyes and eyelids (Ps. 11:4; 33:18), ears (Ps. 18:6), hair, head, face, arms (Dan. 7:9–14; 10:5–19; Rev. 5:1–7; 22:4–6), and other bodily parts.²¹

One should take careful notice of how many verses of Scripture Dake has cited. I suspect that if one were to challenge him that God does not literally have these bodily parts, Dake's response would be that it is he who is taking the testimony of Scripture seriously since that is what the text clearly says.

Lest someone think that my examples are extreme, this issue of the attributes of God is becoming increasingly more troubling even within evangelical circles. A perusal of systematic theologies and other sources dealing with Theology Proper over the last 150 years shows a marked drift away from the classical attributes of God. This drift, or in some cases, deliberate migration, is illustrated by the dispute over open theism. Gregory Boyd, in discussing certain passages of Scripture that describes God as experiencing regret or uncertainty about future outcomes, comments, "It is, I submit, more difficult to conceive of God experiencing such things if the future is exhaustively settled in his mind than if it is in part composed of possibilities."²² Time and space will not permit me here to examine the status of other attributes of God that are fading away within evangelical circles, including simplicity and impassibility.²³ Nor will time and space per-

20. Dake, *Reference Bible*, in the "Complete Concordance and Cyclopedic Index," 81.

21. *Ibid.*, 97.

22. Gregory A. Boyd, "Neo-Molinism and the Infinite Intelligence of God," *Philosophia Christi* 5, no.1, (2003): 192.

23. For a discussion of simplicity see Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, IV.

mit me to go into the details of why these matter. The question one must ask, however, is how the aberrant or heretical thinking of Finis Jennings Dake and others can be answered. It is my contention that it can only be answered by sound philosophy and sound principles of hermeneutics, which themselves are defended by sound philosophy.²⁴

Without a doubt, one does not have to study philosophy to understand many things about reality. An illustration and parallel from the natural sciences might help. A child can know the difference between a dog and a tree. But, if one is to delve deeply into the aspects of physical objects, one would need more technical training in the sciences. Thus, while a child might know whether the object in front of him is a dog or a tree, to understand more completely the physiology of a dog or a tree, or the chemical aspects of them, or the subatomic aspects of them, one would need to study physiology, chemistry, or physics. Likewise, while the child could tell whether the object in front of him is a dog or a tree, to understand what it is in virtue of which all dogs are dogs and all trees are trees (the nature of universals),²⁵ or what the difference is between the essence and the existence of the dog or tree any why that matters (the essence/existence distinction), how

7; *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q3; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 18; Maurice R. Holloway, *An Introduction to Natural Theology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), 231–234, 355–356; James E. Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011); and Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith*, 91–96.

24. As yet, I have said nothing about what I think sound philosophical reasoning would look like. To be sure, this is a subject that has occupied thinkers for millennia. My own views have been variously labeled as Classical Realism, Philosophical Realism, Scholastic Realism, Thomistic Realism, and Thomism. Thomistic Realism (to pick one of the labels) begins with the common sense experiences of sensible (physical) reality. My use of the expression ‘common sense’ should not be construed as an embracing of the Scottish Common Sense Realism of Thomas Reid, et al. While such realism might share some surface similarities and common terminology with the Thomistic Realism that I embrace, the two systems are distinct in critical ways. As such, legitimate criticisms of Scottish Common Sense Realism would not necessarily apply to Thomistic Realism.

25. One important application of the issue of universals is in the pro-life/abortion debate. We understand that the fertilized egg in the womb *is* a human being, not by virtue of the particular functions it might possess (since it has virtually no functions that one might associate with being human) but because it possesses the nature or essence of humanness (what the theologians call a soul). As long as one defines its humanness exclusively in terms of the possession of certain functions like self-awareness, rationality, a sense of the future, or others, he cannot understand why killing the fetus is murder.

it is that the dog or tree remains numerically the same dog or tree throughout all the changes that happen to them during their lifetimes (hylomorphic or form/matter composition). and relationships of the substance, accidents, and properties of the dog or tree, one would need to study the discipline of philosophy.²⁶

Classical Apologetics: The Existence of God

The second level of the Classical method maintains that God's existence can be proven by a number of lines of evidence and argument. These would include the cosmological argument, in terms of which God is argued as the cause of the existence of the universe, the teleological argument, in terms of which God is argued as the cause of the design of the universe as things tend toward their appropriate end, and the Moral argument, in terms of which God is argued as the grounding for moral reality. But, if one employs the metaphysics of Thomistic Realism, this is not "just any kind of abstract, general theism ('a god of some sort or other')"²⁷ that Greg Bahnsen seems so worried about when he reflects upon (what he perceives to be) Classical Apologetics. Instead, such sound metaphysics is the only way to prove all the classical attributes of God that the church has cherished throughout its history. What is more, it is my contention that as sound philosophy has eroded from the general Christian philosophical community, to the same extent these classical attributes are eroding.

26. Indeed, even the judgment of whether a given question is a question for the natural sciences, for theology, for philosophy, or for some other discipline is itself a philosophical question. For a succinct treatment of some of the philosophical aspects of Thomism and its bearing particularly on the question of the existence and attributes of God, see Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2008) and his *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneword, 2010). To assuage any concerns an evangelical might have with embracing the thought of Thomas Aquinas, see Norman L. Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991). To assuage any concerns any Reformed evangelical might have with embracing the thought of Thomas Aquinas, see Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views of the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: Christian University Press, 1985). For an extended bibliography on Thomistic thought, see my bibliography at <<http://www.richardghowe.com/BibThomistic.html>>.

27. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1998), 31

Classical Apologetics: The Truth of Christianity

Once the existence of God is proven and the possibility of miracles is thereby established, specific arguments are given for the truth of the Christian faith, including arguments from manuscript evidence, archeology, and from other corroborating historical evidence for the historical reliability of the Bible, arguments from the Bible and other sources for the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, and arguments from the teachings of Jesus for the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible.²⁸ Thus, with a proper philosophical foundation, sound arguments proving God's existence and attributes, and the historical evidence for the truth of the Christian faith, Classical Apologetics becomes one of the tools needed to go into the world and make disciples.

PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

The apologetic method that has come to be known as Presuppositionalism is largely the legacy (in America) of the Westminster Theological Seminary professor Cornelius Van Til.²⁹ Presuppositional apologetics does not consist of merely examining the legitimacy of the unbeliever's presuppositions. No model is better at doing that than the Classical model. As such, to examine presuppositions is not what distinguishes different apologetic methodologies. Jason Lisle is simply wrong when he says, "The method . . . is called 'Presuppositional Apologetics', . . . It could also be called a 'Transcendental' approach or 'Transcendental Apologetics' which I sort of prefer but 'Presuppositional' has probably caught on more. And

28. I am indebted to R. C. Sproul for this template (basic reliability of the New Testament, who Jesus is, what Jesus teaches about the Bible) in his "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1974): 242-261. One particularly important point to understand about Classical apologetics is that the existence of God must be affirmed before the specific evidence for the truth of Christianity in particular will make sense. This is so because arguments for the Bible and for Jesus's divinity utilize the notion of the miraculous. Since a miracle is an act of God, there cannot be any miracles unless God exists. Thus, demonstrating God's existence is prior to arguing for Christianity. I would argue that this is the *sine qua non* of Classical Apologetics.

29. For an extended bibliography of resources (primary and secondary, sympathetic and critical) dealing with Presuppositionalism, see note 2 of my "Some Brief Critical Thoughts on Presuppositionalism," available at <<http://www.richardghowe.com/Presuppositionalism.pdf>>.

you can see why it's called that. We deal with world views. We deal with presuppositions. That's how it gets its name."³⁰

To be sure, Presuppositionalists do deal with presuppositions and world views. Though Lisle's explanation might seem plausible (and I have encountered several who wonder why, as an apologist and philosopher, I would be critical of examining presuppositions when they discover that I am critical of Presuppositionalism), the reason the method is called 'Presuppositionalism' is because there is something in particular that must be presupposed. It maintains that a proper apologetic methodology must be built on the solid Reformed (Calvinist) theological doctrines of the sovereignty of God and the total depravity of the human race. The God of Christianity, together with the Scriptures, must be presupposed before there can be any consistently coherent or rational thought (i.e., intelligibility) in the first place. Van Til argues, "For man self-consciousness *presupposes* God-consciousness. . . . God-consciousness was for [Adam] the *presupposition* of the significance of his reasoning on anything."³¹ Greg Bahnsen maintains that "the task of apologetics must be exercised upon the infallible and *presupposed* authority of the Word of Christ in Scripture. . . . Christian apologetics must *begin* and end with Him who is the alpha and the omega, the one who only and always reigns as Lord."³² Bahnsen goes on: "The purpose of this treatise is to exhibit presuppositional apologetics as the only faithful and sound method of contending for the Christian hope and biblical message. Resting upon the authority of the living God rather than that of independent human reasoning, the apologist must *presuppose* the truth of Scripture and lay siege to all apostate presuppositions."³³

30. Jason Lisle, DVD "Nuclear Strength Apologetics, pt. 1."

31. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1975), 90, 91; emphasis added. See also his *Apologetics* course syllabus, 55.

32. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics, Stated and Defended* (Power Spring, GA: American Vision Press; Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media, 2008), 3, 4; emphasis added.

33. *Ibid.*, 4. Bahnsen has set up a false dilemma. The choices are not confined to "the authority of the living God" or "independent human reasoning." The Classical Realist would argue that appeals can be made to reality. To construe the matter as if it is a choice between two epistemological issues is to prejudice it in favor of either rationalism (Descartes) or Idealism (Berkeley) or worse. In either case, it is to exclude *a priori* the

According to this method, to assume a neutral ground between the believer and unbeliever from which the believer could launch into rational arguments for God's existence is, de facto, to deny the God of Christianity. The unbelievers' attempts to argue against the existence of the Christian God already employ epistemological assumptions that can be the case only if the God of Christianity is presupposed to exist. Thus, according to Presuppositionalism, Christians who use the Classical theistic arguments are already compromising the nature of the very God they are trying to prove. Van Til argues,

This is, in the last analysis, the question as to what are one's ultimate presuppositions. When man became a sinner, he made of himself instead of God the ultimate or final reference point. And it is precisely this presupposition, as it controls without exception all forms of non-Christian philosophy, that must be brought into question. . . . In not challenging this basic presupposition with respect to himself as the final reference point in predication the natural man may accept the "theistic proofs" as fully valid. He may construct such proofs. He has constructed such proofs. But the god whose existence he proves to himself in this way is always a god who is something other than the self-contained ontological trinity of Scripture.³⁴

He also argues, "The only 'proof' of the Christian position is that unless its truth is presupposed, there is no possibility of 'proving' anything at all. The actual state of affairs as preached by Christianity is the necessary foundation of 'proof' itself."³⁵ As I stated earlier, Presuppositionalism maintains that it is not possible (or appropriate) to try to appeal to "facts" to adjudicate the dispute between Christianity and non-Christianity. Since our understanding and interpretation of these "facts" is part of what is in dispute between the Christian and non-Christian, the non-Christian needs to be shown that unless the

Classical Realist option. For a discussion of the Classical Realist method, see Etienne Gilson, *Methodical Realism*, trans. Philip Trower (Front Royal: Christendom Press, 1990), reprinted *Methodical Realism: A Handbook for Beginning Realists* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011).

34. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 77; emphasis added.

35. Cornelius Van Til, "My Credo," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1971), 21.

Christian faith (or the Word of God) is presupposed, then these “facts” are not (consistently) intelligible at all.

This is not to say that Presuppositionalism holds that an unbeliever cannot know what day of the week it is or whether it is raining. It is to say that he does not know any fact *truly*. Van Til comments,

Often enough we [who believe in God] have talked with you [who do not believe in God] about facts and sound reasons as though we agreed with you on what these really are. In our arguments for the existence of God, we have frequently assumed that you and we together have an area of knowledge on which we agree. But we really do not grant that you see any fact in any dimension of life truly. We really think you have colored glasses on your nose when you talk about chickens and cows, as well as when you talk about the life hereafter.³⁶

Thus, when a Christian presents the Gospel to an unbeliever, the unbeliever will undoubtedly appeal to truths that the unbeliever thinks he knows to be truths in order to dispute the claims of Christianity. The Presuppositionalist will try to show him that, unless Christianity is presupposed to be true, the unbeliever could not know these truths to be truths. Indeed, says the Presuppositionalist, even in his arguments against Christianity, the unbeliever must presuppose the truth of Christianity. Therefore, Christianity must be true.

Problems with the Presuppositionalism of Ken Ham, Jason Lisle, et al.

My criticisms of Young Earth Presuppositionalism do not stem from any objections I have to the conclusions of Young Earth Creationism.³⁷ I would add that my objections also do not stem from any animus toward Reformed theology. I do not believe that Presuppositionalism

36. Cornelius Van Til, *Why I Believe in God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, n.d.), 9; emphasis added.

37. I probably am not far from Ham or Lisle’s views on many things. I hold to a literal reading of Genesis 1-11, which would include maintaining six literal 24-hour days of creation, a literal Adam and Eve, the Fall of the human race in Adam’s sin, the corruption and cursing of the cosmos as a result of this Fall (together with the rejection of the notion that there was death before the fall), a universal, global, catastrophic flood in Noah’s time (together with the Ark and the animals just as Genesis says), and the tower of Babel and the confusion of languages. I might even agree with some of their scientific arguments for some of these particular points.

is necessarily entailed by it. Instead, I object to how Ham, Lisle, and others characterize the task of how the Christian can or ought to defend the faith. Time and space will not allow a thorough critique of the system. I would like to highlight a few problems I often see with their employment of Presuppositionalism.

The Problem of Presuppositionalism Collapsing into Classical Apologetics

Lisle likens his method to an argument about air.³⁸ Just as air is a necessary pre-condition for anyone who might want to argue against the existence of air, so Evolutionists (for example) “must assume the preconditions of intelligibility in order to make any argument whatsoever.”³⁹ The parallel is illicit. Air is only accidentally a pre-condition to an argument for or against air. To be sure, air is a pre-condition for a *human being* to make such an argument. But that is only because of the nature of the human being, not because of the nature of the air as such. God would be able to make an argument against air without air. Air bears a different relationship to an argument about air than the preconditions of intelligibility bear to argument as such (i.e., to argument as argument). In the first instance, it is an argument *about* x where x is (accidentally) required for the arguer to make his argument. With the latter instance, it is not an argument *about* something. Instead, it is argument itself. Thus, what follows is that all the elements of which argument is comprised are necessary for there to be any argument at all. In other words, if x is itself a constituent of argument qua argument, then, necessarily, x is a pre-condition for argument itself. I suspect that one would find little quarrel as to what these constituents might be. Logic and inferences, together with terms and premises (whether factual or not) are certainly necessary. What Lisle is commendably trying to do is to get the Evolutionist to realize that the Evolutionist’s view of reality (what Lisle calls his ‘worldview’) cannot account for the very logic that the Evolutionist uses to formulate his arguments against creation. I certainly agree with Lisle’s method here. But the crucial question becomes is this Presuppositionalism? I contend that it is not. The reason it is not is because Presuppositionalism insists that it is the Trinitarian God of

38. Lisle, *Proof*, 45.

39. *Ibid.*

the Bible that must be presupposed. It is the whole of the Scriptures that must be presupposed. Bahnsen says, “The Christian must not only recognize [that every apologetic encounter is ultimately a conflict of worldviews or fundamental perspectives] for the purpose of developing and responding to arguments with an unbeliever, but also be aware that the particular claims which the apologist defends are understood within the context *of the entire system of doctrine revealed by God in the Scriptures.*”⁴⁰ He goes on, “The Christian apologist does not argue for just any kind of abstract, general theism (‘a god of some sort or other’), but rather for the specific conception of God revealed within the Christian Scriptures.”⁴¹ I defy Lisle or anyone else to show how it is that the demonstration that logic is a precondition to intelligibility equals a presupposition of Christianity.

I want to make sure that I am clear as to what exactly is my problem. I celebrate what Lisle is arguing here. I make the same kind of argument in my apologetic encounters, though I would not use the misleading air analogy. But it will take more argument moves to show the unbeliever that because logic is necessary precondition to intelligibility, therefore the God of Christianity exists. But this first step, together with the following steps in making this argument is *exactly what Classical Apologetics does*. So, my quarrel is that what Lisle is doing is engaging in Classical Apologetics while insisting all along that his method is Presuppositionalism and implying (where others are more explicit) that the Classical method is a compromise of the authority of God’s Word.

The Problem of “Biblical Principles” and the Preconditions of Intelligibility

Another problem I have is that Lisle goes on to characterize the preconditions of intelligibility (logic, morality, uniformity of nature) as “biblical creation principles.” While I might celebrate the specifics of his arguments for each of these, his argument is not a transcenden-

40. Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 30; emphasis added.

41. *Ibid.*, 31. Bahnsen has set up another false dilemma. With this method, he is in no position to fend off the heresies of Dake since Dake could argue that the God of Scripture has all of these bodily parts enumerated earlier. But sound philosophy, coupled with a broader apologetic case, can show that the only true God cannot be Dake’s God and that the God of the Bible is the only true God. To do this is to do Classical Apologetics.

tal one which it would have to be in order to be Presuppositionalism. Instead, his arguments (at least in the case of morality and the uniformity of nature) are *demonstratio quia* (argument to grounding or cause) arguments.⁴² Granted that logic, morality, and the uniformity of nature are truths that one can find in the Bible, he never (nor has any Presuppositionalist that I have read or talked with) shown that it is the Bible (or Christianity) that is this precondition. In other words, it is fallacious to argue that x, y, and z are preconditions of intelligibility; x, y, and z are found in the Bible (or Christianity); therefore the Bible (or Christianity) is a precondition of intelligibility. As soon as one unpacks the arguments to demonstrate to the unbeliever that Christianity is true, one is doing Classical Apologetics.

The Problem of Ontology vs. Epistemology

One enduring inconsistency throughout is the issue of whether Presuppositionalism is making an epistemological point or an ontological point. In his debate with R. C. Sproul, Greg Bahnsen was adamant that Presuppositionalism is making an epistemological and not merely an ontological point. By this he meant that it would not be enough to argue that if God did not exist, we would not be able to know anything. Obviously, if God is the Creator, then, if the Creator did not exist, the creation would not exist. Making this ontological point is saying nothing that distinguishes Presuppositionalism from Classical Apologetics, which is what their debate was about. Instead, Bahnsen was claiming to be making an epistemological point, meaning that in terms of knowing, the truths of Christianity have to be presupposed (epistemologically) before there can be any (consistent) intelligibility. Thus, to be a Presuppositionalist (if we allow Bahnsen to be the standard), it is not enough to merely make the ontological point about God's existence. He has to make the epistemological point.

In response, I believe that the Presuppositionalist (at least, Bahnsen) is confused. When he thinks he is making an epistemological point (to do his Presuppositionalism) he is actually making an ontological point

⁴² I am indebted to William Lane Craig for pointing out this distinction. See his "A Classical Apologist's Response," in Steven B. Cowan, ed. *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 233. See also Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 78^a22–^b12 and Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle*, I, 23.

*about the epistemological event.*⁴³ In other words, Bahnsen's position collapses back into ontology or metaphysics, which ends up making his method Classical. Repeatedly I see the Presuppositionalist make the ontological point while thinking that he is make an epistemological one. For example, consider this from Don Collett: "By way of contrast, the transcendental argument preserves the logically primitive and absolute character of God's existence by *starting* with the premise that God's existence is a necessary precondition for argument itself. In this way argument is made to depend upon God, rather than vice versa, since argument is possible if and only if God's existence is true from the outset of argument itself."⁴⁴ But, of course, to argue that God's existence is necessary for something (in this case, argument) is to make a cosmological argument. What Collet needed to say to be true to the Presuppositional criteria (and to avoid being a Classical apologist) was not merely that argument depends on God (what apologist would not say this?) but that the *assumption of God's existence* was necessary. But this is manifestly false. If I construct a simple Modus Ponens argument, it can be entirely sound without any of the premises being "God exists." To be sure, the Modus Ponens could not exist without God, but, again, this ontological point is not Presuppositionalism.⁴⁵

43. I would like to thank my brother Dr. Tom Howe for helping me see Bahnsen's confusion here.

44. Don Collett, "Van Til and Transcendental Argument," in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2007), 261; emphasis in original. I cannot here explore to very much detail what I see as problem with this characterization. There is a difference between saying that x must be the case "from the outset of the argument" and saying that there must be a premise "x is the case" as a precondition to the argument. The former is merely to make the ontological point that Bahnsen is saying that Presuppositionalism *is not merely making*. To argue that God must exist before arguments can exist is just to make a cosmological argument as a Classical apologist would do. It is just to do Classical Apologetics. The latter is what would need to happen for the argument to be presuppositional in as much as the latter would be (epistemologically) presupposed as a condition of the argument itself. But, of course, the latter is not necessary. It does nothing to demonstrate that God exists.

45. In fairness to Collett, his article seeks to draw critical distinctions between the semantic relations in truth-functional arguments (like Modus Ponens) and the semantic relations in transcendental arguments (i.e., arguments by presupposition). As such, I believe he would not be without a response to me here. However, I believe his point still fails to deliver what he wants regarding the transcendental argument. It is ironic that his entire discussion of these distinctions utilizes these truth-functional relations. Now this is not necessarily a problem in my estimation in as much as I have long maintained that the

The Problem of “God’s Words vs. Man’s Words”

The juxtaposition of “God’s words vs. man’s words” is sometimes captured by the phrase ‘autonomous human reason’. What Ham and others mean by the “God’s words vs. man’s word” template is that it is illicit to allow what they perceive to be merely human arguments or reasoning to affect our understanding and interpretation of Scripture. They sometimes argue that it is wrong to use data from outside the Bible to help us understand the meaning of the Bible. However, they run into trouble when they frame certain issues as if it was a matter of accepting the authority of God’s Word over man’s word. To be sure, some who utilize this template are certainly on to something when they recognize that many unbelievers (and even perhaps some believers) resist acceding to the plain teaching of Scripture on certain matters. I do not at all dispute that it can sometimes boil down to a matter of whether one is going to accept what God has to say about a matter or accept what they or others say about a matter. What bothers me, however, is when this template is used illicitly to cast aspersions upon sources or data from outside the Bible that can be brought to bear on how we interpret certain verses of Scripture. I do not pretend that it is always an easy thing to interpret the Bible. But I do believe that some aspects of legitimate debates are being dismissed out of hand and are being mischaracterized as stemming from a resistance to wanting to be submissive to the authority of Scripture.

For example, Ham asserts, “All versions of the gap theory impose outside ideas on Scripture and thus open the door for further compromise.”⁴⁶ Ham seems to be saying that by virtue of a theory uti-

formal schematizations sometimes understate reality. In saying this, I do not mean that *reality* is beyond our understanding—quite the contrary. Instead, I mean that our formal schematizations *of* reality fall short of what we know (by other means) to be true about the nature of reality. (Take the oddness of the Material Implication as an example.) Indeed, they sometimes fall short even by their own standards, as Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem proved. To substitute one limited schematization (truth-functional) with another limited schematization (transcendental) does not help. To cast these aspersions upon these formal systems merely shows that I am a Classical Realist instead of a Rationalist; that I side with Aquinas rather than Leibniz. For an introductory treatment of the metaphysical grounding of logic, see Peter Kreeft, *Socratic Logic: A Logic Text Using Socratic Method, Platonic Questions, and Aristotelian Principles*, 3rd ed. (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2008). For a more in-depth treatment, see Henry Babcock Veatch, *Intentional Logic: A Logic Based on Philosophical Realism* (1959; repr., New Haven: Archon Books, 1970).

46. <<http://www.christiananswers.net/q-aig/aig-c003.html>> (accessed August 10,

lizing “outside ideas,” that theory is a compromise. In a panel debate on the Trinity Broadcast Network with Old Earth creationist Hugh Ross, Ham said, “Shouldn’t you take outside ideas and reinterpret [the Bible]? No, you can’t do that.” I would argue that we cannot *but* do this in some instances. In fact, I am confident that Ken Ham himself does so at times.

As I have argued above, there is no way the Christian can or should somehow filter or block “outside” ideas in our attempt to understand Scripture. The Bible is situated within a reality that is the creation of a transcendent God. It is only by a sound understanding of aspects of that reality that the reader would be able to properly interpret the Bible. This is what I argued above when I discussed principles of hermeneutics in general and biblical passages on the nature of God in particular. A sound understanding of reality, when pursued deeply enough, will lead us into the disciplines of the natural sciences and philosophy (and perhaps other disciplines as well). Yet Ham seems, albeit selectively, to reject the application of sound science and philosophy. For example, in Ham’s discussion with Ross, after Ross had summarized his desire to use the findings of contemporary science to demonstrate to the unbeliever that God was the Creator and designer of the physical universe, Ham said,

My big issue is one of biblical authority. What does Scripture tell us? . . . We have whole generations of kids in our churches today that are told, “You can believe in the millions of years and evolution. You can reinterpret Scripture here. You don’t have to take that as written. You can believe in a local flood. You don’t have to believe in a global flood.” And you know what’s happening? It’s unlocked the door to undermine biblical authority.⁴⁷

For Ham, for one to argue for an ancient Earth by “imposing” on Genesis a paradigm stemming from the contemporary scientific viewpoint is to reject the authority of the Bible. Clearly, Ham was rejecting Ross’s use of scientific data to guide his interpretation of the biblical text. To be sure, Ham does not grant that such scientific data

2012).

47. “Ken Ham vs. Hugh Ross.” <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgueGotRqbM>> (accessed September 14, 2012).

is true. But it seems to me that his response to Ross stems not from this. He is not rejecting Ross's scientific data because Ham opts for opposing scientific data. To be sure, sometimes Young Earth creationists do make scientific arguments. But it is telling that Ham did not do this here. Instead, he juxtaposed the (proffered) scientific data from Ross with "biblical authority." Thus, he is not merely responding that Ross has misinterpreted Scripture. He is characterizing Ross's take on Genesis as undermining biblical authority precisely because Ross, whether rightly or wrongly, appeals to "outside ideas."

Again, I want to make sure that I am clear as to what exactly is my problem. I certainly grant that there can be faulty assumptions that are illicitly imposed on the reading of a given biblical passage or illicitly employed in putting forth scientific data. If Ham sought to show how it was that Ross's reading of the text was hermeneutically flawed or that his scientific data was faulty or misunderstood (because of faulty assumptions), this would constitute a fair response.⁴⁸ He does not do this. Ham seemingly takes it for granted that the Genesis text must mean what he takes it to mean.⁴⁹

48. I believe that this is what Ham thought he was doing by his example of how we cannot defer to the current scientific viewpoint that people cannot come back from the dead when we are trying to understand the passages that deal with Jesus' resurrection. But the parallel is illicit. The reason the resurrection example does not work is because there the issue is one of naturalism vs. supernaturalism (i.e., whether God exists and miracles are possible). I do not see how this is the same as the dispute between Young Earth creationists and Old Earth creationists, both of whom grant the possibility (and actuality) of miracles. If Ham wants to argue that Ross is indeed conceding to naturalism in his appeal to his science in this instance, I would listen with patience. I have not seen where he ever makes such an argument.

49. By now, perhaps my young Earth readers are beginning to wonder how sincere I was when I earlier claimed to be a Young Earth creationist. It might be helpful for me to suggest how I would have tried to respond to Ross. First, not being a scientist, I would not try to refute any scientific data he would bring forth. I would defer to Ham and Lisle and others in this regard. Further, in what I have said so far, I do not mean to suggest that any interpretation of a given text is just as viable, even in principle, as any other. The key for me is this. If the Earth is as old as the Old Earth creationists say, then what principles of hermeneutics can one employ to render the Genesis narrative consistent with that age? I have yet to find an interpretation of Genesis that seems plausibly compatible with an old Earth. Being more comfortable with the hermeneutical issues than I am with the scientific ones, it is easier for me to opt for a young Earth and suspend my judgment about the science than it is to opt for an old Earth and suspend my judgment about the hermeneutics. My worry is that whatever are the hermeneutical principles that one might adopt that renders Genesis compatible with the current scientific viewpoint on the age of the Earth, what other

The Problem of Inconsistency

Despite the fact that Ham rejects the use of scientific data to affect one's interpretation of the Scriptures, he undoubtedly uses science to understand other Scriptures. Josh. 10:12–13 is the account of the Sun standing still: "Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel: 'Sun, stand still over Gibeon: And Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.' So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the people had revenge upon their enemies." What is interesting about this passage is how it was used in the sixteenth century against the new science from Copernicus that was promulgated by Galileo. No doubt some in that day considered the thinking of Copernicus and Galileo as "outside ideas" that were being used to "reinterpret the Bible"—things which Ham says you cannot do. Virtually all the church leaders (together with the university scientists) held to the Aristotelian/Ptolemaic system that maintained that the Sun moved and that the Earth stood still. The theologians appealed to the straightforward reading of this text in Joshua to prove that the Bible taught exactly this. As they saw it, it would not be possible for the Sun to be commanded to stand still if it was not moving in the first place. Thus, the Copernican system, which Galileo was defending, must be false.⁵⁰

The parallels to the current controversy over Genesis should be obvious. I suspect that not even Ken Ham would defend the old Aristotelian/Ptolemaic system. Yet, the only reason to conclude that the Joshua passage does not mean what it clearly seems to say is because of what we believe we know from contemporary astronomy. Today the standard interpretation of this passage is that the text is em-

interpretive conclusions might these hermeneutical principles necessitate? To be sure, the issue of interpretation can be complicated, and Christians who have equally high regard for the inerrancy and authority of the Bible can differ on some things. For a discussion of hermeneutics, particularly in the context of biblical inerrancy see Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books-ICBI, 1984).

50. For an excellent treatment of the exegetical aspects of this Galileo affair, see Richard J. Blackwell, *Galileo, Bellarmine, and the Bible* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991). What is interesting is that, in his "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina," Galileo shows how a straightforward reading of the Joshua passage is also incompatible with the Ptolemaic system. See Stillman Drake, trans. and ed., *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo* (New York: Random House, Anchor Books, 1957).

ploying phenomenological (or observational) language. This means that the description of the event was from the perspective of the observer. To someone on Earth, it indeed looked like the Sun was moving and that it was made to stand still. We still use such phenomenal language today when we talk about sunrise and sunset. My point here is that, regardless of whether Hugh Ross's interpretation of the Genesis narrative is correct, he is doing *in principle* exactly what Ken Ham (I suspect) would do with the Joshua passage. There can be no doubt that there is nothing wrong, as a matter of principle, with using the data of science to guide us in scriptural interpretation. What goes for the data of science goes also for the data of sound philosophy.

My accusation of inconsistency makes Jason Lisle and Tim Chaffey's comments all the more telling. On one hand they say, "However, when someone 'reinterprets' the clear meaning of the words to accommodate outside notions, it simply means he does not believe the words."⁵¹ The context is a discussion about the age of the Earth. For them, Genesis clearly teaches a young Earth. Therefore, (they argue) to use the "ideas of men"⁵² when they conflict with the Word of God is to "place more faith in men than in God."⁵³ Yet compare this sentiment with this comment they make: "Supporters often used a hyper-literal reading of Joshua 10:12-13 to buttress their position [of geocentricism]. However, it is *quite obvious* that Joshua was simply using observational language."⁵⁴ The problem is that it absolutely was not "quite obvious" at the time. It is only "quite obvious" to us today because we have come to believe through astronomy and mathematics (i.e., "outside ideas" or the "ideas of men") that, indeed, the Earth does rotate on its axis and moves relative to the Sun's standing still. Notice then, that here Chaffey and Lisle are guilty of the same act of "not believing the words" that they accuse the Old Earth creationist of committing. They are doing with Joshua 10 what the Old Earth creationists are doing (in principle) with Genesis. For the Old Earth creationist, it is "quite obvious" that the Young Earth creationist is being "hyper-literal" in their reading of Genesis. What is more,

51. Chaffey and Lisle, *Old Earth*, 110-111.

52. *Ibid.*, 110.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*, 62; emphasis added.

Hugh Ross comes to his position because he believes (whether rightly or wrongly) that the science shows (i.e., he believes because of “outside ideas”) that taking Genesis as the Young Earth creationist does is taking Genesis in a hyper-literal way. Thus, he is doing, in principle, exactly what Chaffey and Lisle are doing with Joshua 10.

It is one thing to be inconsistent with selectively applying “outside ideas” to the Bible to help us understand what it means while insisting that Christians should not do that and to do so is to reject the authority of God’s word. Perhaps what is worse is that by telling Christians that doing so is an abrogation of the authority of Scripture, he is disabusing them of some of the most powerful apologetic tools they have to not only defend the faith against the critics, but also to strengthen the faith of those who already believe. In addition, such tools like sound philosophy are the very things needed in the evangelical church today to fend off the encroachment of aberrant and heretical theology, especially about the nature of God.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to summarize as directly as I can my concerns regarding how Young Earth Creationism is increasingly embracing Presuppositionalism. My concerns arise out of a commitment to the conclusions of Young Earth Creationism and a passionate celebration of the method of Classical Apologetics. Prov. 27: 6 tells us, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” I suspect that some of my young Earth readers will take my comments as harsh. I certainly do not mean them so. Despite the push-back I have received (primarily through comments on my blog) I know that I am not alone within the Young Earth community in my concerns. I have addressed this issue because I believe that it is more than just academic. In repudiating the Classical method of apologetics, due partially to an unwarranted desire to avoid appealing to truths from reality as God has created it, certain Young Earth Presuppositionalists are robbing themselves of a very powerful tool to be used of God in our carrying out the commands of the Lord to defend (1 Pet. 3:15) and earnestly contend for (Jude 3) the Christian faith.

But neither did I intend to be harsh to the greater Presuppositionalism camp. I have no doubt as to their integrity in their endeavors and their sincere desire not only to defend the faith, but to do so in a manner that

is worthy of the Lord and which honors His character and attributes. I hope that my analysis is useful in serving as a corrective to certain aspects of their methodology. Despite our deeply held differences, I know we can celebrate each other as part of a larger Christian family that recognizes the grace of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It for God's glory that I engage in this discussion.

PRESUPPOSITIONAL RESPONSE

Jason Lisle, Ph.D.

DR. RICHARD HOWE lists several perceived problems with presuppositional apologetics. He claims (1) that the method collapses into classical apologetics, (2) that it falsely assumes that preconditions of intelligibility are biblical creation principles, (3) that the method conflates ontology with epistemology, (4) that it juxtaposes God's Word vs. Man's Words, and (5) that it is inconsistent. Let us examine each of these in turn to see if Howe has accurately represented the presuppositional method, and if so, if his criticisms can be rationally justified.

DOES PRESUPPOSITIONALISM COLLAPSE INTO CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS?

The presuppositional method is characterized by biblical authority. It does not attempt to prove God's Word from some greater standard because the presuppositionalist asserts that there is no greater standard. The Bible must prove itself (Heb. 6:13). It does this by providing the only worldview in which knowledge is possible. This is a biblical standard because the Bible itself teaches that God alone makes knowledge possible (Prov. 1:7; Col. 2:3,8). The presuppositionalist does not embrace the standards of the unbeliever (Prov. 26:4), but rather he shows that such standards are absurd on their own terms

(Prov. 26:5). As such, the presuppositional method is fundamentally contrary to classical apologetics. The classical apologist appeals to *something else* as the standard by which the Bible is judged.

Therefore, presuppositionalism could only collapse into classical apologetics if the apologist abandons biblical authority as his ultimate standard of knowledge. Only if he appeals to some other *allegedly greater standard* could such a criticism be defended.

Since the biblical worldview alone makes knowledge possible, the critic who claims he knows the Bible is wrong must tacitly rely upon the Bible in order to make his case. I have likened this to a critic of air using air to explain how air does not exist. Howe criticizes this analogy by pointing out that God does not need air to make an argument against air. (Actually God would never argue against air since air does exist, and God is never wrong). But this mischaracterizes my analogy. I was discussing a mortal human using air to argue against air. And people do need air to verbalize any argument at all, just as we need God's revelation in order to know anything at all. So the analogy seems quite fitting. And it does not deviate from biblical authority because the claim that knowledge begins with the Lord is a biblical claim (Prov. 1:7).

Howe states, "What Lisle is commendably trying to do is to get the Evolutionist to realize that the Evolutionist's view of reality (what Lisle calls his 'worldview') cannot account for the very logic that the Evolutionist uses to formulate his arguments against creation" (21). But this is only *part* of the argument. I am not merely demonstrating that evolution cannot account for laws of logic; rather, I am also illustrating how the Christian worldview can. Laws of logic are a reflection of the way God thinks. As such, we can account for their existence and properties. Laws of logic exist, and they are universal, unchanging, and exception-less precisely because God thinks, is omni-present, unchanging, and sovereign.

Howe contends "that it is not [presuppositionalism]. The reason it is not is because Presuppositionalism insists that it is the Trinitarian God of the Bible that must be presupposed. It is the whole of the Scriptures that must be presupposed" (21). But in fact, I have presupposed the Trinitarian God; I have presupposed the whole of the Scriptures in my argument. Without the entirety of the Scriptures, I

could not know that God thinks, is omni-present, unchanging, and sovereign. Without the entirety of the Scriptures, laws of logic would be just as unjustified for the creationist as for the evolutionist. So it seems that Howe's criticism here stems from a misunderstanding of the method.

Howe says, "I defy Lisle or anyone else to show how it is that the demonstration that logic is a precondition to intelligibility equals a presupposition of Christianity" (22). But this again reveals a misunderstanding of the method. It is obvious that logic is a precondition of intelligibility—no demonstration of this is necessary. Rather, I claim that Christianity is the only way to rationally justify the preconditions of intelligibility, including laws of logic. I make this claim on the basis of biblical authority (Prov. 1:7; Col. 2:3; Rom. 1:18–22). Apart from the Christian worldview as revealed in the Scriptures, we would have no reason to believe in the existence and properties of laws of logic or any other precondition of intelligibility. This is shown in chapter 3 of my book *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*.¹ So the presuppositional method does not collapse into the classical method at all. It never departs from biblical authority.

DOES THE METHOD FALSELY EQUATE "PRECONDITIONS OF INTELLIGIBILITY" WITH "BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES?"

Howe adds, "Another problem I have is that Lisle goes on to characterize the preconditions of intelligibility (logic, morality, uniformity of nature) as 'biblical creation principles'" (22). But aren't they? I would love to see Howe attempt to justify the properties of laws of logic, morality, and uniformity of nature apart from the biblical worldview. The secular philosopher David Hume was reduced to utter skepticism in his failed attempts to rationally justify uniformity of nature within his secular worldview. No one else has fared any better. Logic and morality stem from the nature of God as revealed in Scripture. And uniformity of nature is only justified by the fact that God has promised to uphold nature in a consistent way (Gen. 8:22;

¹ Jason Lisle. *The Ultimate Proof of Creation* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009).

Heb. 1:3). The preconditions of intelligibility are indeed biblical principles.

The Bible does not merely use such principles: rather, it provides the *rational foundation* for such principles. And so Howe is mistaken in stating, “Granted that logic, morality, and the uniformity of nature are truths that one can find in the Bible, he [Lisle] never (nor has any Presuppositionalist that I have read or talked with) shown that it is the Bible (or Christianity) that is this precondition” (23). In fact, I have done so in chapter 3 of *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*. Greg Bahnsen has also done so in his lectures on apologetics. I actually agree with Howe’s statement, “it is fallacious to argue that x, y, and z are preconditions of intelligibility; x, y, and z are found in the Bible (or Christianity); therefore the Bible (or Christianity) is a precondition of intelligibility” (23). But this is not my argument at all. Rather, I point out that unless the Bible is presupposed, x, y, and z cannot be *rationally justified*.

Although I do not wish to belabor discussions about terminology, I need to point out that contrary to Howe’s claim, the transcendental argument is exactly what I use when I ask what worldview can account for laws of logic, uniformity in nature, and morality. Bahnsen states, “Transcendental reasoning is concerned to discover what general conditions must be fulfilled for any particular instance of knowledge to be possible. . . . Van Til asks what view of man, mind, truth, language, and the world is necessarily presupposed by our conception of knowledge and our methods of pursuing it.”²

DOES PRESUPPOSITIONALISM CONFLATE ONTOLOGY WITH EPISTEMOLOGY?

Ontology is the study of the nature of something. It addresses what kinds of things exist. Epistemology is the study of knowledge – how we know what we know. Howe is concerned about “whether Presuppositionalism is making an epistemological point or an ontological point” (23). Perhaps his confusion can be alleviated by recognizing that presuppositionalism deals with *both* epistemology and ontology.

2. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1998), 5–6.

These two things, while different, are inextricably linked. The kinds of things that exist will come to bear on how we know what we know. And our theory of knowledge will have a profound influence on what we believe to exist. For example, if our epistemology endorses the use of laws of logic in reasoning, then it would be ridiculous for our position on ontology to reject the existence of laws of logic. Ontology cannot be divorced from epistemology.

The transcendental argument points out that if knowledge is possible (an epistemological premise), then God must exist (an ontological claim) since the biblical God is the basis for knowledge (a Scriptural claim). Howe states, "Greg Bahnsen was adamant that Presuppositionalism is making an epistemological and not merely an ontological point" (23). Bahnsen is quite correct. The presuppositional method deals with both issues.

Howe continues, "Obviously, if God is the Creator, then, if the Creator did not exist, the creation would not exist. Making this ontological point is saying nothing that distinguishes Presuppositionalism from Classical Apologetics . . ." (23). This reveals a profound misunderstanding of the transcendental argument. The secularist denies that God is the Creator, and hence he denies that God is necessary for the universe to exist. In responding to this position, the presuppositionalist asks how the unbeliever's epistemology (e.g., that laws of logic are a useful standard for truth) can possibly comport with the unbeliever's ontology (that the universe is a godless accident). No unbeliever is able to account for the existence and properties of laws of logic, nor morality, nor uniformity in nature on his own professed worldview. His epistemology is rationally unjustified and in tension with his position of ontology. This is necessarily the case since all knowledge is deposited in Christ (Col. 2:3).

And so when Howe says, "Bahnsen's position collapses back into ontology or metaphysics, which ends up making his method Classical" (24), this cannot be defended. Presuppositionalists deal with ontology too. But the presuppositionalist does not depart from biblical authority as his ultimate standard. Howe says that "to argue that God's existence is necessary for something (in this case, argument) is to make a cosmological argument" (24). No, this is not a cosmological argument at all, but rather the *transcendental* argument. The cosmological argument deals with *cause and effect*; usually it is presented that the

universe has a beginning and therefore requires a cause, and only God is a sufficient cause. But the transcendental argument has nothing to do with cause and effect. Rather, it deals with *rational justification*. It argues that the existence of God is the necessary precondition for knowledge.

Howe states, “If I construct a simple Modus Ponens argument, it can be entirely sound without any of the premises being ‘God exists.’ To be sure, the Modus Ponens could not exist without God, but, again, this ontological point is not Presuppositionalism” (24). It’s not that *Modus Ponens* could not exist apart from God (though indeed it could not), but rather, *Modus Ponens* cannot be *rationally justified* as a universal, invariant, exception-less rule of inference apart from God. We could not know that Modus Ponens is legitimate (an epistemological issue), or universal and invariant unless God exists (an ontological issue). I hope this resolves any confusion on the matter.

IS THERE A PROBLEM JUXTAPOSING “GOD’S WORD VS. MAN’S WORD?”

Howe claims, “What [Ken] Ham and others mean by the ‘God’s words vs. man’s word’ template is that it is illicit to allow what they perceive to be merely human arguments or reasoning to affect our understanding and interpretation of Scripture. They sometimes argue that it is wrong to use data from outside the Bible to help us understand the meaning of the Bible” (25). This just is not an accurate representation of the position. For example, I fully endorse the use of Hebrew and Greek lexicons in exegesis. I even find certain commentaries helpful. These are data from “outside the Bible,” and they can aid in interpretation. What I reject is the notion that any outside information is somehow superior or more reliable than the text of Scripture itself. As a corollary, outside data may not be used to override the exegetically discovered meaning of a text.

External sources may legitimately be used if they help us to understand the author’s intentions—to elucidate what is in the text. They may not be used to override what the text clearly teaches. Even science may be used in a ministerial sense—to make educated guesses on issues where the Bible is silent, such as the geological details of the global flood. However, science cannot be used in a magisterial sense.

to interpret a text contrary to the clear intent of the author (such as to reject a global flood). I endorse exegesis. I reject eisegesis.

Howe states that “they run into trouble when they frame certain issues as if it was a matter of accepting the authority of God’s Word over man’s word” (25). But of course, some issues are just that. And we ought to consider the flipside of Howe’s concern. There are certain issues where the text is very clear; these are a matter of biblical authority and yet some people frame them as merely a matter of “interpretation.” The debate over origins is just such an issue. Genesis is not a book of symbolic prophecy or poetic parallelism that requires a sophisticated hermeneutic and well-developed theology to comprehend. No, it is a history book that records what happened in easy-to-understand language.

While I recognize that there are difficult sections in Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16), most of its main teachings can be apprehended by a child. When people try to interpret the clear texts in a way contrary to the intention of the author in order to make such texts line up with a particular modern philosophy or opinion, this is unacceptable. People often use “hermeneutics” to justify their disbelief in the biblical text. Howe does seem to recognize this. But he places the timescale of creation in the “it’s an unclear matter of interpretation” bin and criticizes Ken Ham for placing the issue in the “biblical authority – the Scriptures are clear on this point” bin.

But in fact, the Scriptures are very clear on the timescale of creation. Exod. 20:11 states, “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” This verse is given as the explanation for verses 8–10, which detail that we are to work for six days and rest one day every week. Is Exodus poetic or prophetic literature that should be taken in a less-than-literal fashion? Clearly not. Indeed the Gospel message is undermined if the age of the Earth is compromised, as I demonstrate in my response to Dr. Scott Oliphint. Let us be honest. The motivation for the gap theory or the day-age theory is *not* because the text is actually ambiguous. No, the text is very, very clear on this issue. The motivation behind these ideas is to allow a Christian to believe in something (deep time) that is contrary to the clear meaning of the text. So Ham is quite correct to say, “All

versions of the gap theory impose outside ideas on Scripture and thus open the door for further compromise.” This is not a ministerial use of science, but an imposition of unbiblical ideas on the text.³

The age of the Earth is an issue that the Bible does address very clearly. Howe claims, “For Ham, for one to argue for an ancient Earth by ‘imposing’ on Genesis a paradigm stemming from the contemporary scientific viewpoint is to reject the authority of the Bible” (26). But of course, Ham is exactly right. The text says “six days” (Exod. 20:11). To reinterpret such clear words in light of the opinions of secular scientists is indeed to deny biblical authority.

This brings us to what I perceive as a very severe problem in Howe’s philosophy of hermeneutics. He states, “It is only by a sound understanding of aspects of that reality that the reader would be able to properly interpret the Bible”⁴ (26). What is the ultimate standard of knowledge in Howe’s view? It is the mind of man—man’s understanding of reality.⁵ According to Howe, our beliefs about the world are the

3. Howe suggests that “there is no way the Christian can or should somehow filter or block ‘outside’ ideas in our attempt to understand Scripture” (26). But again he has misrepresented the presuppositional position. I understand that we all have philosophical baggage that we take with us to the Scriptures. But the Scriptures have the clarity and power to systematically correct our faulty philosophy. We should indeed reject outside ideas that are contrary to the clear meaning of the text. For ideas that seem compatible with the text, we should consider them, and be ready to reject them at any time if the text warrants such. The presuppositional position is not that external information is always irrelevant or detracting, but rather that it too must submit to the ultimate authority of the Scriptures, and therefore can never override the Scriptures.

4. Howe’s claims that “It is impossible to get one’s principles of hermeneutics from the Bible itself” (9). But this just is not true. When we first come to the Scriptures, we may indeed have some incorrect ideas about interpretation. But the main portions of the Bible are so clear that a child can understand them—at least partially (2 Cor. 1:13–14). And the Scriptures have the power and clarity to correct our faulty hermeneutic, such that our understanding improves on the second reading. Our hermeneutic should (eventually) be based foundationally on the Scriptures themselves. This is sometimes called the “hermeneutical circle.”

5. Specifically, Howe claims that his philosophical standard by which he interprets the Scriptures is called variously “Classical Realism, Philosophical Realism, Scholastic Realism, Thomistic Realism, and Thomism.” He goes on to say, “Thomistic Realism (to pick one of the labels) begins with the common sense experiences of sensible (physical) reality” (15 fn. 24). It is troubling to think that a Christian interprets the Scriptures by his “common sense experiences of sensible (physical) reality.” If followed consistently, would not such a view lead to a rejection of the Trinity, resurrection from the dead, and a virgin birth? These are not things that we have experienced in physical reality. Indeed,

foundation by which we interpret the Scriptures. Clearly, the Bible cannot be the ultimate standard if the mind of man is the Supreme Court that ultimately decides what the Bible means.

But the Bible claims in various ways that *it* is the ultimate standard (Matt. 4:4, 7:24–29; 2 Tim. 3:16). It is not our mind that ultimately judges the Word of God. Rather, it is the Word of God that ultimately judges our mind (Heb. 4:12). The Scriptures are the foundational standard. This is why I hold to the analogy of faith; the Scriptures are the only authoritative interpreter of the Scriptures. The view that we may interpret the Scriptures according to our understanding of reality is unbiblical and opens the door to all sorts of heresy.

Consider some of the things we know about reality. We know that people cannot walk on water (just try it). We know that water cannot be instantaneously transformed into wine. We know that blindness cannot be cured by spitting on clay and rubbing it in on blind eyes. Most significantly, we know that dead people stay dead. Have you ever seen an exception? This is reality. Now should we apply Howe’s hermeneutic to the Gospels? We would have to conclude that the miracles are just figures of speech. Most significantly, we would have to conclude that the resurrection of Christ is merely a “spiritual” or some other non-literal event.⁶

Now my point is not that Howe disbelieves any of the miracles of Christ. I know he affirms them. But my point is that this is highly inconsistent with his professed hermeneutic. Everything we know about reality militates against the idea that dead people come back to life after three days. And yet, if we are truly Christians, we must submit to the Word of God, even when it is contrary to our understanding of reality. We should adjust our understanding of the world to the Scriptures, and not the reverse as Howe’s hermeneutic would suggest.

our common sense experiences would lead us to the opposite conclusion. And there are many Scriptural doctrines (e.g., God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility) that are hardly common sense. By Howe’s reasoning, these need to be reinterpreted to fit our perceptions of reality. I trust that Howe does not do this; but it shows the inconsistency of his approach.

6. It will not solve the problem to claim, “But these are miracles!” After all, our observations of the universe suggest that it operates in a law-like fashion without exception. A person may have a philosophy that “miracles are impossible” and this would be reasonable based on our common-sense experiences. In any case, if our understanding of reality is that “miracles do not occur,” then clearly the Gospels do not mean what they say.

In the same way that people argue against the clear teaching of Genesis on the basis that secular scientists believe the world to be billions of years old, there are people who argue against the resurrection on the basis that science has never documented a resurrection from the dead. If science can be used magisterially in the first instance, why not the second? Howe criticizes Ham for pointing this out. Howe states, “But the parallel is illicit. The reason the resurrection example does not work is because there the issue is one of naturalism vs. supernaturalism (i.e., whether God exists and miracles are possible)” (27 fn. 48). But in reality, the base issue is identical: do we allow the secular opinions of scientists to override the clear teaching of the text?

I also must point out that all old-earth arguments do tacitly rely upon naturalism (and uniformitarianism). It would only make sense to argue from science that some process must take millions or billions of years if it happened *by natural processes*. If we allow God to supernaturally create the universe and the things within it, then no case can be made from science that the universe is old. Jesus can turn water into wine instantaneously, and He can create a universe instantaneously.

IS THE METHOD INCONSISTENT?

Howe’s final major criticism is that Ham and others do use science to interpret Scripture while simultaneously criticizing others who do so. He cites the sun standing still in Josh. 10:12–13, as an example of a text that on face value would suggest that the sun orbits the Earth. He then claims, “The parallels to the current controversy over Genesis should be obvious” (28). Namely, he suggests that what Hugh Ross does in interpreting Genesis to accommodate billions of years is *in principle* okay, just as it is apparently okay to interpret Josh. 10:12–13 in light of modern science. But is it?

Clearly the answer is no. In neither instance should we use science to override the clear meaning of the text. The straightforward meaning of Josh. 10:12–13 is that from Joshua’s point of view on Earth, the sun and moon stopped their daily motion. The passage is not dealing with models of the solar system, and it would be wrong to take it that way. It is an observational description. Howe suggests, “It is only ‘quite obvious’ to us today because we have come to believe through astronomy and mathematics (i.e., ‘outside ideas’ or the ‘ideas of men’) that, indeed, the Earth does rotate on its axis and moves relative to

the Sun’s standing still” (29). But this is not so. It is “quite obvious” because Joshua is standing on Earth. My reason for embracing the observational language of Josh. 10:12–13 *comes solely from the text itself*. The Bible almost always uses Earth as the reference frame, and so do we today (e.g. “sunrise” and “sunset”). Motion is ultimately relative anyway.

So are we inconsistently interpreting Genesis by a different hermeneutic? Do we take Joshua as observational language and take Genesis by some other standard? No. In fact, I believe Genesis also uses observational language and for exactly the same reason – it is clear from the text. We see “morning” and “evening” each day (e.g. Gen. 1:5), as would be experienced by a person standing on the surface of Earth. But how can this observational language possibly allow for deep time as Hugh Ross desires? If a hypothetical person on earth had seen six evenings and six mornings, this is six days. There is no exegetical way to interpret the text to allow for the secular notion of deep time. No doubt there are difficult sections in the Bible. The timescale of creation is *not* one of them (Exod. 20:11).

CONCLUSION

In summary, most of Howe’s criticisms stem from a misunderstanding of presuppositional apologetics. This is encouraging to me because such misconceptions can be ameliorated by further clarification of the method. I hope that my comments have been helpful in this regard.

My remaining concern is the hermeneutic proposed Howe—the notion that we must interpret the Bible according to our understanding of reality and sound philosophy that are found outside the biblical worldview. I would argue that reality cannot be discovered apart from biblical presuppositions because knowledge begins with God, and thus His revelation to us.⁷

And what of sound philosophy? Sound philosophy is *Christian* philosophy. Any philosophy that is based on the presuppositions of the

7. This does not mean that a person must have read the Bible in order to have knowledge. Rather, it means that the Bible must be *true* in order for anyone to have knowledge. We must believe in the reliability of our senses before we can read the text of Scripture in which we find the rational justification for the reliability of our senses.

world rather than Christ is foolishness and robs us of knowledge (Col. 2:8; 1 Cor. 3:19–20, 1:20–21; Rom. 1:18–22). So rather than interpreting Scripture to match our fallible philosophy and understanding of reality, we should let Scripture systematically *correct* our philosophy and our understanding of reality (2 Cor. 10:5). Scripture is the ultimate standard; our philosophy and our view of reality are not. Sound philosophy does not simply *end* with submission to Christ; rather, it *begins* with submission to Christ (Col. 2:3, 8; Prov. 1:7).⁸

The Pharisees and scribes had their philosophies and their view of reality. And they were absolutely masterful at interpreting the Scriptures according to their traditions. But Jesus sharply rebukes them for it (Matt. 15:1–9). Jesus tells us that we are to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). When the Bible touches on a matter, we must accept what it teaches and be ready to defend it. This includes the timescale of creation. Let us not embrace the secular philosophies of our time. Rather let us stand boldly on the authority of the Word and contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3).

8. Howe states that he is concerned that by not embracing classical apologetics, we are robbed of a powerful apologetic tool. In fact, being presuppositional does not mean giving up any good evidence. On the contrary, all evidence becomes relevant because apart from Christianity evidence would mean nothing. But let us never forget that this is a *spiritual battle*. And we have only one spiritual weapon: the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). I am concerned that if we relegate Scripture to a position that is less than ultimate, we have given up the only weapon we have. We will have answered the fool according to his folly and become like him (Prov. 26:4).

COVENANTAL RESPONSE

K. Scott Oliphint, Ph.D.

LET ME FIRST begin by affirming my agreement with Dr. Richard Howe. As it turns out, this is the most important area of the entire discussion. At the end of his essay, Howe says, “Despite our deeply held differences, I know we can celebrate each other as part of a larger Christian family that recognizes the grace of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (31). This, of course, is central to our discussion and needs to be highlighted as such. The debate that we are having is within the family, around the table (as it were), recognizing that we all are, by God’s grace, repentant sinners who know that unless we feed on Christ, we will never truly be fed. We recognize, together, that there are only two kinds of people—sheep and goats—and that our responsibility as sheep is to follow our Great Shepherd and happily to do what he asks of us. So, though the matters under discussion are important, especially important for our sanctification and obedience to the One who has called us from darkness into light, they are not matters which, ultimately and eternally, divide us.

As we debate and discuss our differences around the Lord’s table, then, there are two (or so) primary matters that deserve more clarification. The first one focuses on Howe’s proper introductory question,

The issue of apologetic methodology has to do with this question: what is the proper way for Christians to defend the truth of the Christian faith? (6) Howe then goes on to note that there are two options available to any Christian: the Classical approach and the Presuppositional (what I will call “Covenantal”) approach. For the sake of brevity, we can accept this taxonomy (though three of the “Five Views” folk might want to quibble with it!). There are two points I would like to emphasize and highlight in response to Howe’s good question.

First, in order to answer the “proper way” question, it is incumbent on us as Christians to see if the Bible provides any help to us in this regard. First and foremost, we should recognize that there is embedded in Holy Scripture a *command* for Christians to defend the faith. This point is exegetically certain.

The first epistle of Peter is written to a group of suffering Christians. These are Christians who have been “grieved by various trials” (1:6), they are in exile (1:17) and thus living in places that are foreign to them; they are encouraged not to be surprised when fiery trials come upon them (4:12) — note: not *if* fiery trials come, but *when* they do. This is not surprising; there is an antithesis between Christian and non-Christian; one is either in Christ or in Adam. That antithesis is not theoretical. It applies to the way we think, the way we act, and the way we view the world. In the midst of their suffering, Peter gives this command:

. . . sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence (1 Pet. 3:15 NASB).

The command is to “sanctify Christ as Lord.” In the previous verse, Peter refers to Isa. 8:12f. The New Testament application of Isa. 8:12f. is that Christians are to set apart, remember, and recognize, in their hearts that Jesus Christ is Lord. Instead of looking at the overwhelming suffering around them and declaring that there is no God, they are rather to declare, “Jesus is Lord.” They are to “sanctify” or “set apart” the Lordship of Christ in their hearts by showing his Lordship when challenges come.

Peter then goes on to tell them (and us) that the way to sanctify Christ as Lord—the command to set Christ apart as Lord—is met as we

ready ourselves for a defense of that which we believe.¹ Peter is telling us here that when objections and attacks come our way, Christians are required to respond to them.

Perhaps the most significant point of Peter's command is the reason that he gives for it. It is as simple as it is profound: "For Christ also died for sins, once for all . . ." (3:18). The ironic twist, one that points us to the transposition of the gospel, is not that when we see suffering and challenges we should conclude that there is no God. Rather, it is that when we see suffering, when our faith is challenged, we should remember that God himself in the person of his Son did exactly that, so that suffering and sin would one day cease. Suffering is clear evidence that Christ is Lord; it is not a testimony against that truth. The suffering that is the cross of Christ—the very thing that on the face of it might lead us to believe that there is no God—is, as a matter of fact, the deepest expression of his sovereign character as Lord.

It is the clear and steadfast conviction that Christ and Christ alone is Lord that has to motivate our Christian defense. Peter's point is clear. In commanding us to set Christ apart as Lord, his point is not whether one has received Christ as Savior, or as Savior and Lord, not at all. Peter's point is that if one is to be adequately prepared to give an answer for one's Christian faith, the Lordship of Christ must be a solid and unwavering commitment of one's heart.

But why? Again, the answer is as simple as it is profound: because that is what he is! The specific command that Peter gives can be stated more generally. We are to think about and live in the world *according to what it really is* and not according to how it might at times appear to us. As Peter writes to these persecuted and scattered Christians, he recognizes that it must surely be one of their paramount temptations to begin to interpret their circumstances in such a way that would not acknowledge that Christ is Lord. It may begin, in the midst of their persecution and suffering, to look like someone else is in charge. After all, if Christ were Lord, how could these things be happening?

As a matter of fact, the Lordship of Christ explains why "these things are happening." The Lordship of Christ is the conclusion to,

1. That is, the force of the imperative verb in the previous clause is extended and met in the subsequent clauses, given that these clauses depend on that verb.

the end result of, his own suffering and humiliation. It is because he was obedient even to death on a cross that he has been given the name that is above every name. It is because he suffered that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord. The road to his exaltation was paved with blood, sweat, and tears. If we are to be exalted with him on that last day, ours will be so paved as well.

The Lordship of Christ is basic to our defense of Christianity. Christ now reigns. He is Lord. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. That authority is the prerequisite of our task to make disciples. Without that authority, baptism and disciple-making in and for the church are meaningless. All things have been placed under his feet, and Christ has been given as head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). The process of history is the process of making Christ's enemies a footstool for his feet. That footstool is being built because he is Lord. Just like Jesus' earthly father, his heavenly Father is a carpenter. He is building a footstool for his Son (see, for example, Acts 2:35; Heb. 1:13, 10:13).

So, wherever we go, to whomever we speak, Christ is Lord there, and he is Lord over that person. Since he is Lord, his truth is truth in every place and for every person. Every person is in a covenant relationship with Christ the Lord. They owe him obedience. The same Christ who rules over us rules over those who oppose him. The fact that someone has not set Christ apart as Lord in his heart in no way detracts from or undermines the central point that he is Lord over all.

The point for the Christian, however, and the point to stand on in a Covenantal apologetic, is that the truth of Christ's Lordship— which not only includes the fact that he now reigns, but also that he has spoken and that all owe allegiance to him—is true for anyone and everyone. Christ is Lord even over his enemies and over ours. And part of what this means is that the authority of Scripture, which is the verbal expression of Christ's Lordship, is authoritative even over those who reject it.

The Bible is authoritative, not because we accept it as such, but because it is the Word of the risen Lord. It has a claim on all people. Its truth is the truth for every person in every place. Why, then, would we be reluctant to communicate that truth in our apologetics? Perhaps

it is because we have not reckoned with the actual Lordship of Christ. Perhaps we have not really set him apart as Lord in our hearts.

The clear implication of this command is that we must base our defense of Christianity on reality, and *reality is what God says it is*. What we dare not do in a Covenantal apologetic “battle” is let the enemy choose the weapon. Any enemy worth his salt will choose a weapon that fires in only one direction. But we are called to use the weapons that the Lord himself has given us. “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4). The weapons of our warfare are divine weapons, and they have their focus in the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17).

Why choose these weapons? Because they are God’s weapons, given to us by God so that we can “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). In other words, they are the real and true weapons that God has given to us to fight the good fight. They are the weapons through which God is building his Son’s footstool. They are the weapons that alone are used for footstool construction. They are the weapons that alone have the power to subdue the enemy.

The basic principle is this: a Covenantal apologetic must proceed on the basis of reality and not on the basis of illusion. We must proceed according to what Christ, who is the Lord, has told us, not according to what our opponents have decided is “appropriate” for a defense of Christianity. We view our apologetic, and we proceed in it, as in the rest of life, through the 20/20 lenses of Holy Scripture. Anything less would be like choosing to walk in a fog in order to see more clearly.

Second, Howe may have no substantive disagreement with what we have thus far said, but it is difficult to see how agreeing with the above can be consistent with what he says elsewhere. In describing the “three levels” of his apologetic, the “first level” is this:

. . . philosophy is *essential* in establishing the foundation for dealing with unbelievers who might bring up certain challenges, including the challenge that truth is not objective or the challenge that only the natural sciences are the source of truth about reality. Thus, when encountering the unbeliever (and sometimes even a fellow believer), the Christian must (if the occasion demands it) defend that reality is knowable, that logic applies to reality, and that morally fallen human beings

have some capacity to cognitively understand (even if they morally reject) certain claims of the Christian faith. (8, my emphasis)

But if the Lord commands *all of His people* to be ready to defend their Christian faith, it is difficult to see how Howe's "first level" can obtain. Surely, Howe is not arguing that all Christians must be students of and experts in philosophy. There certainly is a need in the church for experts in philosophy and apologetics; that is not the point. And it is not Howe's point either. His point is that "philosophy is *essential* in establishing the foundation for dealing with unbelievers . . ." (8). But that surely cannot be the case.

If the Lord commands all Christians to defend their faith, then he gives them the tools that they need to do so. And those tools are the only tools that are *essential* for defending the Christian faith. Other tools may be useful and helpful, in various contexts and at various times, but they cannot be *essential*.

It appears that Howe's "first level" of Classical Apologetics makes the task of apologetics more akin to the structure of Roman Catholic theology than to the Protestant theology to which I am confident he adheres. That is, in Romanist theology only the "experts" are qualified rightly to handle the Scriptures; they alone are charged with the ministry of the Word; they alone have the qualifications. Everyone else is to hear and believe them, based on their own expertise.

What Howe's "first level" of apologetic methodology does, therefore, is establish an elite group of academics and intellectuals who alone can protect the rest of us from the challenges and objections that are brought against our faith. This elitism, in my estimation, is one of the primary reasons why apologetics, at times in history, has been deemed irrelevant by all but the tiniest band of brothers (who, of course, have the appropriate letters behind their signatures). This serves to take the Bible away from the people in the pews, and hand it over to the *literati*.

This "first level" is incompatible with Peter's command and intent. Because *all Christians* are required to be prepared to defend their faith, they have the essential tools for that defense. And those tools are, in sum, God (by way of His Spirit) and His Word.

But there is a proper emphasis in what Howe avers. The “first level” of which Howe writes is, as he says, the *foundational* level. This level is indeed all-important. However, one of the reasons that the Reformation, of which he and I are heirs, occurred was because the church had lost sight of its *true foundations*. So, during and after the Reformation there was a renaissance and restoration of the proper foundations for the church. The word typically used for those foundations was *principia*, and there were two which were affirmed by the Reformed. There was the *principium essendi*, or the foundation of existence, which was the Triune God, and the *principium cognoscendi*, or the foundation of knowledge, which was God’s revelation. It was this latter *principium* that was the central motivation behind and reason for a Reformation of theology. According to Richard Muller,

These early Reformed statements concerning theological presuppositions focus, virtually without exception, on *the problem of the knowledge* of God given the fact not only of human finitude but also of human sin. The critique leveled by the Reformation at medieval theological presuppositions added a soteriological dimension to the epistemological problem. Whereas the medieval doctors had assumed that the fall affected primarily the will and its affections and not the reason, the Reformers assumed also the fallenness of the rational faculty: a generalized or “pagan” natural theology, according to the Reformers, was not merely limited to nonsaving knowledge of God—it was also bound in idolatry. *This view of the problem of knowledge is the single most important contribution of the early Reformed writers to the theological prolegomena of orthodox Protestantism.* Indeed, it is the doctrinal issue that most forcibly presses the Protestant scholastics toward the modification of the medieval models for theological prolegomena.²

There is, then, during and since the Reformation, a “reformation” of the foundations, or *principia*, on which all Christians must stand. The reason that the epistemological foundation is “the single most important contribution” is because it was the doctrine of revelation gen-

2. Richard A. Muller, *Post-reformation Reformed Dogmatics : the Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725: Prolegomena to Theology*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 1:108; emphases mine.

erally, and of Scripture more specifically, that needed to be recovered from its corrupted state in the Romanist church. So, if I were going to outline a Reformed method of apologetics in terms of levels, "level one" would include these two foundations, these *principia*, both of which come to us from God's Word (which is why virtually every Reformed confession begins with the doctrine of Scripture).

This *principial* reformation moves from Howe's "first level" (i.e., philosophy) to the Reformation's first level, which included the two foundational *principia*. These *principia* cannot be separated: they are, as given to us, mutually dependent. The one entails and implies the other.

My second point, in response, is one that continues both to amuse and to confuse me. Howe articulates it in various ways, but a good summary is given by him here.

As soon as one unpacks the arguments to demonstrate to the unbeliever that Christianity is true, one is doing Classical Apologetics (23).

This statement is based on two, interrelated errors. The first error is that Classical Apologetics *alone* has the room, or the right, or the prerogative, or the method to unpack arguments in order "to demonstrate to the unbeliever that Christianity is true." This is both amusing and confusing because, from its inception a Covenantal (or presuppositional) apologetic has been, consistently and continually, insistent that one defends the faith by way of reasoning. So, consider just a few of many citations from Van Til:

If it is true that the difference between Christian and antitheistic epistemology is as fundamental as we have contended that it is, and if it is true that the antitheist takes his position for granted at the outset of his investigations, and if it is true that the Christian expects his opponent to do nothing else inasmuch as according to Scripture the "natural man" cannot discern the things of the Spirit, we must ask whether it is then of any use for the Christian to reason with his opponent.

The answer to this question must not be sought by toning down the dilemma as is easily and often done by the assumption that epistemological terminology means the

same thing for theists and non-theists alike. The answer must rather be sought in the basic concept of Christian theism, namely, that God is absolute. If God is absolute man must always remain accessible to him. Man's ethical alienation plays upon the background of his metaphysical dependence. God may therefore use our reasoning or our preaching as a way by which he presents himself to those who have assumed his non-existence.³

And,

Scripture teaches us to speak and preach to, as well as to reason with blind men, because God, in whose name we speak and reason, can cause the blind to see. Jesus told Lazarus while dead to arise and come forth from the grave. The prophet preached to the dead bones in the valley till they took on flesh. So our reasoning and our preaching is not in vain inasmuch as God in Christ reasons and preaches through us. Once we were blind; God reasoned with us, perhaps through some human agency, and we saw.⁴

And, once more,

It is therefore of the utmost importance to stress what Warfield stressed, when he said that we believe Christianity because it is "rational." When the Scriptures are presented to the natural man and with it the system of truth that it contains, he knows at once that he ought to accept it. He knows that if he rejects it he does so in spite of the fact that he knows its claim is true and just. Scripture speaks in the name of God to the sinner asking that he repent from his sin. The natural man, having usurped authority to himself is asked to recognize his legitimate sovereign. A son that has gone away from home and has been away for a long time might suddenly be put face to face with his father. Would it be possible for him not to own

3. Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, vol. 2 of *In Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969). This citation is important in that it comes from the first syllabus that Van Til wrote in the early 1930s.

4. Cornelius Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2008), 301.

and recognize his father for what he actually is? So impossible is it for the sinner to deny that Christianity is true. The sense of deity within him constantly gives the lie to all his theories short of the recognition of God as Creator and Judge. So also when confronted with Scripture as the Word of God the natural man can apply his reductionistic theories only at the cost of an evil conscience. He may be intellectually honest in his research. But at bottom he maintains his theories against better knowledge.⁵

It is not the case, therefore, that the Classical Apologist has exclusive rights to argument, rationality, or demonstration. Both of the methods mentioned attempt to argue and to demonstrate. The question remains as to what is the proper, biblical *foundation* on which one stands in order to argue and to show that Christianity alone is rational. The answer to that question, of course, will shape *how* we go about our argument and demonstration.

The second error, entailed by the first, is that Howe fundamentally misunderstands the method that he opposes and critiques. This misunderstanding, it is important to make clear, is *not* due to a paucity of statements to the contrary or to a hopeless ambiguity that resides in the method itself. It is, for whatever reason, due to a culpable mischaracterization.

This may, in part, be due to the term itself. As I have said elsewhere, the term “presuppositionalism” is ambiguous as it stands, and it can (if one insufficiently consults the literature) lend itself to the construction of a straw man or two (or three or four). The problem might also be due to a kind of “cultural narrative” in which a certain position or objection gets repeated so much that it starts to look like an actual fact (e.g., evolution). But this kind of cultural myth has no place in scholarship and should be smacked down whenever it seeks to raise its bobbing head. The best way to do this, of course, is by way of the tried and true Renaissance motto, *ad fontes*. It is not possible to go to the sources of this method and then to come away with a notion that reasoning and rationality are no part of its structure. One may try to argue *that* it cannot be a part of the structure, but such an argument has yet to be made; only statements abound in this regard.

5. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1977).

Finally, and in sum, there is no real dispute *that* we must contend for the faith, *that* we must argue and reason with the unbeliever, etc. The point of contention is *how* we go about doing this. And “how” does not, in the first place, mean the practical and obvious *way* that we argue or speak, though it includes these. “How” means, in the first place, what biblical and theological principles must be set firmly in place in order for our arguing and our speaking to be and do what it is meant to be and do. So, the question is not *whether* these things are employed, but the question for Howe is “how”?⁶

6. For more discussion on the mandate of apologetics in 1 Peter, see K. Scott Oliphint, *The Battle Belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2003); and K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2013). Also see the latter for examples of *how* one might go about reasoning with unbelief in various contexts.

CLASSICAL REPLY

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

I WOULD LIKE TO express my deep appreciation to both Drs. Jason Lisle and Scott Oliphint for their participation in this exchange. Their ability and willingness to rigorously engage the issues with the irenic spirit they have is a testimony to their substantial walk with the Lord and their sincere desire to love God with all their minds. It is hoped that my criticisms of each of them have been taken by them in the spirit in which I intended. I would also like to thank Mr. Eric Gustafson and Mrs. Christina Woodside for all the hard work they did in making these exchanges possible. I should first like to make some remarks to each of their responses to me and end with a few concluding points.

REGARDING JASON LISLE'S RESPONSE TO ME

First, Lisle had nothing to say about the distinction between a transcendental argument and a *demonstratio quia* argument (demonstration from effect to grounding).¹ It appears to me that Lisle either does not grant the distinction or does not understand it. I understand well

1. None of us can hardly be blamed for failing to respond to every point the others made as we were all working with strict word limits not only for our sakes, but also for the sake of the readers.

his stipulation that his method is one predicated upon biblical authority. However, when he argues from some phenomenon (like morality) to the grounding (or cause) of that phenomenon, this type of argumentation is not Presuppositionalism but rather is Classical Apologetics.

Second, Lisle is simply wrong when he says that “the classical apologist appeals to *something else* as the standard by which the Bible is judged” (emphasis his) (34). As I argued in my article, framing the apologetic task in terms of “ultimate standards” is flawed.

Third, despite his protestations to the contrary, I stand by my criticism that he confuses the ontological aspects of these questions with the epistemological ones.² My contention is not that I take exception to anyone making such metaphysical points. My contention is that while the Presuppositionalist is condemning the Classical method as unbiblical and proving a god that is not the God of Christianity, he goes on (in principle) to argue exactly as a Classical apologist would argue.

Last, Lisle admits to a point that in other places where I have attributed this position to Presuppositionalism, I have been accused of misconstruing the view. He says, “Without the entirety of the Scriptures, I could not know that God thinks, is omni-present, unchanging, and sovereign” and that the “laws of logic would be just as unjustified for the creationist as for the evolutionist” (35). This strikes me as manifestly false. Is Lisle saying that without 3 John or Nahum, he cannot know these things about God?³

2. He continues this confusion in his response to me. A few examples should suffice to prove this. When Lisle says things like “the biblical worldview alone makes knowledge possible” and “Logic and morality stem from the nature of God as revealed in Scripture,” he is making metaphysical pronouncements.

3. What is worse, how can he refute the heresies of the Deist Bible when Deist appeals to the exact same Bible to show that God has bodily parts? It will not do to say that Deist has misinterpreted the Scripture, for he could know that a given verse regarding these heresies is speaking figuratively only by going to something outside the Bible to demonstrate it. I contend that this “something” is reality. Further, I contend that we can know (apart from the Bible) that God has these and other attributes. As Rom. 1:20a says, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made. . . .” This refutes the Presuppositionalist method. It refutes it by showing that it is not the Bible that must be presupposed. It refutes it by showing that there is something antecedent to the Bible that is necessary in order to rightfully interpret the Bible.

REGARDING SCOTT OLIPHINT'S RESPONSE TO ME

First, just for the record, Oliphint misquoted me and thus (accidentally, I am sure) misrepresented my views.⁴ He had me saying that I noted “that there are two options [of apologetic methods] available to any Christian — the Classical approach and the Presuppositional . . . approach” (46). What I said instead was that “the two main answers” to the question about how should the Christian defend the faith are the Classical and Presuppositional approaches. I realize that there are more than two apologetic methods. I was only emphasizing that his and Lisle’s approach on the one hand and my approach on the other are the two *main* ones.

Second, Oliphint takes my first level of apologetics (i.e., the philosophical foundation) as elitist, in as much many Christians cannot be experts in philosophy and apologetics. Two things must be said by way of clarification. Oliphint has misunderstood what I meant by saying that philosophy is essential. I do not mean that one must be a philosopher to do apologetics. I would have hoped that my illustration about how a child can know much about reality would have been sufficient to make it clear what I meant. I only meant that there were truths that even a child can know, *an in-depth analysis of which* is doing philosophy. I do not see how Oliphint can deny that if in the course of doing apologetics, for example, a Christian is challenged by a *Tractatus* era Wittgensteinian who challenges the Christian’s use of language to speak of transcendent things, he can make any headway in defending the faith without some expertise in philosophy. All that this means is that to respond to any challenge to a deep enough level, a Christian will either need to deal with the issue at the appropriate level of expertise or lateral the apologetic response to an expert who can. This is not elitist. Next, Oliphint seems to think that the elitism is also characterized by the fact that my position on philosophy vis-à-vis apologetics makes apologetics out of the reach of some Christians. Because some Christians are not (and, perhaps, cannot be) philosophers, then my position is tantamount to confining apologetics to a sort of Roman Catholic Magisterium (the latter is my word). This response strikes me as being unnecessarily obtuse. One might as well

4. Since he somewhat facetiously thought he needed to correct me on this point, I thought it acceptable to defend my original wording.

challenge the use of speech in doing apologetics because there may be some Christians who are mute. I am surprised that my point here is not manifestly true to Oliphint. Surely he would defend the use of deeply rigorous theology (for example in dealing with soteriological issues) if the occasion warranted when sharing the gospel. Yet, just as surely he would recognize that there would be certain Christians who would be unable to delve into these deeper matters. Does this mean that it would be wrong to insist that when the occasion warrants, we should adopt this as a tenet of evangelism?

Last, Oliphint seems to think that he is correcting some misunderstanding of Presuppositionalism on my part.⁵ His concern seems to arise from my repeated allegation that on many occasions when Presuppositionalist defend the faith, they actually do Classical Apologetics. In response, let us be reminded of who started this “fight.” Christians (including Reformed Christians) have been defending the faith since the Church Fathers—indeed, since the Apostles. Along came Cornelius Van Til who launched the salvo that many of these Christians (including those advocates of “less consistent Calvinism”⁶) were doing it wrong. They were not really defending the truth of the real God.⁷ Then Van Til and his disciples, after having argued that the “old” method is wrong, went on to defend the faith. Alas, the defenses at times end up doing the same thing as did the method he condemned. Now, I (and perhaps others) come along and point this out (i.e., point out that the Presuppositionalist is, at times, doing the very method that he in other places condemns), only to have Oliphint protest by exclaiming that Van Til’s method “has been, consistently and continually, insistent that one defends the faith by way of reasoning.” This response is completely irrelevant to the dispute between us. I never characterized the difference between the Classical and Presuppositional

5. He contends that Presuppositionalists do indeed “unpack arguments” in defending the faith and that such “reasoning” is not the “prerogative” of Classical Apologetics alone.

6. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1955), 79–90.

7. Van Til went to great lengths to show why he thought this was the case. He made his case, by the way, by appealing to depths of philosophy, theology, and church history that was quite beyond the average Christian. He was explaining *how* to defend the faith. But if it is wrong for me to insist on doing apologetics the way that I do (because doing it this way would make it elitist, being beyond the reach of many Christians), then why is Van Til’s method, and by extension Oliphint’s, not equally at fault?

methods as being along the lines of “reasoning.” Instead, as I would have hoped my article made clear, it was the *specifics* of that reasoning. Presuppositionalists repeatedly do in their apologetics the same thing as does the method to which they think they stand in contrast. I am reminded of Rom. 2:1, *mutatis mutandis*.⁸

CONCLUDING POSTSCRIPT

In looking over the respective responses to my thinking, I am struck by several things. First, in reading their articles here as well as their published writings, I find myself on a number of occasions agreeing with and celebrating what they actually say when they engage in apologetics. Arguing how it is that only the reality of God can account for such things as logic and morality is indeed a necessary and profitable task. I celebrate every time I read rigorous Classical Apologetics. That it is Classical leads me into my next point.

Second, in critiquing Presuppositionalism, my contention has often been that the apologetics they do (in contradistinction to their discussions *about* apologetics itself) is sometimes Classical at heart.⁹ That they repeatedly deny such a characterization reminds me of Wittgenstein’s ladder in his *Tractatus*.¹⁰ Having made his argument for how he understood the nature of language and how language related to reality, Wittgenstein admits that the picture (no pun intended) he gives of language does not allow the argument that he gives of that picture. He likes this inconsistency (my word) or nonsense (his word) to a person who uses a ladder to climb onto a roof, only to throw the ladder away afterwards.

Last, regarding the main issue before us (i.e., the relationship between apologetic methodology and the question of the age of the Earth) I have maintained throughout that by and large there is not the

8. “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things” (NKJV).

9. This assessment is reinforced when I hear Presuppositionalists like Greg Bahnsen engage in public debates with atheists like Gordon Stein or George Smith. There are moments when the arguments could not have been more carefully (and integrally) formulated by a Classical apologist.

10. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and b. F. McGuinness (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 6.54.

connection between the two that Lisle thinks there is. More specifically, I deny that Presuppositionalism is either a necessary or sufficient condition for Young Earth Creationism. This seems virtually self-evident; otherwise, one is strapped with the impossible task of accounting for Old Earth Creationists such as Oliphint.¹¹ Instead, the question of the age of the Earth vis-à-vis the biblical text is an exegetical one. But in saying this, let me now add this clarification. For one who maintains the indispensable (and sometimes antecedent) role of philosophy in so many aspects of Christian thinking (at a deep enough level), I would also maintain that some exegetical issues necessarily presuppose certain philosophical truths.¹² These truths reside in reality. That reality includes the only true God and the creation He has made. There is no need to confine ourselves to only a sub-set of God's reality to defend His truths.

11. I say "impossible" because one would have to show that somehow Oliphint is not a consistent or rigorous enough Presuppositionalist.

12. Examples would be the nature of truth (correspondence, coherence, disquotational, pragmatic, functional), the nature of language and meaning, the relationship of language to reality, the nature of sensible objects, the nature of knowledge, and almost countless other issues that some skeptics use to challenge the Christian faith. For the best discussion I know of on how sound philosophy is essential to sound hermeneutics, see Thomas A. Howe, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation* (n.c.: Advantage Inspirational, 2004) available now as a Kindle book. Let the reader note challenges also come from other disciplines such as history and the natural sciences. In each case, to the degree that the challenge is technical enough, to that degree an expert is needed to defend the faith, no matter how elitist this may sound.

YOUNG EARTH PRESUPPOSITIONALISM

Jason Lisle, Ph.D.

How SHOULD WE defend the Christian Faith? There are several methods of apologetics: evidentialism, the classical method, the cumulative case method, and presuppositionalism, to name a few. Which of these is best, or is there a clear winner at all? What are the criteria by which we can answer these questions?

CRITERIA

One criterion to consider is the conclusiveness of the method. An apologetic method that merely argues that the Christian worldview is *likely* to be true will not be as powerful as one that demonstrates the Christian worldview conclusively. Some Christians also consider the pragmatic effectiveness of the method to be a good criterion. Essentially they ask, “Which method results in the most people led to Christ, or at the very least refutes any possible objection?” This is not necessarily the same as the first criterion. After all, an argument might

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be conclusive and yet so difficult to understand that it is not effective in persuading people to consider Christianity.

As a third criterion, we might consider the time and difficulty it takes to become skilled in a particular method. We would surely prefer an apologetic method that is easy to learn to one that is far more difficult (and of equal cogency and effectiveness.) Finally, we must ask, “Which apologetic method (if any) is most faithful to Scripture?” This is the most important criterion because it has moral implications. If the Bible endorses one method over another, how could we as followers of Christ rationalize ignoring such direction? Only if two different apologetic approaches were equally biblical would it make sense to even consider the remaining three criteria.

It is my conviction that presuppositional apologetics is the best method by each of the four criteria. Let us now define and explore the presuppositional method. As we do so, we will see how it satisfies each of these criteria.

PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS AND BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

It is always necessary to define terms at the outset in order to avoid confusion later on. This is particularly important with “presuppositionalism” – a term that has been used in several different ways. To be clear, by “presuppositional apologetics” I refer to the method of defending the Christian faith that was used by Dr. Greg Bahnsen and Dr. Cornelius Van Til. It is this method of apologetics and *only* this method that I will define, outline, and defend below. Unfortunately, presuppositionalism has often been misrepresented. And I am grateful for the opportunity to clear up some of the misconceptions.

Adding to the confusion is the fact that several other methods of apologetics are also sometimes called “presuppositional,” and yet they deviate substantially from the apologetic method promoted by Bahnsen and Van Til.¹ Whether these can rightly be called “presuppositional” is not the issue at hand: it is not my purpose to engage in a mere verbal dispute over terminology. I simply wish to point out that I am defending only that “variety” of presuppositionalism that is in the

1. See chapters 4–7 in G. L. Bahnsen, 2008, *Presuppositional Apologetics Stated and Defended* (Powder Springs, GA: The American Vision, 2008).

Van Tilian tradition. It is this method alone that I believe best satisfies the four criteria listed above.

Broadly speaking, presuppositional apologetics is the method of defending the Christian faith that relies on the Bible as the supreme authority in all matters. Before getting into the details of the method, let me say that presuppositional apologetics can be summed up in two words: *biblical authority*. Given that the Bible is God's inerrant Word, it is the only rationally certain starting point for our knowledge of anything. God cannot be wrong about anything (Job 40:2), and God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). So, the Bible is rightly taken to be the supreme and unquestionable standard by which all truth claims are judged (Matthew 4:4, 7:24–27).

A Christian might feel a surge of pious agreement at that last sentence. “*Of course* the Bible is the ultimate standard,” he says to himself. But then he begins to consider the implications of that claim. If the Bible is indeed taken to be the supreme and unquestionable standard by which *all* truth claims are judged, then this necessarily includes the truth claim that “the Bible is true.” Hence, the truthfulness of the Scriptures must be judged by the Scriptures! It seems strangely circular to allow the Bible to be the ultimate standard by which *its own claims* are evaluated. Is not that the fallacy of begging the question? Is not circular reasoning logically fallacious?

This charge of fallacious circularity is, I believe, one of the main reasons why many Christians are inclined to reject presuppositional apologetics at the outset. I will show below that it is logically inescapable that indeed the Bible must be the ultimate standard even when evaluating its own claims. I will also show that this can be done in a logical, non-fallacious way. For now, I simply wish to point out that standing on biblical authority is at the heart of the presuppositional method. This has profound implications for how the presuppositionalist uses evidence.

Biblical authority is the most important characteristic that distinguishes presuppositional apologetics from all other apologetic methods. For the presuppositionalist, *the Bible is the ultimate standard for all things, even its own defense*. All other apologetic systems use some extra-biblical standard by which to judge the truthfulness of the Bible. This “other standard” might be historical evidence, scientific

evidence, or logic. But in all cases, man is invited to judge the Bible by some external standard. Of course, the presuppositional apologist does endorse the use of historical evidence, scientific evidence, and logic. But the presuppositionalist holds that such standards are secondary to (and could not exist apart from) the supreme authority that is the Word of God.

Most apologists offer evidence to the unbeliever as if the unbeliever's standards and mind were in a position to evaluate such evidence and judge the Bible to be worthy of belief. This effectively makes the unbeliever the ultimate judge of truth. Unbelievers like to think that their unbiblical standards and unregenerate mind is in a position to judge God's Word. The presuppositionalist challenges this assumption, exposes the unbeliever's absurd standard, and educates the unbeliever of the fact that God is the ultimate judge of truth. It is not the human mind that judges God's Word, but God's Word that judges the human mind.

THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The Bible indicates in many ways that God is the ultimate source of all knowledge (e.g. Prov. 1:7). We are the recipients of some of that knowledge (Prov. 2:6). We can only know things in an ultimate sense because God has revealed them to us. Some of this comes from natural revelation. God has written his law on our hearts, for example. And we have the special revelation of God's Word. God has given us a mind by which we can use His revelation to discover yet further revelation. But we do not have "independent knowledge" – knowledge of something that God does not know (Col. 2:3). All knowledge that we possess is ultimately a gift from God. It follows, therefore, that apart from revelation from God, we could know absolutely nothing.

This thought is offensive to our sin nature. We like to think that we have a certain rational independence from our Creator. It is tempting to object, "Surely there are some things I know without revelation from God. I know I exist. I think; therefore I am. Right?" But of course, astute logicians will point out that the argument "I think; therefore I am" begs the question. For in saying "I think" the arguer has tacitly assumed his own existence – the very thing he is attempting to prove. "Thinking is occurring" would be a less presumptuous premise. But then there is no way to conclude "therefore I am" from such a premise.

Indeed, we could not even know that we exist apart from God's revelation. We often fail to realize how utterly dependent on God we are for everything. *Knowledge is only possible in the Christian worldview.* This biblical truth is foundational to the presuppositional method.

As one illustration of this fact, consider the astronomer who thinks she knows quite a lot about the universe based on what she has observed through her telescope. "I *know* that Saturn has rings," she says. "I have seen it with my own eyes. And I do not believe in God at all. Evolution is how life came to be. So I do not need God to have knowledge." But her knowledge-claim is inconsistent with her professed worldview. She has implicitly assumed that her eyes are reliable. But is this assumption rationally warranted? If her eyes are not reliable, then neither is any truth claim based on such a premise, such as the belief that "Saturn has rings." So we must ask, "Is the belief that her eyes are reliable *consistent* with her professed belief in evolution?"

In the Christian worldview, we have a very good reason to believe that our senses are basically reliable in most situations. After all, our sensory organs were designed by God (Prov. 20:12). And God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). But if God did not exist, and our eyes (and other organs) were merely the results of billions of years of mindless chemistry and chance mutations, would there be any reason to believe that they are truthful? An evolutionist might argue that they have survival value. Perhaps so, but that does not equate to "truth." Chlorophyll has survival value in plants, but it does not truthfully reveal to the plant any knowledge of the universe. The atheist astronomer has no reason to believe on her own worldview that her eyes are reliable. For all she knows, she might be a plant; her experiences of seeing Saturn with rings might be nothing more than the byproduct of photosynthesis.

Knowledge is only possible because God has revealed Himself. Perhaps a person would object, "But some people reject Christianity. Yet, unbelievers do have knowledge." This objection is easily answered, "Yes – because unbelievers do have revelation from God!" The Bible is very clear that God has revealed Himself to *everyone* (Rom. 1:18-20). Unbelievers, therefore, do know God and are able to have knowledge because of His revelation. But they suppress their knowledge of God in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). As a result, their thinking is reduced to absurdity (Rom. 1:20-22).

As one example of such absurdity, consider atheism. Are there genuine atheists that sincerely believe that God does not exist? According to Scripture, emphatically no. Rom. 1:18–20 makes that abundantly clear. God has made Himself inescapably known to every person, such that they literally have “no excuse” (no apologetic) for their denial of Him (Rom. 1:20). The atheist *does* believe in God, but has deceived himself into thinking that he does not believe in God (James 1:22). Therefore, we should not argue with atheists as if they really needed evidence that God exists. They already know that. Rather, we simply argue to expose their suppressed knowledge of God. We show that they betray their belief in God by the way they behave and by their other professed beliefs.

The knowledge that God has revealed to all men is not merely limited to the fact that “a god” exists. Rather, verse 21 indicates that they *know God*. Now, it would make little sense to say, “I know Jim, but I do not know anything about him.” Clearly, in order to *know* someone we must know at least some things about him. The Bible explicitly claims that God’s revelation to all men includes some knowledge of creation and of God’s divine nature (Rom. 1:20), as well as some knowledge of God’s moral standards (Rom. 2:14–15) and his righteous anger at mankind’s refusal to live up to them (Rom. 1:18). Unbelievers know on some level that the Christian worldview is true.

I do not mean that the unbeliever necessarily knows all aspects of the Christian worldview (e.g., that God created in six days, that Jesus walked on water, or that the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years). But the essential truth of Christian theism is hardwired into him by God. Such truth includes the fact that man is created in God’s image, responsible to God for his actions, and the unbeliever stands guilty before His righteous Creator as described in the Bible.

So Rom. 1:18–22 is not dealing merely with atheists, but *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. All unbelievers suppress at least some of their God-given knowledge. They do this because they are uncomfortable with the thought of an all-powerful God who is rightly angry at them for their sin. They would rather live in darkness than have their wickedness exposed by God’s revelation (John 3:19). They go to great lengths to convince themselves and others that they really do not believe in the

biblical God. *It is crucial to our apologetic efforts that we recognize that all unbelievers are self-deceived* (James 1:22, 1 John 1:8).

THE PRESUPPOSITIONAL METHOD

All non-Christian worldviews are always characterized by self-deception. What kind of argument then should we use with unbelievers? Answer: one that exposes their self-deception. I do not need to present heaps of evidence to the unbeliever of God's existence, of creation, or of God's moral standards; the unbeliever already knows these things but has deceived himself about them. I simply expose that self-deception. The unbeliever is able to have knowledge only because of his suppressed knowledge of God. He tacitly relies on Christian principles while simultaneously denying that he is relying on Christian principles. His worldview is self-contradictory and ultimately absurd.

It is easy enough to show the unbeliever's intellectual hypocrisy, thereby refuting his worldview on its own terms. I will show this below. But as Christians, we do not do apologetics as some intellectual game or to show our alleged rational superiority. Nor do we do it merely to tear down the non-Christian position – though this is *part* of why we do it (2 Cor. 10:5). We do it out of obedience to God (1 Pet. 3:15) and because we want to see people won to Christ (Acts 18:4, 28:23). We know that God ultimately is the only one who can bring unbelievers to repentance (2 Tim. 2:25; 1 Cor. 12:3). But He can use our apologetic efforts as part of the means by which He accomplishes His purpose. Apologetics is an aspect of evangelism.

That being the case, I not only refute the unbeliever's worldview by showing its absurdity, I also present the Christian worldview and invite the unbeliever to stand on it and see its rationality. We find that the non-Christian worldview (whatever version it is) will not make knowledge possible because only the Christian God can do this (e.g., Prov. 1:7). The non-Christian worldview is riddled with inconsistency and arbitrariness. It tacitly presupposes the Christian worldview in some places, while simultaneously denying the Christian worldview. On the other hand, the Christian worldview does make knowledge possible in a rational, self-consistent way. The unbeliever is left with a simple choice: be a Christian or be irrational.

Essential to the presuppositional method is that we never in fact depart from biblical authority. After all, the claim that only

Christian theism will make knowledge possible is a *biblical* claim (e.g. Prov. 1:7, Col. 2:3, 8). We stand on the authority of God's Word at all times as our Lord did in His earthly ministry (e.g. Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Therefore, we never capitulate to the fallible standards of sinful man. We never agree to put the Bible (and thus God) to the test (Matt. 4:7) by some alleged greater authority. There is no greater authority (Heb. 6:13).

We are more than happy to consider, for the sake of argument, the non-Christian worldview—to show that it does not stand up to scrutiny on its own fallacious terms. This is an internal critique, and it is biblically warranted. We indeed are to cast down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5). In particular, we show the arbitrariness and inconsistency of the unbeliever's claims and show how his worldview would fail to make knowledge possible on its own terms. This does not mean that we in reality accept any of the propositions of the non-Christian worldview. Rather, it means that we examine a hypothetical scenario for the sole purpose of showing how it fails on its own terms.

This important aspect of the presuppositional methods is summed up in Prov. 26:4–5. Prov. 26:4 states, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him.” The term “fool” here is the term God uses for those people who refuse to use their intellect properly, in a way consistent with God's revelation. The term is used in Ps. 14:1, which says, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God’.” Actually, the words “there is” are not in the original Hebrew. Literally, the fool says “No God” indicating his silly, stubborn rebellion to God's revelation. Prov. 26:4 indicates that we are not to go along with the fool's standard, to accept his terms of the debate, or we would be just as foolish.

Prov. 26:5 then states, “Answer a fool according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own eyes.” At first glance, this may seem to contradict verse 4. But clearly the sense is different. Although we should never embrace the foolish standard of unbelievers (Prov. 26:4), we should examine their worldview as a hypothetical scenario, in order to show that it leads to absurdity. This internal critique reveals the foolishness of the unbeliever's standards, such that he cannot be “wise in his own eyes” (Prov. 26:5).

These two principles (Don't Answer, Answer) actually work together to form a powerful defense of the Christian faith against all opposition. Consider an obvious and silly example of this approach in action. The critic says, "I do not believe that words exist. Now I am more than willing to consider the possibility that I'm wrong. And I welcome you to make a good counterargument. But you must not use any words in your argument – because I do not believe in such things!" Now how should we respond?

For some strange reason, most people feel that they must capitulate to the standard of their opponent. "Well, if he does not believe in words, then I guess I cannot use words in my defense." But that reasoning is fallacious. Words do exist whether the person admits it or not. What is worse, he even used words to make his case that words do not exist. If we were to agree to his standard, we would be "answering the fool according to his folly" in the sense of Prov. 26:4 and we would "be like him." We cannot make an argument without words.

But if we follow the method outlined in Prov. 26:4–5, we can easily defeat the critic's silly standard. We would not agree to his standard and might even say so. "I do not accept your claim that words do not exist." Then we do an internal critique, showing the absurdity of his standard on its own terms. "But if words did not exist, you could not have stated that 'words do not exist.' Your belief is self-refuting and therefore wrong." The real power of this argument is revealed by the fact that the critic can have no response to it! If he says nothing, then the argument stands. But if he says anything at all, he proves that words do exist—confirming the argument.

In summary, the presuppositional method (A) presents the Christian worldview and invites the unbeliever to stand on it and see how Christianity makes sense of the world and makes knowledge possible in a self-consistent way. (B) We do an internal critique of the competing non-Christian worldview, showing that it cannot make sense of the world or make knowledge possible in a self-consistent way. (C) We never depart from biblical authority in our approach, except as a purely hypothetical scenario to show the absurdity of it. (D) We have confidence that the Christian worldview alone will make knowledge possible since all knowledge is ultimately in God (Prov. 1:7, Col. 2:3). There is no particular order in which we discuss these

things. Every conversation will be different and will often involve discussing each of these points multiple times and in multiple ways.

The presuppositional method does not require a great deal of knowledge or debating skills. It requires only a good understanding of the Christian worldview and how such a worldview makes knowledge possible. We then invite the unbeliever to construct and defend a contrary worldview that will make knowledge possible, confident from the Scriptures that he will not be able to do so. This means that we do not need to study in detail every possible non-Christian worldview. We simply let the critic define his own worldview, and then we press him to be consistent with what he professes and watch his worldview collapse on its own terms. When we contrast the presuppositional method with other apologetic approaches, we can see that criterion 3 is satisfied.

THE PRAGMATIC NECESSITY OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

Presuppositional apologetics is designed to resolve debates over competing worldviews. A worldview is a person's philosophical framework – his or her basic beliefs about the world, about truth, about right and wrong. Not all debates are worldview debates. If two Christians have a disagreement about the price of eggs, they can readily settle the issue by going to the store and looking at the price tag. In such a case, both people have the same worldview, and so the debate can often be settled by observational evidence alone. However, worldview debates cannot be resolved this way. This is not to say that evidence is irrelevant or useless; but it is never (by itself) *decisive*. Here is why.

All people have “presuppositions.” Presuppositions are very elementary beliefs that are assumed before any investigation of evidence. As one example, a scientist must presuppose that her sensory perceptions are accurate *before* she can make reliable observations of the universe. Apart from that presupposition the scientist would have no reason to believe anything that she sees or hears. Presuppositions therefore guide and control how people interpret evidence. For this reason physical evidence by itself is never decisive when it comes to a worldview dispute.

As a hypothetical example, consider Ken—a Hindu who believes that the universe is merely an illusion. His friend Susan is a consistent Christian who believes the universe is quite real just as the Bible teaches. If they have a disagreement on the price of eggs, can they settle the dispute by going to the store and looking at the price tag? No, because Ken will argue that the price tag is merely an illusion too and proves nothing. Both Ken and Susan have the same evidence, but they disagree on the implications of that evidence because they have differing worldviews. Worldview debates cannot be resolved by physical evidence alone. This does not mean that evidence is useless or unimportant in worldview debates. It is simply not decisive.

As one example, a Christian might argue for a “young” solar system on the basis of comets. Comets are composed of icy material that is gradually vaporized by solar heat. We have measured the rate at which this occurs and find that a typical comet can last no more than 100,000 years. So, if the solar system were billions of years old, then it should have no comets. But of course we do have comets. This evidence seems to refute the secular timescale of 4.5 billion years.

But a secularist’s worldview will not allow him to draw that conclusion. His worldview requires billions of years (to allow for evolution). Yet, he observes comets and recognizes that they cannot last that long. The secularist therefore proposes a “rescuing device”—a hypothesis to protect his worldview from what appears to be contrary evidence. In this case, the secularist proposes an “Oort cloud” — essentially an unobserved “comet generator.” The Oort cloud is supposed to constantly supply the solar system with new comets as old ones are depleted. There is no observational evidence of an Oort cloud. But then again, its undetectable nature means that it cannot be *disproved* at the moment. The secularist appeals to his worldview as the justification for his belief in an Oort cloud.

A clever person will always be able to invent a rescuing device to protect his worldview from what appears to be contrary evidence. His justification for doing this will be the truth of his worldview. Thus, it is the worldview itself that must be challenged. And it cannot be challenged merely by appealing to external standards because the critic will deny such standards. Worldview debates can only be resolved by an internal critique — refuting them according to their own absurd standards. Evidence (historical, scientific, etc.) may of course be used

as part of that internal critique. But evidence cannot be used in a way that assumes the unbeliever will interpret it properly because he will not—at least not consistently. The unbeliever will invent a rescuing device to deal with all contrary evidence.

The Bible assures us that all worldviews contrary to Christianity are defective and would fail to make knowledge possible (e.g., Prov. 1:7; Col. 2:3, 8; Rom. 1:18–22). When we share this fact with unbelievers, they will usually attempt to argue otherwise. Since we know they cannot do this rationally, we simply point out the internal inconsistency and arbitrariness in their reasoning. Such an internal critique is extremely effective because it shows the absurdity of the non-Christian worldview on its own terms. There is no refutation more devastating than *self*-refutation. I have been using this approach for many years, and I have yet to see even one unbeliever be able to give any cogent response. With other methods, there is always a possible rescuing device. But with presuppositional apologetics, there is nothing to which the unbeliever can appeal. Criterion 2 is satisfied.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

Scattered throughout the above discussion, we have seen some biblical support for the presuppositional method, suggesting support for criterion 4. In particular we saw the advice of Prov. 26:4–5, that we should not accept the standards of the critic lest we be as foolish as he is; rather we take them as a hypothesis to show how they self-destruct so that the critic will not be “wise in his own eyes.” Prov. 3:5 states, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding.” Proverbs are often generalizations, but the method is endorsed more forcefully in other Scriptures such as Col. 2:3–8.

Col. 2:3 states, “In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” We must therefore build our thinking on the Christian worldview if we are to have wisdom and knowledge. Paul explains in verse 4, “I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument.” Paul warns us in verse 8 not to be robbed of these treasures of wisdom and knowledge by embracing worldly presuppositions, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than accord-

ing to Christ.” The “elementary principles of the world” refer to the basic building blocks of secular knowledge—in other words, secular presuppositions. Let us not overlook the last part of the verse, “rather than according to Christ.” So Paul warns that we can be robbed of wisdom and knowledge “carried off” and away from the truth by embracing worldly presuppositions in contrast to Christian presuppositions.

Jesus put it this way:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.

Notice that Christ does not make an exception for apologetics. He does not say, “Except when you are defending Scripture. . . . Then by all means, build your house upon the sand!”

When Satan demanded physical evidence of Christ’s deity, it was not that he really doubted. He just wanted to see if he could get Jesus to appeal to a non-biblical standard. Jesus responds in Matt. 4:4 that we are to live by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. He does not add an exception for apologetics (e.g., “Except when you are defending the Word, then go ahead and use some secular standard.”) We are not to abandon biblical authority for the purpose of defending biblical authority. Paul explains that the man of God stands on the Word of God even “to refute those who contradict.” We are not to use secular presuppositions to judge scriptural claims.

God does not have kind things to say about man’s worldly presuppositions. 1 Cor. 3:18–20, “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their own craftiness’; and again, ‘The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.’” See also 1 Cor. 1:20,25; 2:5. Eph. 4:17–18, “This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just

as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.” If we were to give up our biblical standard and embrace worldly standards, we would indeed be like the “fool” (Prov. 26:4).

Jesus never once departed from biblical authority in His earthly ministry, except for the sake of hypothesis to show the absurdity of doing so (e.g., Matt. 12:24–29, 38–42). Jesus was a master presuppositional apologist, always standing on the Word, and doing internal critiques of competing claims showing their absurdity (e.g., Matt. 22:15–46). And the response of Christ’s critics was exactly what presuppositionalists find today: “And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question” (Matt. 22:46). Presuppositional apologetics is very effective at silencing the critic. Likewise, the Apostle Paul never embraced unbiblical standards. Rather he showed that such standards are wrong and self-refuting (Acts 17:22–31). Paul wrote, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” Does this sound like someone who embraced worldly standards in his defense of the faith?

A negative example could also be given. Thomas was not fully presuppositional in his philosophy. Rather than accepting on the basis of biblical authority that Christ would rise from the dead, he demanded physical evidence on his own terms (John 20:24–25). Interestingly, Christ did give Thomas such evidence (John 20:27). Is this an endorsement of Thomas’s actions or simply an action demonstrating the graciousness of our Lord? Jesus gently rebukes Thomas for his attitude and implies that Thomas missed out on a blessing because of it (John 20:29).

It is tempting for us to believe that physical evidence is superior to God’s Word and that people would believe the Gospel if only they saw a spectacular miracle. But Jesus flatly denies such reasoning in Luke 16:27–31. In verse 31 He says, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets,” [in other words, the Scriptures] “they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead” [a most spectacular miracle]! This was confirmed in Christ’s own resurrection. There were some who stood in the presence of the resurrected Lord and still did not believe in Him. (cf. Matt. 28:17)

The conclusive nature of this approach is indicated in the Scriptures: Rom. 1:20 indicates that the unbeliever has no excuse for his denial of God—literally no excuse. If the Christian faith were merely probable, then the unbeliever would have some excuse, albeit a small one. Many texts of Scripture indicate the *certainty* of Christianity (e.g., Acts 2:36; Prov. 22:21; Acts 12:11; Gen. 15:13; Josh 23:13). Christianity is not merely probable; it is certainly true. Much more could be written regarding the biblical basis for the presuppositional method. See *Always Ready* and *Presuppositional Apologetics Stated and Defended*, both by Dr. Greg Bahnsen.

OBJECTIONS TO THE METHOD

Most, perhaps all, objections to the presuppositional method that I have read or heard stem from a misunderstanding of the method. There are those who claim that presuppositionalists do not believe in using evidence. As a scientist, I use evidence all the time in my apologetic method! Yet my method is always presuppositional. *Of course* presuppositionalists use scientific and historical evidence. We simply recognize that such evidence is always interpreted in light of a person's worldview. We do not pretend that there is some neutral interpretation of evidence that is superior and thus in a position to judge God's Word. But that does not mean we cannot use it in the right way (to show inconsistency and arbitrariness in the secular worldview, to show how Christianity accounts for such evidence, to stimulate further discussion, and so on). So this objection is nothing more than a straw-man fallacy.

Perhaps some of the confusion comes from the name. Those unfamiliar with apologetic methods might infer from the name that presuppositional apologetics deals mainly with presuppositions whereas evidential apologetics deals mainly with evidence. In reality, both methods deal with presuppositions and evidence. The difference between these two methods concerns the way in which the arguments are constructed, and the ultimate standard by which evidence is evaluated. Most presuppositionalists (myself included) are not particularly happy with the name "presuppositional" apologetics for this reason. But, historically, this is the name of the method, and so I will not dispute terminology here.

There are those who object that the presuppositional approach is too philosophical or abstract. In reality it is very practical. It is a method that works against any possible criticism of the Christian worldview (since all other worldview must first presuppose Christian principles in order to “get started”). Of course, there are aspects of the method that are philosophical and abstract. But this is true of all apologetic methods. Apologetics is designed to defend the Christian worldview; and a worldview is necessarily philosophical and abstract. So this objection fails.

Some have objected that the presuppositional method only works against atheism. But the method defends only *Christian* theism, and it does so against *any* alternative. It is in *Christ* that all wisdom and knowledge are deposited— not some generic conception of “deity.” Rom. 1:18–20 indicates that God has revealed himself to everyone such that they have no excuse for denying Him; it does not say that all men merely have some generic concept of deity. No, they know God—*the* God. So it is hard to take this objection seriously. Perhaps this objection stems from the fact that the method has been used masterfully and famously in debates against atheists. There was the legendary Bahnsen–Stein debate, and the Bahnsen–Tabash debate, both on the existence of God. It seems less well-known that Bahnsen also used the method masterfully in formal debates against a Jew, a Muslim, and Roman Catholics. Presuppositional apologetics works to refute *any* non-Christian worldview.

There are some who might object that the presuppositional method is too difficult to explain to use it effectively. Most people have not consciously considered their own presuppositions and whether or not those presuppositions comport with each other in a way that can make knowledge possible. It seems that we have to lay down more “ground work” to use this method than we would by appealing directly to evidence. Though I reject the notion that the method is “too difficult” to be useful, I do agree that it requires the Christian to do more preparatory work in educating the unbeliever so that he or she can understand the argument. But (1) it is not really all that much more, and (2) given the devastating and conclusive nature of the argument, is it not worth taking a little time to educate the unbeliever?

Ultimately, we can either (1) educate the unbeliever so that he can understand a conclusive and truly devastating argument for

Christianity, or (2) we can capitulate to his ignorance. Rather than using a faulty or inconclusive argument (albeit one that is easy to understand) that the Christian position is likely, how much better to educate the unbeliever so that he can understand that Christianity is inescapably true.

Some might say, "How can we stand upon biblical authority and expect to be persuasive when the critic does not acknowledge biblical authority?" Prov. 26:4–5 answers this. The Bible has authority whether people will admit it or not. And the unbeliever's own worldview does not and cannot stand up to an internal critique. If the unbeliever refuses to acknowledge the authority of the Bible, that is his problem. I am not going to commit the same sin just to make him comfortable, any more than I would hold my breath when debating a critic of air. In battle, the best place to stand when defending a hill is on the hill. In spiritual warfare the best place to stand when defending the Bible is on the Bible.

Some Christians might hesitate to be presuppositional because they are concerned that they will have to give up a favorite argument or item of evidence. But this is not a logical objection, merely a psychological preference. And it is misplaced. Ironically, the presuppositional method "increases" the value and range of evidence. In the presuppositional method *all* evidence is "proof" of the Christian worldview because apart from the Christian worldview, evidence would be meaningless. Our very ability to observe evidence and draw rational conclusions is based upon our senses and mind being created by God to function properly. As to arguments for Christianity, the broad umbrella of presuppositional apologetics embraces all cogent or sound arguments as long as they do not abandon the Bible as our ultimate standard. Of course, some Christians do use arguments that abandon biblical authority. But these are contrary to Christ's teaching (e.g., Matt. 7:24–27). A Christian need not give up any argument to be presuppositional, except bad ones. And he should not be using those in the first place.

Some might object to the conclusiveness of the presuppositional argument. "If presuppositional apologetics proves Christianity conclusively, then is there any room for faith?" This objection is based on a misunderstanding of what faith is. Biblical faith is *not* "believing in something that is unproven or unprovable." Nor is it "believing some-

thing without evidence.” Rather biblical faith is having confidence in something not observed by the senses, but for which there *is* evidence. This is the way the word ‘faith’ is used in the Bible. Heb. 11:1 confirms this. We have great evidence for the Christian worldview—it is logically provable! Yet we have not observed God with our senses. Thus, our belief in Christianity is faith. It is an objectively provable faith.

Far be it from removing the need for faith, the presuppositional method affirms that faith in God is essential for knowledge. Again, such faith need not be a “saving faith” (James 2:14, 19–20). Even unbelievers have a type of faith in God and rely on biblical presuppositions, albeit inconsistently. But apart from our conviction that God exists and is who the Scriptures say He is, we would lose any rational justification for things like logic or uniformity in nature. Faith in the biblical God is actually the prerequisite for knowledge. Is it “by faith we understand” (e.g., Heb. 11:3).

CIRCULAR REASONING

Perhaps the most widely cited objection to presuppositional apologetics is the argument that (1) presuppositional apologetics employs circular reasoning, (2) circular reasoning is fallacious, and (3) therefore presuppositional apologetics is fallacious. Regarding the first premise, we must clarify that presuppositional apologetics does not arbitrarily assume the Bible as the sole proof of the Bible. My argument is not “the Bible is true because it is true.” Nor is it “the Bible is true because it claims to be the Word of God who cannot lie. And since God cannot lie, this biblical claim must be true.” Such arguments would be fallacious: they beg the question. Nonetheless, there is a degree of circularity to the method since we do not depart from biblical authority for the sake of proving it. Is this fallacious?

First, it may surprise some people to learn that circular reasoning is actually logically valid. Validity means that the chain of reasoning from premise to conclusion is correct. And circular arguments do satisfy this condition since the conclusion is simply a restatement of the premise. Why then are circular arguments usually considered fallacious? The answer is that they are *arbitrary*. The conclusion does not prove anything beyond what is assumed in the premise. But what

if it were not arbitrary, but logically inescapable? In such a case there would be no reason to call such an argument fallacious.

Consider this example: is it possible to prove that laws of logic exist? Yes, an argument can be constructed that proves laws of logic. But the argument would have to use laws of logic in order to be constructed. Only by presupposing the existence of laws of logic can we construct an argument which proves that there are laws of logic. What is even more spectacular is that anyone wanting to argue *against* the existence of laws of logic would first have to assume the existence of laws of logic in order to construct the argument. Laws of logic must exist because the contrary position leads to absurdity. This is a *transcendental argument*. It establishes the proof of a foundational claim by showing the impossibility of the contrary. The argument has a degree of circularity and yet is non-arbitrary and logically inescapable.

The notion that circular reasoning is always wrong reveals a bit of philosophical naivety. In fact, all ultimate standards must be defended in a somewhat circular way (by a transcendental argument). Here is why: Consider a truth claim (p). To establish the truth of (p) we argue that it follows from another truth claim (q). But how do we know that (q) is true? It too must be defended by another claim (r). This process must terminate in an ultimate standard (s). The alternative is that the chain would go on forever and could never be completed; and an incomplete argument proves nothing.

How then do we justify the ultimate standard? We cannot appeal to a greater standard, for then our ultimate standard would not truly be ultimate, and we would be left to justify this greater standard. We cannot appeal to a lesser standard because a claim cannot be more certain than the claim upon which it is based. In other words, we cannot defend (s) by lesser standard (r) because (r) is only reliable if (s) is. We cannot merely assume (s) with no justification because then (s) would not truly be known and all beliefs based on it would be unjustified. We could not know anything if that were the case.

The only option left to us is that (s) must somehow prove itself. It must be the standard for its own truth as well as all other truth claims. An ultimate standard can be proved only by a transcendental argument. It is demonstrated by showing that the contrary claim would make knowledge impossible. This of course matches the biblical claim

that knowledge is impossible apart from the Christian God (Prov. 1:7, Col. 2:3). The Bible is self-attesting, and self-authenticating.

We note that the Bible itself recognizes that ultimate standards must be based on themselves. This is explained in the context of promises. People appeal to a greater standard than themselves when making a promise. Heb. 6:16 states, “For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.” What then does God – the standard of standards—appeal to when making a promise? Heb. 6:13 states, “For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself.” Yes, God, the ultimate standard of knowledge, appeals to God as His standard. There is no other option. This cannot be a mistake in reasoning since God makes no mistakes in reasoning.

The presuppositional argument is *not* therefore a simple arbitrary circle. Rather, it argues from the biblical principle that unless you argue from biblical principles, you cannot argue at all. It is more of a “spiral” that goes out of its own plane than a simple circle—a spiral that encompasses all possible knowledge. So when people object that Christianity has a degree of circularity to it, a simple response would be, “Yes. You either reason within the Christian circle, or you cannot reason at all. So this is a great reason to embrace Christianity.”

CONSIDER THE ALTERNATIVE

To argue for the truth of Christianity by appealing to a non-biblical standard is logically fallacious. The Bible claims that it is the ultimate standard, the foundational worldview that makes knowledge possible (e.g. Matt. 7:24–27, Prov. 1:7). Call this proposition A. The person who attempts to argue for the truth of the Scriptures by some non-biblical standard either acknowledges (1) that this standard is as or more authoritative than Scripture, or (2) that such a standard is less authoritative than Scripture. If he takes option 2, then he has not really proved anything because his chosen standard is fallible; hence any conclusions are unreliable. If he takes option (1), then it follows that the Bible is not the ultimate standard for knowledge (proposition “not-A”). If he successfully proves the Bible by such a method, then he proves proposition A since this is part of the Bible. But as a premise he assumed not-A. His conclusion contradicts his premise, and so his argument is invalid and self-refuting.

All non-presuppositional methods argue on the basis of some non-biblical standard. They tacitly suppose that man's mind is the ultimate standard and is in a position to judge God's Word. They attempt to show that God's Word passes certain tests (historical verification, scientific accuracy, logical coherence) and as such it is (at least very likely) true, and therefore you should have faith in it. This contradicts the biblical claim that God (and by extension His revelation) is the ultimate standard for knowledge by which all other standards will be judged. The unbeliever likes to pretend to be the judge of all truth. He expects us to act as God's defense attorney and present evidence that he will judge on his non-biblical terms. And if the unbeliever is convinced by such evidence, then he will place his faith in God. In response to this the presuppositionalist says, "No. You have it backwards. You must *begin* with faith in God's Word. Only then can you start to understand or prove anything else." (Heb. 11:3)

CLASSICAL RESPONSE

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

I AM GRATEFUL FOR this opportunity to engage Dr. Jason Lisle on these important matters. I appreciate his undying commitment to the authority of the Bible. No one should doubt Lisle's desire to help others see the authority of the Bible and to understand the truth of the Gospel message. In addition, it is encouraging to see Lisle's commitment to utilizing the tools of sound reason in serving the Lord, recognizing as he does that sound reasoning comes from the Lord. Last, in light of the following criticisms of Lisle's apologetic method, nothing I say should be taken as a criticism of his conclusions regarding the age of the earth in as much as I would consider myself a Young Earth Creationist.

PROBLEMS WITH WORLDVIEW DISCUSSIONS

Similar to certain other apologists with whom I am familiar, Lisle discusses apologetics in terms of "worldviews."¹ He says, "An

1. See, for example, Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins, *Worlds Apart. A Handbook on World Views*, 2nd ed. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003); David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Story of the Biblical Christian, Marxist Leninist and Secular Humanist Worldviews* (Manitou Springs, CO: Summit Press, 1991), republished as *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for*

apologetic method that merely argues that the Christian worldview is *likely* to be true will not be as powerful as one that demonstrates the Christian worldview conclusively. . . . Knowledge is only possible in the Christian worldview.” (emphasis in original) In Lisle’s view, the truth of the Christian worldview is demonstrated by showing that all non-Christian worldviews are absurd (meaning that they can be refuted on their own terms) and that they tacitly presuppose the Christian worldview. I have come to believe that there is a lurking problem with some worldview talk.

While a discussion of worldviews can sometimes be productive when doing apologetics, one must be careful with how he understands the relationship of thinking and worldviews. Some formulations I have heard of this relationship gets dangerously close to relativism. What I have in mind here is how some worldview discussions sound like Wittgenstein’s “forms of life” in the vein of some of his disciples such as Norman Malcolm.² To be fair to Lisle, I realize that this is not what he is advocating. It is evident in his discussion of worldviews in *Ultimate Proof* that he is trying to avoid the relativism I am discussing here. It is precisely because I am confident that neither he nor certain others in this discussion are advocating a Wittgensteinian fideism that

Truth (Eugene: Harvest House, 1997); James W. Sire: *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, InterVarsity Press, 2004); James E. Taylor, *Introducing Apologetics, Cultivating Christian Commitment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, Baker Publishing Group, 2006). While Lisle does not define a worldview in his article here, he does define it in his *The Ultimate Proof of Creation: Resolving the Origins Debate* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009), 25, as “a network of our most basic beliefs about reality in light of which all observations are interpreted.” He continues with the common simile of the glasses affecting “the way we view things.”

2. See his “The Groundlessness of Belief,” in *Reason and Religion*, ed. Stuart C. Brown (London: Royal Institute of Philosophy, 1977), reprinted in Louis P. Pojman, *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 4th ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2003), 391–399. Wittgenstein says, “All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life.” [Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row, 1969), §105, p. 16c.] For Malcolm (in applying Wittgenstein) various “systems” are “forms of life” or “language games” none of which needs or could have any justification over against the other. “Religion is a form of life; it is a language embedded in action—what Wittgenstein calls a ‘language game’. Science is another. Neither stands in need of justification, the one more than the other” (398).

I raise my concerns about how they sometimes frame these issues. In other words, it only because I know that they are not advocating any sort of epistemological relativism that I am concerned about how the discussion proceeds.

One problem with this is that it capitulates to an unwarranted rationalistic foundationalism in the tradition of Descartes. While I might have some sympathies with foundationalism generally considered (but certainly not with its Cartesian form), our knowledge of reality is not deducible *from* that foundation, but rather is reducible *to* that foundation.³ To illustrate this, consider an example from the physical world (sensible reality) and our knowledge of it. If the law of non-contradiction did not obtain with reality, then any given being could be its own opposite. Any given thing we might know about sensible reality would be indistinguishable from its contradiction. There would be no distinction between a tree and a non-tree and there would be no distinction between knowing a tree and not knowing a tree. However, it is not possible to begin with the law of non-contradiction and deduce truths about sensible reality from it. To put a more Christian spin on it, we can demonstrate that if the physical world exists, then God exists. This is the cosmological argument. But, the fact that God exists does not necessarily entail that the physical world exists.⁴ The physical world is a sufficient condition for the existence of God and the existence of God is a necessary condition for the existence of the physical world.⁵

3. Another example of a Young Earth Creationist and this Cartesian way of framing things is Jonathan D. Sarfati. "All philosophical systems rely on logical deductions from starting assumptions—axioms—which, by definition, cannot be proven from prior assumption. For our axioms, it is rational to accept the propositions revealed by the infallible God in the 66 books of the Bible." ["Loving God with All Your Mind: Logic and Creation." at Creation.com, <http://creation.com/loving-god-with-all-your-mind-logic-and-creation>, accessed September 5, 2013. Sarfati is wrong. It is not the case that all philosophical systems take this Cartesian approach.

4. This, again, was to some degree the method of Descartes. See his *Meditations on First Philosophy* in John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, trans. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2:3–62.

5. The point here is not causal. I am not saying that the physical world causes there to be a God. To say that the physical world is a sufficient condition for the existence of God is to say that if there is a physical world, then necessarily there has to be God. This form of saying it is the same as saying that being a pregnant human being is a sufficient condition for being a female human being. Certainly the pregnancy does not cause the human being to be female. Rather, it is saying that if a human being is pregnant, then necessarily it

But the physical world is not a necessary condition for the existence of God and the existence of God is not a sufficient condition for the existence of the physical world. Thus, this method of Cartesian foundationalism seems inadequate in itself to deliver any real knowledge about the creation.⁶

It is my contention that, despite his best efforts, Lisle does not escape the self-referential problems that worldview discussions can fall into. While contending (using the glasses simile) that the Bible “is a bit like corrective lenses” and arguing that it is the “evidence” that different worldview interpret differently, comments such as “we all interpret the facts in light of our worldview” can lead toward these self-referential problems. Even though in context, when referring to

is female. If you were reading about someone named “Bobby” you might not yet know whether Bobby was a man or a woman. If, as you read further, you see that Bobby is pregnant, then you know that, necessarily, Bobby is a woman.

6. I should like to direct the reader to the very interesting and helpful article by Don Collett, “Van Til and Transcendental Argument” in K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton, eds. *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2007): 258–278. I have cast the issue in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions that track exactly the truth-functional argument forms of Modus Tollens and Modus Ponens, respectively. Collet argues that the form of the transcendental argument is not merely truth-functional but semantic. His article is helpful in as much as it shows exactly where the problems lie with the Presuppositionalist position. Such problems include (1) There is a confusion of the ontology (metaphysics) and the epistemology of a given position as evidenced by his statement: “In this way [of stating the issue] argument is made to depend upon God, rather than vice versa, since argument is possible if and only if God’s existence is true from the outset of argument itself” (261) and this statement “It enables us to articulate more precisely Van Til’s position that ‘no human being can utter a single syllable, whether in negation or affirmation, unless it were for God’s existence’” (269, emphasis in original). These are nothing if not metaphysical claims, and, thus, are irrelevant to this apologetic debate since this metaphysical point does not distinguish Classical Apologetics from Presuppositional Apologetics. Both sides would agree with Van Til that the existence of God is necessary for there to be any human beings at all, and thus God’s existence is necessary for any human being to utter anything. Instead, Collet must make the epistemological point in order to be making an argument for Presuppositionalism at all. (2) Setting the Presuppositionalist position in contrast to “both ‘deductive’ and ‘inductive’ methods of argument” (260) is, in my estimation, a false dilemma since the Classical method of Aristotle and Aquinas is neither “deductive” (Descartes) nor “inductive” (Locke, and certain contemporary apologists). Granted the terms ‘induction’ or ‘inductive’ are used in the Classical position, but such Classical induction is quite different from its more modern instantiations (precisely because of the confusion of Modern Empiricism and Classical Empiricism). While I might agree with some of the criticisms the Presuppositionalist would level against these “deductive” and “inductive” methods, I deny that the only alternative is the so-called transcendental argument of Presuppositionalism.

“fact.” Lisle evidently means facts about the physical world, to say that our “interpretation” of even physical facts is always relevant to (or in light of) our worldview makes it impossible for Lisle to know the reality of any worldview other than his own. This is so because the only way that Lisle can know the worldview of anyone else is through his own apprehension of the physical world. He will either have to hear or read what that other worldview is. Since this knowledge of that other worldview comes to Lisle by means of a physical “fact” or “evidence,” then by his own model whatever he thinks he knows about that worldview is itself “interpreted” by his own worldview. The critic can then say that it is not the critic’s own worldview that is at fault but, rather, Lisle’s *interpretation of* that worldview that is at fault. Since every “fact” is interpreted, there is no way for Lisle to be able to say that his understanding of any given worldview (except perhaps his own) is true. What is missing from Lisle’s formulation is any direct access to reality. Because of the way he has set up the epistemological task, he has, in principle, made it impossible for him to describe physical reality truly. He can only describe physical reality *according to his own worldview*. Of course, Lisle does not think this poses any problem since he admits as much. He says, “If the Bible is indeed taken to be the supreme and unquestionable standard by which *all* truth claims are judged, then this necessarily includes the truth claim that ‘the Bible is true.’ Hence, the truthfulness of the Scriptures must be judged by the Scriptures! It seems strangely circular to allow the Bible to be the ultimate standard by which *its own claims* are evaluated” (emphasis in original) (65). The problem, however, is not merely one of circularity (as bad as that is). The problem is how Lisle can claim that any given “fact” which involves knowledge from the physical realm is *true*. Let us take them one at a time.

Circularity

It is not uncommon, perhaps, when defending, for example, the logical law of non-contradiction, for the charge to be made that the defense is circular. Since one has to use the law of non-contradiction (so the criticism goes) in order to defend the law of non-contradiction, then such a defense commits the fallacy of begging the question. This criticism Lisle fully embraces. He observes, “Nonetheless, there is a degree of circularity to the method since we do not depart from bibli-

cal authority for the sake of proving it" (80). He then asks himself, "Is this fallacious?" after which he proceeds to supposedly answer the question. The problem with his answer is that he shows how a circular argument that is formal is still a valid argument. In doing so, he is illicitly mixing several categories. He is illicitly drifting from issues relating to informal arguments to issues relating to formal arguments. He is illicitly shifting his examination from the fallacy of begging the question within informal logic, to the issue of validity within formal logic. By (correctly) claiming that any formal argument where the conclusion is also one of the premises is valid, he mistakenly assumes that he has deflected the criticism of circularity in his apologetic method.⁷ This he has not done. Validity by itself does not deliver much. It is quite easy to construct a ridiculous argument with a plainly false conclusion which, nevertheless, is valid.⁸

Still, Lisle tries to rescue certain types of circularity from being fallacious by showing that in some cases the circularity is not arbitrary (since, in his estimation, it is arbitrariness that makes certain circular arguments to be considered fallacious). This rescue is attempted by an appeal to the notion of being "logically inescapable." As he sees it, even if an argument is circular, if the circularity is not arbitrary but

7. The reason that such circularity does not render a formal argument invalid (and, in fact, actually renders it valid precisely because of the circularity) is because of the definition of validity in formal logic. Stated affirmatively, validity (which pertains only to formal arguments) means that it is impossible for all the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false. (Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 8th ed. [New York: Macmillan, 1990], 46; Robert Baum, *Logic* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975], 19–20.) Stated negatively, a formal argument is valid just in case it is not invalid. (With certain types of formal proofs, it is easier to prove that an argument is not invalid than it is to directly prove that it is valid.) It is invalid only when all the premises could be true and the conclusion still be false. If the formal argument does not fulfill this criterion of invalidity, then it is by definition valid. But it would be impossible for any formal argument where the conclusion is also one of the premises to have all true premises and a false conclusion. This is so because if the conclusion was false, then the premise which is the same as the conclusion would also have to be false. (Since they are the same proposition, they necessarily have the same truth-value.) This means you could not have all true premises with a false conclusion. Thus, such an argument could not possibly fulfill the requirements for being invalid. Thus, necessarily, it is valid.

8. An example would be (1) unimpeded light travels at sixty mph and (2) the sun is sixty miles away from the earth. Therefore, it will take unimpeded light from the sun one hour to reach earth. Notice that *if* the premises were true, the conclusion would have to be true. The reason the argument can be valid even though the conclusion is false is because at least one (and, in this case both) of the premises is false.

is logically inescapable, then it is not fallacious. For the most part, I agree with what he goes on to say about logic although I disagree that “all ultimate standards must be defended in a somewhat circular way.” Aristotle admits that using the law of non-contradiction to prove the law of non-contradiction might not satisfy the critic who cannot get past what seems circular to him. Thus, Aristotle appeals to the distinction between a proper demonstration and a negative demonstration, or what J. L. Ackrill translates as “refutation.”⁹ As I will discuss later, what gets Lisle in trouble in how he handles things like the laws of logic is his framing the epistemological task in terms of an “ultimate standard.”

With this, trying to defend the laws of logic is the one place where a transcendental argument actually occurs. To show the critic of logic that he has to use logic in order to level his criticism (or rejection) of logic is to show that logic is transcendently necessary. In all my readings of and hearing lectures and debates by Van Til, Bahnsen, and other Presuppositionalists, and in all the discussions I have had with Presuppositionalists, I have never once encountered an argument for Christianity that is truly transcendental in the way that the above argument for logic is transcendental.¹⁰ To be sure, Presuppositionalists (and others) have shown that logic is transcendently necessary. They might even have shown that logic comports with the Bible. But this is very far from showing that the Bible is transcendently necessary. The Presuppositionalists themselves insist that such a case for Christianity cannot be made piecemeal.¹¹ Somewhere, there is a dis-

9. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 4, 1006^a12, trans. J. L. Ackrill, *A New Aristotle Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 267.

10. The highly touted debate that Greg Bahnsen had with Gordon Stein is no exception. I commend to the reader the critique of the Bahnsen-Stein debate by Sean Choi, “The Transcendental Argument,” in Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister, eds., *Reasons for Faith: Making the Case for the Christian Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007): 231–247. Though Choi is sympathetic to Presuppositionalism, he nevertheless acknowledges, “I think it can be seen that Bahnsen’s strategy . . . is insufficient to establish the truth [that, if Christian theism is false, then there is no rational justification for the laws of logic]” (238–239). Further on Choi concludes, “The lesson is that a formulation of TAG [Transcendental Argument for God] that purports to establish the rational inescapability of *Christian* theism (like Bahnsen’s and Butler’s) seems too ambitious and doomed to fail” (247).

11. See Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (n.c., Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1975), 20; Greg L. Bahnsen (with Joel McDurmon as editor), *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended* (Power Springs, GA: American

connection. The Presuppositionalists promise to show that only by presupposing Christianity can there be an intelligibility at all and that any intelligibility that is found with the non-Christian is only in spite of his non-Christian “worldview.” But what we get is a demonstration of the transcendental necessity of logic, together with the observation of how logical the Bible is.

What is more, in critiquing, for example, whether the atheist astronomer knows whether Saturn has rings simply because she has seen them through her telescope, Lisle says, “So we must ask, ‘Is the belief that her eyes are reliable *consistent* with her professed belief in evolution?’” to which he responds, “In the Christian worldview, we have a very good reason to believe that our senses are basically reliable in most situations” (67). But the promise of Presuppositionalism was not “a very good reason” but was, instead, something that was transcendently necessary. To offer “a very good reason” is the language of Classical Apologetics. That this “very good reason” is not the Presuppositionalist’s transcendental argument is evident by what Lisle goes on to say. He seeks to show how the Bible teaches that our sensory organs were designed by God, how God is not the author of confusion, and how the randomness of the evolutionary process could not yield any assurance that our senses are delivering truth. The problem with this response is that it is most assuredly not a transcendental argument, which is to say, it is not Presuppositionalism. Very often the writings and discussions by Presuppositionalists are defenses of Presuppositionalism not defenses of Christianity. When they do actually defend the Christian faith, they end up giving the arguments of Classical Apologetics, as in this case.

Metaphysical Facts

Moving beyond this discussion of the problems with Lisle’s method regarding how worldviews determine one’s interpretation of physical “facts,” a few things need to be said regarding other kinds of facts. Given that Lisle is a scientist and his interests lie along the issues of the age of the earth and the integrity of God’s Word, especially regarding the Creation account vis-à-vis evolution, it is quite understand-

able that his emphasis regarding worldviews is on how we “interpret” the data of sensory experience. As a Classical (or Scholastic) Realist¹² I would submit that our sensory experiences of reality also deliver to us metaphysical truths.¹³ Time, space, and purpose will not allow for a treatment of this subject.¹⁴ Let it suffice to say that just as it cannot be the case that all of our knowledge about physical reality is “interpreted” by our antecedent worldview, so it is also with metaphysical truths. We have already seen how logic is trans-worldview in as much as it is transcendently necessary. This is no less a metaphysical as it is a physical truth given that logic applies not only to the physical realm but also to the metaphysical realm as well.

Ultimate Standards

It is noteworthy that Lisle frames his apologetic concerns in terms of a position needing to be justified by an “ultimate standard.” This also is characteristic of a Cartesian foundationalism. I counted over sixty uses of phrases to the effect that, in laying out what Lisle calls a worldview, one must have some “standard” by which he judges (or knows) the truth of that worldview. For Lisle, the ultimate standard must be the Bible. He says “Presuppositional apologetics is the method of defending the Christian faith that relies on the Bible as the supreme authority in all matters. . . . I will show below that it is logically inescapable that indeed the Bible must be the ultimate standard even when evaluating its own claims. . . . For the presuppositionalist,

12. Taking a cue from Edward Feser, the term ‘Scholastic Realism’ sets off the moderate realism of Aquinas from the moderate realism of Aristotle. For Aristotle, universals (as universals) exist only in (human) intellects and are instantiated in particulars as their forms. For Aquinas, not only are universals found in human intellects and instantiated in particulars as their forms, but they also eternally pre-exist in the mind of God as their Creator. See Edward Feser, “Teleology: A Shopper’s Guide,” *Philosophia Christi* 12, no. 1 (2010): 142–159. See also John Peterson, *Introduction to Scholastic Realism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999). One should note that there is a difference between Classical Apologetics and uses of the term ‘classical’ regarding philosophy (e.g., Classical Realism). To be classical in one’s philosophy is to embrace (to some degree or another) the categories of metaphysics found in the Greek philosophers such as Plato or Aristotle.

13. Such metaphysical truths would include logic, universals, form/matter, essence/existence, substance/accident, causality, and more.

14. For a helpful treatment of the epistemology of Scholastic Realism, see Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *Man’s Knowledge of Reality: An Introduction to Thomistic Epistemology* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1956).

the Bible is the ultimate standard for all things, even its own defense." (emphasis in original) (65). But such a rationalist foundationalism is not the way we know reality. When I see a tree, I do not check my perception of the tree against some standard and then conclude that I am seeing a tree. I just see the tree. Our knowledge of reality begins with our sensory experiences.

To be sure, our sensory faculties are what they are because of the way God had created us. What is more, there certainly are views of reality that cannot account for how it is that we can trust our senses. But showing the inadequacy of these views of reality is not Presuppositionalism. Consider this illustration. If I lived 2,000 years ago and heard the preaching of Jesus first hand, I might believe that Jesus is telling the truth. I might even characterize my belief in Presuppositionalist categories. But notice, the *content* of Jesus' message is not the reason why I believe that I am hearing the preaching of Jesus. I believe that I am hearing the preaching of Jesus because I am hearing (empirically) the preaching of Jesus. So, as a Presuppositionalist I might think that I know that Jesus is the "ultimate standard" (to use a Presuppositionalist category) of the truth and might even give Presuppositionalist arguments for it. What is not happening is that my knowing that it is Jesus that I am hearing preach is because of any Presuppositionalist criteria.

The upshot of all of this to me is this. I would argue (as worldly as it might first appear) that it is not the biblical worldview to which the Christian apologist must appeal to make his case for the truth of the Christian faith. Rather, it is reality. (A true proposition is a proposition that corresponds to reality.) Reality serves as the context against which the notion of truth derives its meaning and the only repository from which we can get what we need to understand even the Bible itself (as I hope my argument in my original article demonstrated regarding how we are able to discover when the Bible is speaking figuratively or literally about God [e.g., God's walking in the cool of the garden and other bodily description of God]). To be sure, God and the Bible are elements of reality. God is real. The Bible is real. But they are not the only things that are real. All of God's creation is real. Even if one wanted to maintain, as I certainly would, that there are critical differences between God and His creation, the fact remains that there is nothing more fundamental than reality.

This is not to deny that sometimes one's "worldview" can adversely affect his ability to know reality accurately. Nor is it to deny that the fallen state of the lost with their rebellion against the Creator drives them to reject what they otherwise know to be the case. But what it does say is that it is ultimately illicit to frame the apologetic task as needing some "ultimate standard" to demonstrate the truth.

Presuppositionalism and the Question of the Age of the Earth

Perhaps the reader will understand why I have focused so much on the issue of apologetic methodology. I hope that he is not disappointed that a more direct evaluation of the debate on the age of the earth is missing. But let him not forget what occasioned all these discussions in the first place. There can be little doubt that the apologetic methodology of Presuppositionalism has become dominant in Young Earth Creationism apologetics. As a Young Earth Creationist who is a Classical apologist I regret this development. I am convinced that not only does Presuppositional fail to service a good apologetic for Young Earth Creationism, but it fails to service a good apologetic for Christianity as such. My concerns in this regard are what prompted me to spend as much time in apologetic methodology as I have. As for the question of the age of the earth, my only contention with Lisle would be that while I agree that the earth is young, I deny that Young Earth Creationism is entailed by Presuppositional. In other words, I see nothing inconsistent (neither in practice nor in principle) with someone being a Presuppositionalist and also being an Old Earth Creationist.

COVENANTAL RESPONSE

K. Scott Oliphint, Ph.D.

I MUST CONFESS AT the beginning of this assigned “rebuttal” that I am going to have great difficulty “rebutting.” In reading Dr. Jason Lisle’s original article, I found myself, in the main, responding with a hearty, “Amen!” Thus, since I am supposed to offer a “rebuttal,” I am constrained to pick a nit or two, rather than to respond to anything substantial in his initial essay.

First, I am in full agreement that it is the position of Cornelius Van Til, among “presuppositionalists,” that is most consistent in its apologetic methodology. The reason for this is that Van Til was thoroughly Reformed in his theology and thus sought diligently to apply that theology to the discipline of Christian apologetics. This is one rationale, among others, that I prefer to label Van Til’s method as “Covenantal” rather than as “presuppositional.”¹ The change of label is not meant to be merely terminological, but neither is it meant to be substantial. That is, the new moniker provides the opportunity to change some empha-

¹ I am not arguing that everyone must change the label, but that the label “Covenantal” provides more clarity than confusion, unlike the label “presuppositionalism.” The latter, however, has historic precedent, though it was a term given to Van Til and not one that he himself created.

ses as well, but it is not designed in any way to change the substance of what Van Til himself set forth.

Because what Van Til was arguing had its roots in historic, Reformed, theology, it would be natural to delineate his apologetic approach simply as “Reformed.” However, there is a breadth and depth to the adjective “Reformed” that may make it too broad as a modifier for apologetics. I am proposing, in light of the above, that the word ‘covenant,’ properly understood, is a better, more accurate, more specific, term to use for a biblical, Reformed apologetic.

In attempting to explain a Reformed approach to apologetics — a covenantal apologetic — as well as to justify the change in terminology, we need a clear understanding of what is meant by the word “covenant.” For that, we begin with the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 7.1: “Of God’s Covenant with Man”:

The distance between God and the creature is great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which He has been pleased to express by way of covenant.

We need to highlight the most important ideas in this section. First of all, we are reminded that, in the beginning, and quite apart from the entrance of sin, the distance between God and the creature is “so great.” But just what is this distance? Is it an actual spatial distance between God and man (male and female)? That doesn’t seem possible, given that God is everywhere: there is no place where his presence is absent. So, the ‘distance’ referred to here must be metaphorical. It should not be interpreted to refer primarily to a spatial qualification.

Rather it might be best to think of it as a distance that is based on the character of God Himself in relation to the character of man. The “distance,” in other words, might be analogous to the distance between a man and a snail. There are similarities between a man and a snail – both are capable of physical motion, both depend on the necessities of life in order to live. But it is not possible for a snail to transcend its own character in a way that would allow it to converse, communicate and relate to man on a human level. We could call this an ontological difference: a difference according to the being of the

snail relative to the being of man. Or, perhaps better, there is a necessary and vast distinction between the two kinds of beings.

This is the case as well with respect to God and man, according to this section of the *Confession*. There is a vast, *qualitative* distinction between God's own character and ours, between God's own being, and the being of man. God is one "who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible..." (*Westminster Confession*, 2.1). He is not restricted or confined by space; He is not subject to the passing of moments; He is not composed of anything outside of His own infinite character; He does not change; He cannot be fully understood or comprehended.

We, however, are none of those things. We have no analogies of what those attributes, listed above, are, and we are unable completely to comprehend them. We are finite, bodily, mutable, constrained by time and space. This disparity is impossible adequately to state, but it is a difference, a vast difference, and a difference that includes a kind of "distance" between us and God.

There is a great chasm fixed between God and his creatures, and the result of such a chasm is that we, all of humanity, could never have any fruition of God, unless He saw fit, voluntarily (graciously), to condescend to us by way of covenant.² That condescension includes God's revealing Himself, in and through His creation, including His Word, to man. We begin, therefore, with respect to who we are and to what we can know, with a fundamental distinction between God as (alone) the "I Am," and man as the creature.

Contrary to some opinions, God is, in fact, Totally Other. But there is nothing intrinsic to this truth that would preclude God from revealing Himself to His creatures. Since God is Totally Other from creation, our understanding of Him, our communication and communion with Him, can only take place by His initiative. That initiative is His condescension, including His revelation. Such revelation, as

2. For a fuller and more technical discussion of God's covenantal condescension, in light of his "distance" to us, see K. Scott Oliphint, *God With Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Crossway Books, 2012).

the exclusive means of knowledge of, and communion with, God, assumes rather than negates God's utter 'otherness.'

So, God freely decides to create. He did not have to create, but He determined that He would. The high point of that creation was the creation of man (Adam and Eve). These were the only aspects of all of God's creation that were called "image of God," and that were meant to show off, as much as possible on a created level, God's character.

In creating man, God voluntarily determined, at the same time, to establish a relationship with him. That relationship is properly designated a covenant; it is established unilaterally by God and it places obligations on man with respect to that relationship. It comes to man by virtue of God's revelation, both in the world, defined here as every created thing, and in His spoken word.

This has sweeping implications for apologetics. Given that all men are in covenant relationship to God, they are bound by that relationship to "owe obedience unto Him as their Creator." That obligation of obedience comes by virtue of our being created – we were created as covenant beings. We are people who, by nature, have an obligation to worship and serve the Creator. That much has been true since the beginning.

But, as we have said, something went terribly wrong. Man fell from his original state and consequently lost the ability and the will to worship and serve the Creator. The covenant relationship that, prior to the Fall, existed in harmony with the Creator's will, was, after the Fall, a relationship of animosity and rebellion on our side, and was one of wrath on the side of the Creator.

But there was still a relationship. It is not the case that man ceased to be a covenant creature after the Fall. He was still responsible to God to obey and worship Him. He turned this responsibility, however, into occasions for rebellion. Instead of walking with God in the cool of the day, man began to try to hide from God, to fight with God, to run from Him, to use the abilities and gifts he had been given to attempt to thwart the plan of God and to construe for himself a possible world in which he was not dependent on God at all.

So God provided a way in which the obedience owed Him, and the worship due His name, could be accomplished. He sent His own Son, who alone obeyed the letter of the law, and who also went to the

cross to take the penalty deserved by us in order that those who would come to Him in faith would be declared to be not guilty before the tribunal of the covenant Judge. And those who thus put their faith in Him, as a part of their obedience to Him, may be called on, and thus required, to answer the challenges and questions that come from those who will not bow the knee to Christ.

Enter apologetics. To whom is the faith “once for all delivered to the saints” to be defended? Given the above, it is to be defended, at least, to those who are covenant-breakers, i.e., those whose relationship to God is defined by rebellion and denial. That rebellion and denial is *in Adam*. That is, it is a characteristic that entails the covenant (or federal) headship of Adam (see, for example, Rom. 5:12–21). In Adam, we suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Only the truth of God as it is found in His Word can shatter that suppression and bring out the truth that is latent in our very souls. So, the first nit-picky point, in agreement with Lisle, is that the moniker is ambiguous; I propose a change.

The second nit to pick is Lisle’s summary of our (mutually agreed) apologetic method. That method, he says, “can be summed up in two words: *biblical authority*.” (65) Again, since I am forced to pick nits here, this could, perhaps, be stated more clearly. There are many who affirm biblical authority, including all of the contributors to this discussion, who do not also affirm a Covenantal approach to apologetics. Why is that?

One reason is that the God who is affirmed by many is a god who remains dependent on man and his choices in order to act. It is not, therefore, the *a se* Triune God of Scripture from whom, through whom and to whom are *all things*, who is thought to be the true God. Rather, it is a god who depends, in order to act, on the foreseen acts of individuals. It is a god who, thus, is dependent on the same chance incident that inspired our (assumed) autonomous decisions in the first place. It is not the God who works *all things* by the counsel of His own will.

Once the sovereignty of God is thus muted, so also will the authority of Scripture be, in subtle but important ways, compromised. *Included* in the affirmation of biblical authority (that Lisle and I endorse) is the concomitant truth, brought out with explicit clarity during the time of the Reformation, of Scripture’s *self-attestation*. This is a

truth, unfortunately absent and all but lost in the broader evangelical context, that requires Scripture's *principle* status. A brief explanation is in order.

God's revelation is covenantal because (1) it initiates a relationship between God and humanity and (2) it entails obligations. This means that we cannot begin our discussion with the assumption that the intellectual, moral or conversational ground on which we and the unbeliever are standing is the same. The very reason there is a debate between us is because our respective *authorities* are in conflict. Just as an unbeliever will stand on his own chosen ground in order to debate and discuss, so also will we.

This is an important point, in that its most consistent expression is found in Reformed theology. Thus, it is intrinsic to a Covenantal apologetic. The affirmation of the Christian's authority is put concisely and most helpfully in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 1.4 (and, *verbatim*, in the *Savoy Declaration* and the *London Baptist Confession*):

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

As Lisle argues, this is one of those truths that forms the foundation of our apologetic approach. Note that the Confession is focusing here on Scripture's *authority*. That authority is not something that comes *to* the Word of God from the outside: it is not something given to, or imposed on Scripture by another, external, authority: not by "any man or church." Rather, Scripture's authority is tied inextricably to its Author, God Himself. As Christians, therefore, we accept the authority of Scripture, and we believe and receive it, "because it is the word of God."³ The only other option available to anyone, at any time, is to accept Scripture's authority because some "man or church," or some other "authority" determined Scripture to be authoritative. The

3. See K. Scott Oliphint, "Because it is the Word of God," in *Did God Really Say?: Affirming the Truthfulness and Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. David B. Garner. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2012).

Reformers, in the midst of their opposition to Romanism, saw this clearly.⁴

So, while there can be arguments given for Scripture's authority (section five in chapter one of the *Confession* gives a partial list of those), those arguments seek to explain or embellish, and *not to establish*, the authority itself. This has deep implications for apologetics. Scripture as *principium* must be conjoined with the Triune God as *principium* in order for this approach to be properly assessed and applied.

The only other nit left to pick is Lisle's definition or understanding of the notion of "presupposition." (This is another reason why it might be best to drop the term as a typical moniker). Lisle says this: "All people have 'presuppositions.' Presuppositions are very elementary beliefs that are assumed before any investigation of evidence." (72) I think Lisle is partly correct in seeing presuppositions as "elementary beliefs that are assumed before any investigation. . . ." But more needs to be said if we are going to do justice to Van Til's biblical emphases on the matter. We can better explain this by way of a quote from Van Til:

How then we ask is the Christian to challenge this non-Christian approach to the interpretation of human experience? He can do so only if he shows that man must presuppose God as the final reference point in predication. Otherwise, he would destroy experience itself. He can do so only if he shows the non-Christian that even in his virtual negation of God, he is still really presupposing God. He can do so only if he shows the non-Christian that he cannot deny God unless he first

4. For an example of the "problem" of circularity, note how John Owen argues against the vicious circularity of "the Papists," in, for example, John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. W. H. Gould, Ages Digital Library CD ed., 16 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 8: 526: "And, indeed, they do plainly run into a circle, in their proving the Scripture by the authority of the church, and the authority of the church again by the Scripture; for with them the authority of the church is the motive or argument, whereby they prove the divine authority of the Scripture, and that again is the motive or argument, by which they prove the authority of the church." See Owen's arguments for a fuller discussion of a Reformed doctrine of Scripture and circularity.

affirm him, and that his own approach throughout its history has been shown to be destructive of human experience itself.⁵

It might be useful to see the various ways that “presuppose” (and its relatives) are used in this short paragraph.

First, Van Til notes that there is an *obligation* to presuppose God: Van Til says that the apologist “shows that man *must* presuppose God as the final reference point in predication.” Here he is thinking of what all people *must* do, under God. All of us are *obliged* to acknowledge God as the Creator and Sustainer of *all that is*. The assumption behind this “must,” of course, is that some *do not* presuppose God in that way. So, as an obligation, and contra Lisle, presupposing God in this case is *not* a belief that one holds, but it *should* be.

Van Til then argues that the apologist must show “the non-Christian that even in his virtual negation of God, he is still really presupposing God.” Here we see again that a presupposition is something that one, in fact, *does not* believe at all, and yet is nevertheless the foundation for what one avers. In this case, Van Til is referring to the objective situation and, again, *not to a belief*. One’s negation of God depends on the fact that God exists, has created and sustains all that is, *including the predication of his supposed non existence*. This is the point of Van Til’s illustration of the little girl that he saw, sitting on her father’s lap, slapping him in the face.⁶ The slap itself could have its proper reference and meaning if and only if the father was holding up the little girl all the while. The little girl was “opposing” her father: in doing so, she was “presupposing” her father’s support, even if she was unable or unwilling to affirm and articulate his support. Without that support, the slap was only a slap in the void. It had no referent, no meaning, no content. This is the objective situation as it stands for all people, at all times, everywhere, and into eternity. So, here are two crucial and central notions of “presupposition” that do not involve a belief that one has or holds.

5. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1977).

6. See Van Til’s responses to Dooyeweerd and Montgomery in E. R. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1977).

Van Til then says that the apologist challenges the non-Christian when “he shows the non-Christian that he cannot deny God unless he first affirm him. . . .” Here his meaning is similar to the objective meaning above, except in this case there is a more explicit push to show the non-Christian the necessity of affirming God and his existence. In this case, as with the first one mentioned above, there is an obligatory element that is crucial in the apologetic discussion.

In all of these uses of the notion of “presupposition,” there is no relationship to the non-Christian’s personal belief. There are occasions when Van Til uses the term in precisely that way. The point is not that presuppositions *are not* beliefs. The point is deeper than that, and it is necessary to understand if one is going to understand this method. Unless we recognize the different nuances in the notion of presupposition we will miss some central and important elements to this methodology, and, perhaps, breed even more confusion about the matter.

This should do it for a nit-picky “rebuttal,” but one more comment, not in rebuttal, but as an elaboration, is in order here. Lisle says, “Some might say, ‘How can we stand upon biblical authority and expect to be persuasive when the critic does not acknowledge biblical authority?’” (12) This is an excellent question, and one which, to my mind, gets at one of the crucial, though much-neglected, aspects of our approach.⁷

We can think of persuasion as the “art of connection.” It is the opposite of what one man has called the “Burp effect.” Using the “Burp effect,” we simply, without knowledge of or concern for the person to whom we speak, “burp” the truth onto someone. The result, like a burp, is that we feel better and they’re offended. Whether we have “connected” or not is simply not a point of concern. In persuasion, however, we are concerned, as the Lord allows, to provide and articulate a “connection” between us and those to whom we speak. But what could that connection be?

There are many ways to discuss an answer to this question, which time and space will not allow here, but we can begin with this. Since it is true, as Lisle rightly says, that all people *know the true God*, we

7. For an extended discussion on persuasion, see K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2013).

can be assured that any person to whom we speak will be one who knows, but suppresses, the truth that God continually gives “through the things that are made” (see Rom. 1:18–21). It is not the case, then, that we come to people who, at bottom, are a *tabula rasa* with respect to God, or are unaware, or completely ignorant, of the God of whom we speak. This was one of the reasons that the apostle Paul, on Mars Hill, began his defense of Christianity with the characteristics of the true God (see Acts 17:22ff.). Paul knew that the philosophers and Athenians in the audience were not ignorant of God. The very idols that characterized the city of Athens were not monuments of honest seekers, they were masks erected so that they could suppress the truth of God by appearing to be “religious” theists (Acts 17:22).

When Paul begins his address with a proclamation of God’s sovereign and independent character, he is involved in *persuading* the Athenians. That is, he is “connecting” the truth of God’s character with the truth that God Himself had revealed, and was revealing, to each and every person in the audience. The “connection,” then, that we want to establish and develop in our apologetic discussions is the “truth connection.”

This means, as well, that whenever we move, in our apologetics, from God’s character to the truth as it is found in Christ — e.g., to the need for an atonement, for repentance, for submission to Christ and His Word, etc. — as Paul did at Athens (see Acts 17:30–31), we are *connecting* and *completing* the truth that is given to all people in natural revelation. This, again, is too rich an idea fully to develop here, but we must affirm that God’s truth is one, that the truth that He gives in natural revelation is meant to go together with the truth that He gives in His Word, and that these two modes of revelation are only distinct modes of revelation and never meant to be separate.

So, for example, because all people know God’s righteous requirements, including the fact that the transgression of His law is worthy of death (see Rom. 1:32), we all know that we are sinners who have violated God’s character. The corollary to this “bad news” is the good news of the gospel. When we communicate to those who know (even though they suppress) that they are sinners, and we tell them that God (whom they know, but suppress) has provided *the* way out of their slavery to sin by way of His own sacrifice, that truth “connects” with

what they already know: it connects with what God is always and everywhere “declaring” to them(see Ps. 19:1–2).

We also know, as the *Westminster Confession* (1.5) affirms, that “our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.” That is, we know that it is beyond our ability *fully* to persuade anyone. That work is the sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit. But we also know that the Spirit Himself uses the truth of God to bring people to Himself.

So, our contribution in persuasion is “connecting” the truth of God as it is given in His Word, with the truth as it is given in His world, so that, in God’s design, the Spirit of God will use that truth for His own sovereign purposes. And we know that such truth will never return to God without accomplishing what He sovereignly intends for it to accomplish (see Isa. 55:10–11). It may be a stench of death to them, but it may also be an aroma of life (see 2 Cor. 2:15–16). In any case, it is sovereignly used of God.

This has been anything but a true rebuttal, but I trust that the nits and nuances will provide for further clarification and discussion concerning these important matters.

PRESUPPOSITIONAL REPLY

Jason Lisle, Ph.D.

I ENJOYED READING DR. Scott Oliphint's response to my opening article. As I said in my first response, I believe that his approach to apologetics is very biblical. Since Oliphint did not address the issue of the age of the earth in his response, I cannot find much with which to disagree. I will simply suggest, as I did in my response to Oliphint's first article, that the apologetic method that both he and I use only makes sense in light of the literal history of Genesis and that history includes a six-day creation. Only if we take the words of Genesis as written can we make sense of the apologetic method that we both endorse. And if we take the words of Genesis as written, then God really did create heaven and earth and everything within them in six days. So there is a strong link between what on the surface may seem like two unrelated issues.

In my closing article, I will deal primarily with Dr. Richard Howe's response. Howe states, "When referring to 'fact', Lisle evidently means facts about the physical world, to say that our 'interpretation' of even physical facts is always relevant to . . . our worldview makes it impossible for Lisle to know the reality of any worldview

other than his own.”¹ (89). But this just is not so. God has given human beings the ability to consider for the sake of hypothesis the competing worldview of the critic and to show how it fails to comport with knowledge. Our thinking is correct to the extent that it lines up with the biblical worldview. Therefore, the more biblical our worldview, the more we will be able to correctly understand and critique the worldview of the critic. An optometrist can correctly examine another person’s glasses and expose their defects only because he is wearing his own glasses and therefore sees things as they are.

Howe states, “What is missing from Lisle’s formulation is any direct access to reality” (89). But this is philosophically naïve. Only God has direct knowledge of reality. All of our knowledge is ultimately derivative. It is processed through the senses and mind that God has created for us. All of our knowledge of reality comes directly or indirectly from God’s revelation to us (Ps. 36:9). Indeed, all (not some) of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are deposited in Christ (Col. 2:3). We cannot begin to know anything apart from God (Prov. 1:7).

The weakness of Howe’s position is evident in his statement, “As a Classical (or Scholastic) Realist I would submit that our sensory experiences of reality also deliver to us metaphysical truths.” Can we know things by sensory experience? Certainly – but not apart from the Christian worldview. Howe has tacitly presupposed (among other things) that our senses correspond to reality. Now how does he know that he’s not in the “Matrix” and that his sensory experiences have nothing whatsoever to do with the real world? Sensory experience is only reliable if our senses correspond to reality; and only the Christian worldview can rationally justify this.² It is only the Christian

1. It is not merely “facts about the physical world” that require a Christian worldview, but *any fact whatsoever*. The unbeliever cannot even know that $2+2=4$ apart from Christian presuppositions. Howe claims that “logic is trans-worldview in as much as it is transcendentally necessary.” No! Logic is not worldview-neutral, it is a *Christian presupposition*. Laws of logic are universal, invariant, abstract, exception-less entities that describe the relationships between concepts. Only the Christian worldview can justify the existence and these properties of laws of logic. One might argue that laws of logic are a transcendental necessity, but this does not justify our belief that they are universal, unchanging, and abstract; nor does it justify why truth must always correspond to them. Laws of logic are definitely not “trans-worldview” as Howe claims. When non-Christians use laws of logic, they are stealing from the *Christian worldview*. All knowledge is in Christ (Col. 2:3), and this includes knowledge of the principles of logic.

2. Howe criticizes my wording of this when I say that in the Christian worldview we

worldview that allows us to rationally justify the conclusion “there is a tree” from the premise “I see a tree.” Knowledge from sensory experience is worldview-dependent.

Following this line, Howe claims, “When I see a tree, I do not check my perception of the tree against some standard and then conclude that I am seeing a tree. I just see the tree. Our knowledge of reality begins with our sensory experiences” (94). But again, this shows that Howe has not adequately reflected on the preconditions necessary for him to know that what he sees has any correspondence whatsoever to reality. How does he know that the label “tree” correctly matches the image in his mind? How does he know that his senses correspond to reality, such that what he sees in fact exists physically? These questions are easy to answer in the Christian worldview. But no other worldview can answer them cogently. Now, Howe may not *consciously* consider all the things necessary for him to justify his belief that his perception of a tree actually corresponds to reality or how each of them is based on the Christian worldview. But they are based on the Christian worldview nonetheless.

Howe criticizes my claim that the Bible should be our ultimate standard in all things.³ He states, “But such a rationalist foundational-

have “a very good reason” to believe that our senses are basically reliable. He says, “To offer ‘a very good reason’ is the language of Classical Apologetics” (92). He then goes on to say that this is not a transcendental argument. This shows that he has not understood my point at all. So I shall clarify here. When I say that we have a good reason to believe something, I am referring to rational justification—not probabilistic induction as Howe seems to think. I can *know* that my senses really are basically reliable in the Christian worldview. I argue that unless the Christian worldview is presupposed, then we have absolutely no reason whatsoever to believe that our senses are basically reliable. Howe says, “There certainly are views of reality that cannot account for how it is that we can trust our senses.” But this is not my argument. My argument is that there are *no* views of reality aside from Christianity that can account for the reliability of our senses along with the other things necessary for knowledge. The Christian worldview *alone* provides the justification for the preconditions of intelligibility. This is certainly not a classical apologetics argument as Howe has claimed. It is a transcendental one. And since the claim that knowledge depends on God is biblical, this argument never departs from biblical authority. This is the heart of the presuppositional approach.

3. Strangely, Howe disagrees with me that an ultimate standard must be defended in a somewhat circular way. But what is the alternative? An ultimate standard cannot depend on a lesser standard since the lesser standard is only justified if the ultimate standard is. And an ultimate standard cannot be justified by a greater standard: otherwise it would not really be ultimate. And if the ultimate standard is unjustified, then it is not really known—in

ism is not the way we know reality”⁴ (94). Contrary to Howe’s claim, we do indeed know reality only to the extent that we rely (either explicitly or implicitly) on biblical presuppositions. We can have beliefs that happen to be true; but they remain unjustified (and are therefore not “knowledge”) unless we rely upon the biblical principles necessary to justify them. It is the fear of the Lord—not sensory experience—that is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7). And there is no truth to be found outside of the Christian worldview, for Christ *is* the truth (John 14:6).

The following quote from Howe is disheartening: “I would argue (as worldly as it might first appear) that it is not the biblical worldview to which the Christian apologist must appeal to make his case for the truth of the Christian faith. Rather, it is reality” (94). First, the biblical worldview *is* reality. Reality is exactly what the Bible says it is, and nothing is real that is contrary to what the Bible affirms. Moreover, the Christian and non-Christian disagree on what reality is. That is precisely what they are debating: does reality correspond to the Bible or some other worldview? Additionally, how does Howe know what reality is? It will not do to appeal to sensory experience unless we already knew that our senses are reliable. And I contend that only the Christian worldview can ultimately justify that belief.

which case any claims based on it would also be unknown. It is logically inescapable that an ultimate standard must provide its own justification. The Bible does this. And it alone does this in a way that makes knowledge possible. Therefore, you can either reason within the Christian circle, or you cannot reason at all.

4. Curiously, Howe seems critical of my emphasis on the importance of understanding and defending our ultimate epistemological standard, and in particular my claim that the Bible should be that standard. He criticizes this as foundationalism and then goes on to say that in fact “our knowledge of reality begins with our sensory experiences.” Essentially, he wants knowledge not to be based on an ultimate standard, but on our senses. But would not this make “our senses” the ultimate standard? It is impossible to get around having an ultimate epistemological standard. It will either be God’s Word or something else. Howe believes it is sensory experience. How contrary to Scripture! The Bible says that knowledge begins with the Lord (Prov. 1:7), not sensory experience.

This shows that Howe's ultimate authority is not in fact the Bible.⁵ Instead, his ultimate standard is his view of reality.⁶ I say "*his view* of reality" and not "reality" because Howe does not directly experience reality; he experiences sensory data which he interprets to be in accord with reality. Like all of us, Howe is able to know a bit about reality only because God has graciously revealed it to him, through sensory experience, the Scriptures, and so on. And the bit that he thinks he knows is subject to human error. Why would Howe think that his limited and fallible knowledge of the world is in a position to judge the inerrant Word of Almighty God? The only reason we can have any degree of confidence in our sensory experiences and our rational thoughts is because the biblical worldview is true. Howe's view is epistemologically backwards.

And it is unbiblical. The Word of God is to be our ultimate standard, not our sensory experiences. For we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Jesus instructed us to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). Indeed even the most spectacular evidence that we can experience with our senses will not persuade someone who has rejected God's Word, as Jesus taught in the account of Lazarus and the rich man. "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

5. Howe does not agree with my position on the nature of circular reasoning and claims that I have mixed categories—formal and informal logic. But he never really explains why he thinks this, and I am at a loss to understand how he could have drawn that conclusion from my articles. My argument for God is transcendental and deductively conclusive. I am not making an inductive probabilistic argument. Christian theism is the only worldview that makes knowledge possible. And knowledge is possible. Any argument against Christian theism must presuppose Christian theism in order to be rationally justified. A similar argument can be made for laws of logic (though it will not justify their properties apart from Christianity). Curiously, Howe seems to accept the transcendental argument for laws of logic, while simultaneously rejecting that same argument for God which justifies both the existence and properties of laws of logic and all other preconditions of intelligibility. He claims, "To be sure, Presuppositionalists (and others) have shown that logic is transcendently necessary." No. Rather, the presuppositionist has shown that the Bible is the transcendental necessity needed to justify the existence and properties of laws of logic (and uniformity and morality).

6. At one point, Howe states, "The fact remains that there is nothing more fundamental than reality" (94). What about God? God is more fundamental than the reality (the universe) that He created. Jesus indicates the superiority of His Word to the physical universe in Matt. 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

Jesus practiced what He preached, always relying upon the Word as His ultimate authority, not on sensory experience: “It is written. . . . Have you not read . . . ?” (e.g. Matt. 4:4, 7, 10, 12:3, 5, 19:4, 21:13, 26:24, 31; Mark 7:6, 14:21). Let us follow Christ’s example and build our way of thinking upon the rock of His Word, not the shifting sands of man’s changing view of reality (Matt. 7:24–29).

The apostle Thomas agreed with Howe’s apologetic. He judged the Bible to be worthy of belief only when it corresponded to his view of reality. Unless he saw the resurrected Jesus with his own eyes, his own senses, he would not accept what Jesus Himself had said about the resurrection (Matt. 17:22–23). And Jesus very graciously rebuked Thomas for this approach: “Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.’” (John 20:29). Thomas missed out on a blessing because he trusted his senses above Christ’s Word.

In some ways, this discussion was on two different issues: the biblical constraints on the age of the Earth and on apologetic methodology. On the surface, these may seem like two widely different topics, but I suggest that they are related issues. What relates them? Biblical authority. Do we allow the Scriptures to be the ultimate and authoritative interpreter of the Scriptures? Or do we allow some external principle or philosophy to be the standard by which the Scriptures are judged and interpreted? If the Bible truly is the ultimate epistemological standard for all truth claims, then we all should be six-day creationists *and* presuppositionalists.

I am honored for the opportunity to discuss these issues with Oliphint and Howe. I pray that God blesses them both. And I hope that my comments have been helpful.

COVENANTAL APOLOGETIC & OLD EARTH CREATIONISM¹

K. Scott Oliphint, Ph.D.

REFORMED THEOLOGY, AS worked out by Calvin and his recent exponents such as Hodge, Warfield, Kuyper, and Bavinck, holds that man's mind is derivative. As such it is naturally in contact with God's revelation. It is surrounded by nothing but revelation. It is itself inherently revelational. It cannot naturally be conscious of itself without being conscious of its creatureliness. For man self-consciousness presupposes God-consciousness. Calvin speaks of this as man's inescapable sense of deity.²

Christian apologetics is the application of biblical truth to unbelief. It is complicated by the fact that there are so many theological permutations of biblical truth and almost no end to the variations and contours of unbelief. So, defense of the Christian faith can become

1. What follows is a lightly edited version of chapter 2, "Always Ready," of my *Covenantal Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2013), 29–56.

2. Cornelius Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2008), 114.

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complex. This article lays out the primary biblical and theological principles that must be a part of any Covenantal defense of Christianity.

There is no “one way” or even “five ways” properly to address objections against Christianity. But, in every case, what must be understood are the fundamental biblical and theological tenets or principles that guide, direct, and apply to whatever attacks, objections and questions that may come to the Christian. With those principles in place, a proper, Covenantal, defense of Christianity can be pursued.

The biblical and theological principles, which will be laid out below, belong historically to the theology that gained its greatest clarity during the time of the Reformation. The entire discussion will assume that Reformed theology is the best and most consistent expression of the Christian faith.³ First, however, to ensure that we are all on the same page, some basic truths about Christianity and apologetics need to be mentioned.

REQUIRED TO RESPOND

Consider first our place in God’s cosmic battle. A non-Christian friend of mine recently returned from a trip overseas. When I asked him how his trip was, he declared to me, “There is no God.” That was the first thing he wanted me to know. For him, the suffering that he saw was so overwhelming that it was a certain indication that God could not exist. My response to him was very simple, and it stopped the conversation (at least for a while). I asked him, “What makes you think that God is responsible for such things?” That question was in itself a kind of defense; I knew that he knew that he was a sinner, and that such sin brought certain death (Rom. 1:32). The question was calculated to make my friend think of sin’s power of destruction.

First Peter is written to a group of suffering Christians. These are Christians who have been “grieved by various trials” (1:6), they are in exile (1:17) and thus living in places that are foreign to them: they are encouraged not to be surprised when fiery trials come upon them (4:12) — note: not *if* fiery trials come, but *when* they do. The Christian perspective on suffering is in diametrical opposition to my friend’s. That opposition is not theoretical. It applies to the way we think, the

3. For a summary of Reformed theology, see, for example, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

way we act, and the way we view the world. In the midst of their suffering, Peter gives this command:

. . . sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence (1 Pet. 3:15 NASB).

In the previous verse, Peter refers to Isa.8:12f, which includes a command to regard Yahweh as holy. Peter attributes the prerogatives of Yahweh to Jesus Christ here. The New Testament application of Isa. 8:12f. is that Christians, in the midst of their suffering, are to set apart, remember and recognize, in their hearts, that Jesus Christ is Lord (cf. Acts 2:35).

Peter then goes on to tell them (and us) that the way to sanctify Christ as Lord — the command to set Christ apart as Lord — is met as we ready ourselves for a defense of that which we believe. Peter is telling us here that when objections and attacks come our way, we are required to respond to them.

Perhaps the most significant point of Peter's command is the reason that he gives for it: "For Christ also died for sins, once for all . . ." (3:18). The ironic twist, one that points us to the transposition of the gospel, is not that when we see suffering we should conclude that there is no God. Rather, when we see suffering, we should remember that God himself, in the person of his Son, did exactly that, so that suffering and sin would one day cease. Suffering is clear evidence that Christ is Lord; it is not a testimony against that truth. The suffering that is the cross of Christ — the very thing that, on the face of it, might lead us to believe that there is no God — is, as a matter of fact, the deepest expression of his sovereign character as Lord.

It is the clear and steadfast conviction that Christ, and Christ alone, is Lord that has to motivate our Christian defense. Clearly, in commanding us to set Christ apart as Lord, Peter's point is not whether one has received Christ as Savior, or as Savior and Lord. Peter's point is that, if one is to be adequately prepared to give an answer for one's Christian faith, the Lordship of Christ must be a solid and unwavering commitment of one's heart.

But why? The answer is as simple as it is profound: Because that is what he is! The specific command that Peter gives can be stated

more generally. We are to think about, and live in, the world according to what it really is, and not according to how it might at times *appear* to us. As Peter writes to these persecuted and scattered Christians, he recognizes that it must surely be one of their paramount temptations to begin to interpret their circumstances in such a way that would not acknowledge that Christ is Lord. It may begin, in the midst of their persecution and suffering, to look like someone else is in charge. After all, if Christ were Lord, how could these things be happening?

As a matter of fact, the Lordship of Christ explains why “these things are happening.” The Lordship of Christ is the conclusion to, the end result of, his own suffering and humiliation. It is *because* he was obedient, even to death on a cross, that he has been given the name that is above every name. It is *because* he suffered that every knee will bow and tongue confess that he is Lord. The road to his exaltation was paved with blood, sweat and tears. If we are to be exalted with him on that last day, ours will be so paved as well.

With all of the attendant mysteries surrounding the suffering of Job, two words from God himself — “My servant” (Job 1:8, 2:3) — initiate our understanding of what Job was called to endure. As Job was called to be a suffering servant, Christ was the quintessential Suffering Servant (Is. 53). Those who know their Redeemer lives (Job 19:25), who are called to be united to him, will be suffering servants with him as well.

The Lordship of Christ is basic to our defense of Christianity. Christ now reigns. He is Lord. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. That authority is the prerequisite to the command to make disciples. Without that authority, baptism and disciple-making in and for the church are meaningless. All things have been placed under his feet and Christ has been given as head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). The process of history is the process of making Christ’s enemies a footstool for his feet. That footstool is being built because he is Lord. Just like Jesus’ earthly father, his heavenly Father is a carpenter. He is building a footstool for his Son (cf. Acts 2:35; Heb. 1:13, 10:13).

Since Christ is Lord, his truth (though suppressed) is truth in every place, and for every person. The fact that someone has not set Christ apart as Lord in his heart in no way undermines the central point that

he is Lord over all. At least two implications of this truth are important to remember.

The first implication is that truth is not relative. Most Christians agree with that point, even if they do not quite understand it. I remember years ago reading Alan Bloom's bestseller, *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom began that book by noting what was patently obvious then (and what is even more pronounced today). He said that there was one cardinal affirmation that every college student believed — "Truth is relative." He went on to say that it was such a part of the fabric of our culture and our way of thinking that it was thought to need no argument; to demand an argument would be to misunderstand the status of that truth. The bedrock conviction that truth is relative, Bloom asserted, was as ingrained in the American psyche as baseball and apple pie; it was the air that we breathed.

The sinful power of self-deception cannot be underestimated in this regard. The power of sin in us makes us adept at denying what we know for sure. If anything is patently obvious, it is that truth cannot be relative. The notion itself betrays a decided lack of self-awareness and a stubborn blindness to the "big picture." At the micro and the macro levels, we live and move and have our being in the God who alone is truth. Anyone who wants to argue that truth is relative betrays, by that argument, that it cannot be. Anyone who wants to hold that truth is relative, but pretends apathy about the matter, and thus eschews argument, is like David Hume⁴ who plays backgammon even though he knows that such an act annihilates his own philosophy. So the relativistic worldview that we think is real turns out to be a sleight of hand; it is a magician's illusion.

The point for the Christian, however, and the point to stand on in a Covenantal apologetic, is the truth of Christ's Lordship over all. Part of what this means is that the authority of Scripture, which is the verbal expression of Christ's Lordship, is authoritative even over those who reject it.

The Bible is authoritative, not because we accept it as such, but because it is the Word of the risen Lord. Its truth is the truth for every person in every place. Why, then, would we be reluctant to communi-

4. David Hume (1711–1776) was the most famous and radical of the Empiricist school of philosophy. See more on Hume later.

cate that truth in our apologetics? Perhaps we have not reckoned with the actual Lordship of Christ. Perhaps we have not really set him apart as Lord in our hearts.

The second implication, which we have already broached, is that we must base our defense of Christianity on reality, and reality is what God says it is. What we dare not do in a Covenantal apologetic is let the enemy choose the weapon. Any enemy worth his salt will choose a weapon that fires in only one direction. But we are called to use the weapons that the Lord himself has given us. The weapons of our warfare are divine weapons, and they have their focus in the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17).

Why choose these weapons? Because they are *God's* weapons, given to us by God so that we can “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). In other words, they are the real and true weapons that God has given to us to fight the good fight.

There is more to be said on these points, but the basic principle is this: a Covenantal apologetic must proceed on the basis of reality and not on the basis of illusion. We view our apologetic, and we proceed in it, as in the rest of life, through the 20/20 lenses of Holy Scripture.

WHAT IS COVENANTAL APOLOGETICS?

As we saw in 1 Pet. 3:15, apologetics is a biblical and theological notion. Apologetics is a term much like other biblical words such as justification, sanctification, etc. The difference with apologetics, however, is that it necessarily deals with a relationship between Christian faith and unbelief that is not the focal point of most other biblical notions. Many, if not most, of our Christian doctrines relate specifically to what we as Christians believe. Not so with the notion of apologetics.

So, for example, if one wanted to be an expert on the biblical teaching of justification, one would concentrate on those texts that deal specifically with that teaching. The doctrine of justification is a doctrine for the church; it is Scripture's teaching on how we can be declared not guilty before God. So, it relates directly to the Christian and his relationship with God.

In order to think carefully about apologetics, we begin with Scripture as well. But we pursue Scripture in such a way that we have at the forefront of our minds the way in which biblical doctrines — especially the doctrine of God, of Christ, of sin and of salvation — relate to what Scripture says about unbelief. In other words, the concern of apologetics is biblically to answer challenges that come to Christianity from unbelief.

What we hope to show throughout this journal is that apologetics must (1) be *Christian* and that it (2) must have a *theological* foundation. If these two things are integral to Christian apologetics, then it might be best to give it a proper label.

Though the approach we will advocate in this book is (a version of) what some have called “presuppositionalism,” the label ‘presuppositionalism’ as an approach to apologetics needs, once and for all, to be laid to rest. It has served its purpose well, but it is no longer descriptively useful, and it now offers more confusion than clarity when the subject of apologetics arises.

There are various reasons for this confusion. For one, there are a variety of ways to understand the notion of “presupposition,” as well as a variety of ‘presuppositionalists’ whose approaches significantly differ. Francis Schaeffer, Gordon Clark, and E. J. Carnell, just to mention three, were all concerned with presuppositions in their apologetic argumentation. Their respective approaches, however, differ in ways that relate to their use and understanding of biblical truth.

Moreover, there is also the post-Kuhnian⁵ predicament in which we find ourselves such that paradigms and presuppositions have come to be equated, and have come into their own, in a way that is destructive of Christianity in general, and of Christian apologetics in particular. Presuppositionalism has been, thereby, dispossessed of any clear meaning and has often died the death of a thousand qualifications. It is time, therefore, to change the terminology, at least for those who consider the approach of Cornelius Van Til to be consistent with Reformed theology and its creeds.

5. Thomas Kuhn’s, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) made the notions of paradigms and presuppositions much more common-place than they were before.

Because what Van Til was arguing had its roots in historic, Reformed theology, it would be natural to delineate his apologetic approach simply as “Reformed.” However, there is a breadth and depth to the adjective “Reformed” that may make it too ambiguous as a modifier for apologetics. I propose, in light of the above, that the word ‘*covenant*’, properly understood, is a better, more accurate, more specific, term to use for a biblical, Reformed apologetic.

In attempting to explain a Reformed approach to apologetics, a *covenantal* apologetic, as well as to justify the change in terminology, we need a clear understanding of what is meant by the word “covenant.” For that, we begin with the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 7.1: “Of God’s Covenant with Man”:

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which He has been pleased to express by way of covenant.

First of all, we are reminded that, in the beginning, *and quite apart from the entrance of sin*, the distance between God and the creature is “so great.” Given that God is everywhere, there is no place where his presence is absent. So, the ‘distance’ referred to here must be metaphorical. It should not be interpreted to refer primarily to a spatial qualification.

Rather it might be best to think of it as a distance that is based on the character of God himself in relation to the character of man. The “distance,” in other words, might be analogous to the distance between man and a snail. There are similarities between a man and a snail – both are capable of physical motion, both depend on the necessities of life in order to live. But it is not possible for a snail to transcend its own character in a way that would allow it to converse, communicate and relate to man on a human level. We could call this an *ontological* difference; a difference according to the *being* of the snail relative to the *being* of man. Or, perhaps better, there is a necessary and vast *distinction* between the two kinds of beings.

This is the case as well with respect to God and man, according to this section of the *Confession*. There is a vast, qualitative distinction

between God's own character and ours, between God's own being, and the being of man. God is one "who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible..." (*Westminster Confession*, 2.1). He is not restricted or confined by space; he is not subject to the passing of moments; he is not composed of anything outside of his own infinite character; he does not change; he cannot be fully understood.

We, however, have no analogies of what those attributes, listed above, are, and we are unable completely to comprehend them. We are finite, bodily, mutable, constrained by time and space.

There is a great chasm fixed between God and his creatures, and the result of such a chasm is that all of humanity could *never* have *any* fruition of God unless he voluntarily (graciously), condescended to us by way of covenant.⁶ That condescension includes God's revealing himself, in and through his creation, including his Word, to man. We begin, therefore, with respect to who we *are* and to what we can *know*, with a fundamental distinction between the Creator and the creature.

Contrary to some opinions, God is, in fact, Totally Other. But there is nothing intrinsic to this truth that would preclude God from revealing himself to his creatures. Since God is Totally Other from creation, our understanding of him, our communication and communion with him, can only take place by his initiative. That initiative is his condescension, including his revelation. Such revelation *assumes* rather than *negates* God's utter "otherness."

God did not have to create, but he determined that he would. The high point of that creation was the creation of man (Adam and Eve). These were the only aspects of all of God's creation that were called "image of God" and that were meant to show off God's character.

In creating man, God voluntarily determined to establish a relationship with him, a *covenant*. It is established unilaterally by God, and it places obligations on man with respect to that relationship. It

6. For a fuller and more technical discussion of God's covenantal condescension, in light of his "distance" to us, see K. Scott Oliphint, *God With Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2012).

comes to man by virtue of God's revelation, both in the world, defined here as every created thing, and in his spoken Word.

This has sweeping implications for apologetics. Given that all men were created as covenant beings, they are bound by that relationship to "owe obedience unto him as their Creator." We are people who, by nature, have an obligation to worship and serve the Creator.

But, Adam, as representative of all people, fell from his original state and consequently lost the ability and the will to worship and serve the Creator. After the Fall, the covenant relationship was one of animosity and rebellion on our side and one of wrath on the side of the Creator.

But there was still a relationship. It is not the case that man ceased to be a covenant creature after the Fall. He was still responsible to God to obey and worship him. He turned this responsibility, however, into occasions for rebellion. Instead of walking with God in the cool of the day, man began to try to hide from God, to fight with God, to use the abilities and gifts he had been given to attempt to thwart the plan of God and to construe for himself a possible world in which he was not dependent on God at all.

So God provided a way in which the obedience owed him and the worship due his name could be accomplished. He sent his own Son, who alone obeyed the letter of the law, and who also went to the cross to take the penalty deserved by us in order that those who would come to him in faith would be declared to be not guilty before the tribunal of the covenant Judge. And those who thus put their faith in him, as a part of their obedience to him, may be called on, and thus required, to answer the challenges and questions that come from those who will not bow the knee to Christ.

Enter apologetics. To whom is the faith "once for all delivered to the saints" to be defended? Given the above, it is to be defended, at least, to those who are *covenant-breakers*. The apostle Paul gives us something of the psychology of these covenant-breakers in Romans, chapters one and two.

First, Paul begins by asserting that the attributes of God have been both clearly seen and understood since the creation of the world (1:18-23). Paul is saying that because man is created in God's image, he *inescapably* knows God. It is not simply that he knows *that*

a god exists. But, says Paul *all men* know God, the true God. We can say unequivocally, therefore, *every human being on the face of the earth since creation and into eternity* has an ineradicable knowledge of God—a knowledge that is given *through everything that was made*. So, in knowing a particular thing, man knows God who reveals himself in and through that thing (including man himself). This was in part Calvin's point in beginning the *Institutes* as he said,

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.⁷

To the extent that we know ourselves truly, to that extent we know God truly; the two are inextricably moored. This is part of what it means to be *image* of God. To seek self-knowledge without knowing God would be like trying to know our image in a mirror when we were not standing in front of it. There would be no image because the "original" would not be there. So it is also that in the act of knowing, to the extent that we know something truly, we know it as created (i.e., as having its origin and its sustaining existence in God.) To claim to know something while thinking it to be independent of God (or to deny that there is a God), is to fail to know it for what it *really* is. Whatever it is, it is created and sustained by God at every moment.

But Paul introduces a problem in this passage. It is not the case that man willingly submits himself to the knowledge of God that comes in and through creation. On the contrary, God's wrath is revealed from heaven precisely because man, in knowing God, suppresses the truth of that knowledge in unrighteousness, worshipping and serving the creature, rather than the Creator (1:18, 23, 25).

It is not the case, then, as Thomas Aquinas supposed, that knowledge of the existence of God is not self-evident to us,⁸ but rather it is an integral aspect of our covenant relationship with God and can no more be eradicated from our souls than can our souls themselves be

7. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 20 of *Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (London: SCM Press, 1960), 1.1.

8. Cf., *Summa Theologica*, Q. 2, Art. 1.

annihilated. The problem is not with the *evidence*, but with the ‘*receptacle*’ (i.e., the sinful person) to which the clear evidence constantly (by God and *through* creation) comes and is grasped.

It is this covenant dynamic of ‘always knowing while suppressing’ that a Reformed, covenant apologetic seeks to incorporate. It may be helpful here to elucidate the application of this ‘knowing while suppressing’ principle by attempting to make some distinctions.

Man (male and female) did not cease to be man after the fall. There were certain aspects that were in continuity with the pre-fall situation. It should be obvious from our reading of Scripture that while every aspect of man was affected by sin, so that we are all *totally* depraved, we still remain *people* made in his image. Whatever was essential to being a person prior to the fall was retained after the entrance of sin. And since one essential aspect of man was his being created in the image of God, that image, at least to some extent, remained after the fall. We are still, by virtue of our very constitution, covenant creatures, even after the fall.

In terms of our *actions*, however, there was *radical* change. Whereas Adam and Eve gladly served God in the garden, once sin entered the world, “all the thoughts and intentions of the heart were *only evil continually*” (Gen. 6:5). It is no longer the case that man is able not to sin, as it was before the fall. Rather, his entire direction is changed. This depravity, this sinfulness, which extends itself to the entire person, is rebellion in the face of the knowledge of God. It is *covenant* sinfulness – before the face, and in the context of, the clear, distinct and personal knowledge of God.

We will always be image of God, even in our eternal existence, whether in hell or in the new heaven and new earth. None other of God’s animate creation will live eternally as covenant creatures. Only man was given that gift.

But, since the fall, given the above, we became, in the truest sense of the word, *irrational*. Sinfully and deceptively we create a world of our own making, where we convince ourselves that we are all gods. What we now seek to do, and how we seek to live and think, are set in polar opposition to the world as it actually is. Our actions are in opposition to what they were originally intended to do.

If this is really the way things are since the fall, then the apologetic task is always, or at least *should* always be, set within and controlled by that covenant relationship that is a universal condition of every person. Man's denial of God is not something that is done in ignorance. It is evidence of the suppression of the knowledge of God within us. Our refusal to acknowledge God is not, as has been supposed, an *agnostic* refusal — that is, it is *not* a refusal based on ignorance — but it is culpable rebellion. So, as Paul clearly states, we are without excuse.

Since this is irrational and militates against the way the world actually is, it is incumbent on the apologist to ask the unbeliever to justify his own position. Suppose the unbeliever is convinced of his own autonomy. We could ask how, for example, it can be that he thinks himself worthy of complete trust so that he is the origin of truth itself.

Even as we begin to ask some probing questions, though, the apologist cannot simply accept the unbeliever's self-diagnosis, as if in his sin he is able and willing accurately to assess his own condition. Imbedded in the sinful heart is the paradox of self-deception—the steadfast commitment to 'knowing but suppressing', a commitment to deny the world as it is, even with regard to one's own fundamental identity, in order to attempt to assert our supposed autonomy.

It will not do then for the apologist simply to start on the yellow brick road with his unbelieving friend and assume that it will lead to Kansas. Once one begins on a make-believe road, it can only lead to more of the same; one cannot leave the land of Oz by taking a road that is, *in its entirety, within* Oz. The only way back to the real world of Kansas is to get off the road altogether and change the mind-set that trusted in the yellow-brick road in the first place.

This is what a covenantal apologetic seeks to do. It seeks to take the truth of Scripture as the proper diagnosis of the unbelieving condition *and* challenge the unbeliever to make sense of the world he has made. Scripture tells us that a world built on the foundation of unbelief does not exist; it is a figment of an unbelieving imagination, and thus is basically irrational.

If we want to use a philosophical term for this approach, a covenantal apologetic is *transcendental*. A transcendental approach looks for the (so-called) *pre-conditions* for knowledge and life. It does not simply assume that knowledge is the same for believer and unbeliever

alike. Instead, this approach asks questions about the basic foundations of an unbelieving position. In asking those questions, it also recognizes that what Scripture says is true. It recognizes, for example, that the only reason that there can *be* an unbelieving position is because God is who he says he is, people are what God says they are, and everyone, even unbelievers, “live, move and have their being” in the Triune God (Acts 17:28).

So, the unbelieving position has *both* its own presumed foundations, *and* it needs and requires Christian foundations in order even to try to oppose them. There are two worlds colliding in every unbelieving position, therefore. There is the world which the unbeliever is attempting to build, a world which is illusory. And there is the *real* world, the world where the Triune God reigns, controlling whatsoever comes to pass — even the unbelieving position itself. This approach, then, tries to make obvious both the presuppositions of the unbelieving position itself, and also the covenantal presuppositions that are at work, in order to challenge the unbelieving position at its root. In that sense, it is a *radical* (from *radix* – root) approach. It attempts as much as possible to get to the root of the position/problem.

THE TEN TENETS

Having looked some basic Christian truths, and the biblical mandate for a covenantal approach to apologetics, what I would like to do in this section is to set out *Ten Theological Tenets* for a Covenantal, Christian apologetic that are necessary to that approach. The list itself is not exhaustive, and, like much in theology, there could be useful debates on the relative priority of each of them. But what should be non-controversial are the Tenets themselves, each of which is a substantial part of a Covenantal approach to apologetics.

The Ten Tenets certainly deserve more time than I am giving them here. My concern, again, is primarily with these Tenets as foundational to this approach.

1. The faith that we are defending must begin with, and necessarily include, the Triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A generic theism is no part of the Christian faith. Any defense that does not have the Triune God as foundational is a defense of a false

theism. And theism of this sort is not a step *toward* Christianity, but is an idolatrous reaction to (suppression of) the truth. It masks, rather than moves toward, true knowledge of the Triune God.

In saying that we “must begin with” the Triune God, we are not saying that a Covenantal apologetic must always *begin its apologetic discussion* with the Triune God. Rather, we are saying that we must never assume that we are defending anything but what God himself, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit has revealed and has accomplished in creation and redemption. To “begin with” and “necessarily include” the Triune God means that we stand squarely on Christian truth, including a Christian understanding of God, when we engage in our defense.

2. God’s covenantal revelation is authoritative by virtue of what it *is*, and any Covenantal, Christian apologetic will necessarily stand on, and utilize, that authority in order to defend Christianity.

As we have seen, God’s revelation is covenantal because (1) it initiates a relationship between God and humanity and (2) it entails obligations. This means that we cannot begin our discussion with the assumption that the intellectual, moral, or conversational ground on which we and the unbeliever are standing is the same. The very *reason* there is a debate between us is because our respective authorities are in conflict. This is an important point, in that its most consistent expression is found in Reformed theology. The point itself is put concisely and most helpfully in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 1.4 (and, *verbatim*, in the *Savoy Declaration* and the *London Baptist Confession*):

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

This is one of those truths that form the foundation of our apologetic approach. However, it is another one of those truths that we do not, necessarily or in every case, present as an integral part of our actual discussion or argument.

Note that the *Confession* is focusing here on Scripture’s *authority*. That authority is not something that comes to it from the outside; it is

not something *given to*, or *imposed* on Scripture by another, external, authority, not by “any man or church.” Rather, Scripture’s authority is tied inextricably to its Author, God himself. It is incumbent on us as God’s creatures, therefore, to accept the authority of Scripture and believe and receive it “because it is the word of God.”⁹

So, while there can be arguments given for Scripture’s authority (section five in the *Confession* gives a partial list of those), those arguments seek to *explain* and not to *establish* the authority itself.

3. It is the truth of God’s revelation, together with the work of the Holy Spirit, that brings about a covenantal change from one who is in Adam to one who is in Christ.

The import of this Tenet is that it encourages, even requires, us to communicate the truth of God since it is just that truth that the Holy Spirit uses to change hearts. Remember that we are attempting to defend the *Christian* faith, not a generic theism. So, as in evangelism, there needs to be a communication of that faith if there is going to be any hope of a change of mind *and heart*.

4. Man (male and female) as image of God is in covenant with the Triune God, for eternity.

The importance of this can hardly be overstated. What it means is that all people, just because they are image of God, are responsible to God for everything that they are, do, and think. This responsibility is presumed in the final judgment. God will judge *all men* on that day. Those who have rejected him will be eternally punished for that rejection, and those who have trusted him will be eternally rewarded. This judgment assumes that the entirety of humanity is responsible to the same God; they are *obligated* to obey him, because he is their Creator and Sustainer. God, then, has a sovereign right over all of humanity.

5. All people know the true God and that knowledge entails covenantal obligations.

This Tenet is concise, but is crucial to grasp. It does not mean that all people *can* know God. Nor does it mean that all people know that something, somewhere is bigger than they are. Scripture is clear that

9. See K. Scott Oliphint, “Because It Is the Word of God,” in *Did God Really Say? Affirming the Truthfulness and Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. David B. Garner, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2012).

all people *know God* (Rom. 1:18f.). *All people* know the true God because God makes himself known. The knowledge that we all have is sufficient so that if we refuse properly to respond to it, we will stand without excuse before God on the day of judgment.

This knowledge is not knowledge that we, through some process of inference, may acquire for ourselves. The point that Paul wants to make in Rom. 1:19 is that all of us have this knowledge *because God gives it to us*. In other words, the revelation of God and his character that is given in all of creation is also given to each and every person by virtue of God's own revelatory activity.

6. Those who are and remain in Adam suppress the truth that they know.

God gives sufficient knowledge of himself to all of his human creatures. That knowledge is true knowledge; it is not a vague or imprecise "feeling" or a sporadic "experience" of something greater. It is true *knowledge* of God. But, because of the effects of sin in our hearts, we seek, if we are in Adam, to hold that knowledge down. In our sins, we will not acknowledge it. Instead, we deceive ourselves into thinking that there is no God, or that we cannot know him, or that we can get by on our own, or a million other falsehoods that serve only to mask the clear truth that God continually gives to us through the things that he has made (Rom. 1:20).

7. There is an absolute, covenantal antithesis between Christian theism and any other, opposing, position. Thus, Christianity is true, and anything opposing it is false.

When we claim to be Christians, we are doing more than just listing a biographical detail. We are claiming that the truth set forth in God's revelation describes the way things *really and truly* are in the world.

Therefore, any view or position that opposes what God has said is by definition false, and does not "fit" with the way the real world is. This means that the views of any who remain in unbelief are, in reality, illusions. They do not and cannot make sense of the world as it really is.

Not only so, but, we should notice, there are, at bottom, only two options available to us. We either bow the knee to Christ and affirm the truth of what God says, or we oppose him and thus attempt to "create"

a world of our own making. So, no matter what kind of opposition there is to Christianity, we know before we even know its details that it cannot make sense of the real world.

This is a great comfort and should help us to be more confident of our defense. We need not fear or be threatened by any view that we encounter. Even before we know the details of that view, we know from the outset that it cannot stand of its own weight. Any view that opposes Christianity cannot be consistently thought or consistently lived.

8. Suppression of the truth, like the depravity of sin, is total but not absolute. Thus, every unbelieving position will necessarily have within it ideas, concepts, notions, etc. that it has taken and wrenched from its true, Christian context.

In properly understanding the biblical doctrine of sin as total depravity, we affirm that *all* of man is affected by sin (total depravity), but we also affirm that man is not as bad as he could be (absolute depravity).

In the same way, when man suppresses the truth in unrighteousness, that suppression is total. *But it is not absolute.* He cannot completely eradicate or submerge the knowledge of God that is always his and always being given by God.

Thus, there will be aspects of the truth of the knowledge of God that surface in those who are in Adam. So, for example, even though an unbeliever will recognize that two plus two equals four, and thus will know that truth, the very fact that he would hold that truth to be independent of God's creating and sustaining activity means that he does not know that truth *as it really is*. Those who die in Adam will be held responsible for every fact (even two plus two equals four) that they took from God's world, even as they refused to acknowledge them to be God's facts in the first place. So, just as man, who remains in Adam, can continue to think, work, etc., that thinking and working will only serve, in the end, to further condemn him.¹⁰

9. The true, covenantal, knowledge of God in man, together with God's universal mercy, allows for persuasion in apologetics.

10. See K. Scott Oliphint, "The Irrationality of Unbelief," in *Revelation and Reason: New Essays in Reformed Apologetics*, ed. Oliphint, K. Scott and Lane G. Tipton. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 2007).

Some might want to argue that, if 7 above is correct, then there is no use discussing or arguing about the truth of Christianity since man is either in one “world” or the other. If there is such a divide, it might be asked, how can we even “reach” those who live in a world of their own making?¹¹

The answer is twofold. First, because people, always and everywhere, know the true God, whenever we speak God’s truth to them it “gets through” and “connects” to that knowledge that God is continually giving to them. Second, because God’s universal mercy restrains their sin in various ways, the depravity that might otherwise hinder our conversation is also restrained.

If we think of persuasion as an opportunity to take what the other person himself might hold or believe, and to reframe that belief in a way that is consistent with Christianity, then we can begin to think about the best approach to someone who wants to reject Christianity altogether. We can point to Paul’s use of the Greek poets in his address at the Aereopagus (Acts 16:17ff.). Paul co-opted those quotations and gave them Christian content, thereby drawing his audience in (by quoting/using that which was familiar to them, and which was an aspect of their own worldview) while also pointing them to the truth of Christianity.

10. Every fact and experience is what it is by virtue of the covenantal all-controlling plan and purpose of God.

This means that, in every case, those who are outside of Christ, who remain in Adam, are, nevertheless, thoroughly embedded in the world that he created and controls. The facts of the world display God’s glory (Ps. 19:1f.; Rom. 1:20). To take those facts for selfish use is to twist them and pervert them.

So in order to understand one fact properly, that fact needs to be seen in the context of God’s plan and purposes. The explanation of the fact itself is not sufficient unless and until the context and purpose of that fact is known and acknowledged. So, for example, it is not enough simply to say that lions instinctively seek their prey because they are such good hunters, but the real story includes the fact that “the young

11. See K. Scott Oliphint, “A Primal and Simple Knowledge,” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David Hall and Peter A. Lillback, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2008).

lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God” (Ps. 104:21). It is God who provides for the animals, not instinct.

YEC AND COVENANTAL APOLOGETICS

It will be obvious by this point that the notion of a young earth has not factored into our apologetic discussion, neither has it been included in the Ten Tenets, which are necessarily a part of our approach. There is good reason for this.

Put simply, since a Covenantal apologetic is built and dependent upon the theology of the Reformation, there is no need to include such a view since the theology that came out of the Reformation, based as it was on Scripture and those in the history of the church that were faithful to Scripture, did not include the age of the earth as a necessary implication of their theology.

As Robert Letham points out with respect to the days of creation (which is often a necessary corrolate of YEC).

None of the great Reformed confessions make any comment on the matter. The *French Confession* (1559) concentrates on creation as a work of the trinity (Chapter 7). The *Scots’ Confession* (1560) stresses the sovereign action of God in creating all things for his own glory (Articles 1–2). The *Belgic Confession* (1561) states that the Father created *ex nihilo* all creatures “as it seemed good to him, giving to every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator.” The *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) focuses on the *ex nihilo* nature of God’s creative act and does not remotely come near mentioning the process of creation (Q.26). The *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566) attempts a trinitarian doctrine of creation, opposes the Manichean idea that evil was co-created but neither does it approach our topic (Article 7). The *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (1563, 1571) do not deal with creation at all! This universal absence of any reference connected even remotely to the issue of the days of creation establishes that it was not a confessional issue in the slightest in the Reformed churches. It was not a matter of definition since it was not a matter of controversy or even a point for discussion, despite the varying views in exegetical history.

Consistently, the confessions present theological accounts of creation without reference to the exegesis of Genesis 1.¹²

If we believe, as I do, that this absence was due to the nature of the text of Scripture, and not to any oversight or undue inattention on the part of the theologians of the Reformation, then we have to reckon with the question of why the days of creation, and the related questions surrounding the age of the earth, have taken on such prominence in the (relatively) recent past.

One response to the question is that Christians have determined, exegetically, theologically and biblically, that such a view is implied in what Scripture teaches. This is as it should be. Such decisions are part and parcel of our continual study of Scripture. Some may conclude that Scripture teaches that the days of creation were equal in time to what we consider a day.

Another obvious response to that question is “science.” Because science has put forth a view of evolution that has taken on virtually universal hegemonic influence, attention has been paid to the teaching of Genesis 1 and related passages in a way that is virtually unprecedented in church history.

But then we have to ask if such intense attention is given to these texts *with a view toward* the scientific evolutionary hegemony. In other words, could it be the case that these texts of Scripture, which for 1900 years were seen to be inextricably linked to the *doctrine of God*, are now being read against the background, not primarily of who *God* is and what *he* “began” to do in and through creation, but primarily of what *science* has said, and have themselves been given a weight and a meaning that they were never meant to bear.

To put it more within our apologetic context, could it be the case that a fundamental fear of the current scientific hegemony has motivated some to come to Genesis 1, and related texts, and to *read into* those texts concepts and ideas that are not really there?

So, an apologetic that has its foundation in Reformed theology need not be overly concerned with the myths that science is able to perpetuate, even when those myths gain cultural ascendancy and rise

12. Robert Letham, “‘In the Space of Six Days’: the Days of Creation From Origen to the Westminster Assembly,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 61 (1999), 169–170.

to the level of scientific dogma. Scripture's power and authority are perfectly capable of addressing such issues in a way that both exalts its truth, even while it challenges the unbelief resident in such errors. If one concludes for YEC, well and good. If one concludes that YEC is the *only* responsible position to hold, then, given the history of the discussion, it may be that science has played too key a role in one's reading of "God's days" in the beginning.

CLASSICAL RESPONSE

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

I AM HAPPY TO be able to response to Dr. Scott Oliphint's important contribution. I should first like to comment on some strengths of his work and then level some criticisms.

STRENGTHS

First, as with most Presuppositionalists with whom I am familiar, I appreciate Oliphint's commitment to the authority of the Scriptures. In a day where, even among those who would name themselves Evangelical, there is increasing erosion of such commitment, it is encouraging to see formidable thinkers and writers such as Oliphint take a strong and deliberate stand on God's Word. Second, I appreciate that Oliphint is interested in having his apologetic methodology be consistent with his theology. It is hoped that all of us who do apologetics would be so conscientious in making sure our methods of defending the faith agree with our own theological commitments. Third, Oliphint is to be commended for the clarity of his thinking and writing. The subject of apologetic method, especially as it is found in the debate between the Classical and Presuppositional apologists, is difficult enough without its difficulty being exacerbated by obtuse conversation. Fourth, I appreciate the depth and breadth of Oliphint's

knowledge in the related matters reflected not only in his contribution here, but also in his very important contributions in his books. Last, everyone appreciates Oliphint's willingness to dedicate his time and efforts to this project. This conference will be all the richer for his contributions in helping clarify and defend the Presuppositionalist position or, as he would have it, the Covenantal Apologetics position.

CRITICISMS

At the risk of being somewhat redundant with my original article, I should like to visit some issues that I have with Oliphint's position. My treatment of these issues comes in no particular order. First, as is evidenced by the opening quotation from Van Til, sometimes there is a confusion of metaphysical considerations with epistemological considerations. While it is certainly true that "man's mind is derivative," this is to make a metaphysical point. No doubt, since God is the Creator and Sustainer of the world, the existence of everything other than God is derivative. But to infer from this anything about our *knowledge* of God's revelation is to illicitly switch the focus from a relatively uncontroversial (between Classical and Presuppositional apologists) metaphysical point to a much more controversial epistemological point. Talk about God's revelation is talk about *knowledge*, not being. This is confirmed by such language as "conscious of itself," "conscious of its creatureliness," and "self-conscious." All of these are epistemological phrases, not metaphysical ones. Whether and how it is the case that one is self-conscious, or even God-conscious, is what is in dispute between us. But the dispute is hampered to the degree that the Presuppositionalist does not properly parse out the metaphysical aspects and the epistemological aspects of the debate. I realize that Oliphint takes the epistemological position that he does precisely because of how he regards the metaphysical aspects. However, too often the way in which these issues are dealt with illicitly makes conclusions about the epistemology of what is going on based on observations of the metaphysics of what is going on. To say that God is the Creator does not tell us everything that is relevant in making an assessment of how the creature *knows* that God is the Creator.

Second, Oliphint begins by defining apologetics as "the application of biblical truth to unbelief" (115). I wonder why such truths have to be "biblical." It would seem that framing these truths "biblical" is

misleading. Granted, no truth can contradict what God has said. But the notion of truth is broader than just being biblical. Truth is correspondence to reality.¹ But to say that some truth is “biblical” is to say that it corresponds to the Bible. But many truths of reality fall beyond the Special Revelation of the Bible. Thus, the task of the apologist is to defend the truth of the Christian faith by an appeal to reality, not merely by an appeal to the sub-set of truths of reality contained in the Bible. Granted, Oliphint does say that “we must base our defense of Christianity on reality.” But it seems that, for him, what is reality is conveyed to us by the Bible. This seems to be the only way to take his comment right afterwards that “reality is what God says it is.” Now, if by ‘what God says’ Oliphint means what God has said both through General and Special Revelation, I would be more comfortable with this. But to do so would begin to convert his apologetic method from Presuppositionalism to Classical. This is why I take his expression

1. Aristotle defines truth thus: “This is clear, in the first place, if we define what the true and the false are. To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true; so that he who says of any thing that it is, or that it is not, will say either what is true or what is false.” (*Metaphysics* 4.7.1011^b26–29, trans. W. D. Ross in Richard McKeon, ed. *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941). This view has come to be known as the correspondence theory of truth. Other philosophers holding a correspondence theory of truth would be Plato (*Sophist*, 240d; 263b); Augustine (*Soliloquia* 1, 28); Thomas Aquinas (*Truth*, Question 1, Article 1); René Descartes (*Meditations on First Philosophy: Third Meditation: Objections and Replies. Fifth Set of Objections* (see John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, trans. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2:26, 196)); David Hume (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, II, 3, §X, III, 1, §1 (see L. A. Selby Bigge, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon Press], 448, 458); John Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II, XXXII, §2–§5); Immanuel Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason*, I, Second Part, First Div., Bk. II, Chap. II, §3, 3 (see Norman Kemp Smith’s trans. [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965; 220]); Bertrand Russell (“On the Nature of Truth,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1906–1907), 28–49 as cited in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edwards, ed., (New York: Macmillan Publishing, Co. and The Free Press, 1967), s.v. “Correspondence Theory of Truth,” 232); and the early Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 2.0211–2.0212, 2.21, 3.01). Those philosophers who hold the correspondence theory of truth differ as to exactly where the “correspondence” obtains. Positions include that it obtains between the proposition and external reality (naïve realism), between the proposition and the internal reality of the form of the thing in the intellect (moderate realism), or between the idea of reality in the mind and the thing in reality outside the mind (representationalism). Other theories of truth include coherence theory, pragmatic theory, and performative theory. Clearly, debates about the nature of the truth of certain proposition will vary according to how one defines ‘truth’. For the most part, my examination of the issue of the truth-value of future contingencies will presuppose a correspondence theory.

‘reality is what God says it is’ to mean what God says through Special Revelation, viz., the Bible. Thus, what he seemingly gives with one hand, he takes away with the other. If what God says is what we now know as the Bible, then clearly reality consists of more than what God says it is. Nowhere in the Bible does it say what the speed of light is. To be sure, the speed of light is what it is because that is the way God created it and sustains it in existence. What is more, our knowledge of the speed of light is acquired only because God has given us the faculties to know His creation. But sound reasoning based upon the knowledge of reality by means of those faculties becomes the building blocks for a Classical Apologetics methodology. In saying this, I am not denying that there is a critical moral dimension involved in terms of which human beings are not always neutral with respect to our knowledge we gain through our faculties. But the remedy to that failing in us is not the purpose of and is beyond the capacity of any apologetic methodology. That requires a supernatural intervention into the human heart that only the Holy Spirit can work.

Third, in unpacking the apologetic task, Oliphint confines the objective to “the fundamental biblical and theological tenets or principles that guide, direct, and apply to whatever attacks, objections and questions that may come to the Christian” (116). Again, I wonder why he confines them to “biblical and theological.” I am not trying to split hairs here. What are missing are those philosophical truths that also must be understood as bearing upon the case for Christianity. Indeed, to conclude which kinds of truths are relevant and which kinds are not is itself a philosophical judgment. What is more, many of the theological truths that are critical presuppose philosophical truths that inform them. For example, we can know from reality that God must be immaterial and that God does not have a body. We know this despite the fact that the Bible speaks repeatedly of God in bodily terms. But we can only judge that these descriptions are metaphorical because of what reality tells us (the critical assessment of which is philosophy). In commenting upon a quote from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* regarding the distance between God and man, Oliphint rightly observes, “But just what is this distance? Is it an actual spatial distance between God and man (male and female)? That doesn’t seem possible, given that God is everywhere; there is no place where his presence is absent. So, the ‘distance’ referred to here must be metaphorical. It

should not be interpreted to refer primarily to a spatial qualification” (98, 122). My challenge to him is how he can know this? He cannot argue biblically that this must be metaphorical for it is the Bible itself that is being interpreted. I would maintain that it is only by the application of sound philosophy that one can know how to adjudicate metaphor from literal in the Bible regarding these metaphysical issues related to the nature of God.² Thus, when he says (again, quoting the *Westminster Confession of Faith*) that God is one “who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible,” such an understanding of the nature of God cannot be consistently sustained by mere exegesis. The Bible itself can only be understood to teach this nature of God by understanding certain truths about reality that are themselves beyond the specifics of the biblical revelation. This is the only way to stave off the heresies of the likes of Finis Dake, et al.

Fourth, with Oliphint’s truthful claim that “the Bible is authoritative, not because we accept it as such, but because it is the Word of the risen Lord. It has a claim on all people. Its truth is the truth for every person in every place” (48, 119). He adds somewhat provocatively, “Why, then, would we be reluctant to communicate that truth in our apologetics? Perhaps because we have not reckoned with the actual Lordship of Christ. Perhaps we haven’t really set him apart as Lord in our hearts.” I assume that he is thinking here of Classical Apologetics. It must be that the Classical apologists have not “really set him apart as Lord in our hearts.” I cannot blame him for such a characterization. He is, after all, being entirely consistent with his Covenant Apologetics. But what I think Oliphint is looking past is that the issue is not *whether* God’s Word is authoritative, but how you demonstrate that this is the case. He seems to mistakenly think that the *fact* that God’s Word is authoritative is *ipso facto* a demonstration of

2. I would remind the reader of my example in my original article regarding Isa. 55:12. “For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you. And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” We know this is metaphor because we know from reality that trees do not have hands and mountains cannot sing. We know this by a simple apprehension of the nature of tree and mountains using the sensory faculties with which God has created us. For metaphysical truths (such as the nature of God) the principle is the same. We also know from reality that God cannot have bodily parts. But the way we know this, while beginning with the sensory faculties, also brings to bear sound philosophical reasoning.

this fact. Presuppositionalism is committed to the notion that a demonstration (in the Classical Apologetics sense of the term) is, by its very nature, a denial of that very authority of God's Word. Two illustrations can show why this is ill-conceived. Suppose someone came up to him and exclaimed "I am the absolute authority and sovereign. You must bow down to me immediately!" What if Oliphint were to inquire as to how he is to know that this one is the absolute authority he claims to be? The sharp rebuke might be something to the effect, "The very fact that you are asking for a demonstration of the truth of what I say already shows you are in rebellion against my absolute authority! If there was such a demonstration, it would prove that, after all, I was not the absolute authority that I am! The only way you can know that I am the absolute authority is because, unless my absolute authority is presupposed, you would not be able to have any intelligibility at all, not even the intelligibility to make your case against me." Of course, Oliphint would quickly find out that any additional requests for a demonstration of the truth of his additional claims would be met with the same sharp rebuke. It should be clear that, even if it were true that this one was the absolute authority, the fact that he was the absolute authority does not carry with it the proof by which anyone could know that this was the case.

My second (and perhaps not nearly as far-fetched) example is this. Suppose a man was injured in such a way that while recuperating in the hospital, his eyes and ears were greatly compromised (perhaps by overmuch bandaging of his head). Suppose further that a woman came into his hospital room requesting a kiss. He would understandably ask her a reason why he should kiss her. Suppose, then, that she claimed to be his wife. Knowing that he should never kiss a woman that was not his wife, it would seem entirely appropriate for him to ask for evidence that she was indeed his wife. After all, it is entirely possible that some unscrupulous woman is trying to harm him.

But what if, after all the bandages are removed and he could see and hear (and know) that the woman was indeed his wife, he still asks her why he should kiss her? In the former scenario, his request for a demonstration is entirely appropriate. It is not an insult to her to ask for proof that she is his wife. Because he is compromised, he does not know for sure. His problem is epistemological. But in the latter scenario, having come to realize that she is his wife, his demand for a

reason why he should kiss her amounts to asking for a reason why a husband should kiss his wife. This is a moral problem. Knowing that she is his wife is sufficient reason for him to know that he ought to kiss her because of the nature of what it is to be his wife.

These illustrations track the apologetic vs. the evangelistic tasks. The unbeliever might be in a position where he needs a demonstration that the one making the demand on his life is indeed the true Creator God. This is especially the case since his faculties are compromised and there is in the world many false gods that are seeking to do him harm. In this, he is not asking why, as a creature, he must submit to his Creator. Instead, he is asking whether this one is the Creator. But if, having come to understand that this is the Creator, he then demand some "proof" or "reason" why he should bow down to Him, this is a moral problem that can only be remedied by a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit. It is beyond the reach of any apologetic method.

Last, I should like to make a few comments about some of Oliphint's Ten Tenets. His first tenet says that the faith we are defending must begin with the triune God. He quickly points out, however, that this does not mean that the apologetic discussion must so begin. Rather, it is that "we must never assume that we are defending anything but what God himself, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has revealed." But what Christian apologetic method fails to do this? It seems to be somewhat misleading. On the one hand Oliphint is critical of what he characterizes as a "generic theism" (128, 130). I can only assume he is thinking here of the theism that is established by the classical arguments such as the cosmological argument. Granted, in its initial demonstration, the God that is concluded is not evidently Triune (but neither is He evidently *not* Triune). That is only because the truth of the Trinity is truth that is not disclosed in "the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20), which is to say, not disclosed by General Revelation but, rather, is disclosed by Special Revelation. After the entire apologetic task has run its course, this Special Revelation is itself demonstrated to be true. But I sense from some Presuppositionalists that they want to have it both ways. On the one hand, they criticize the Classical arguments because these arguments, in isolation from the rest of the arguments for Christianity, do not demonstrate that God is a Trinity. But if I pointed out that in neither his debate with Gordon Stein nor his debate with George Smith did Greg Bahnsen argue for the Trinity, we

are quickly informed that the Trinity is not something that the apologetic discussion must begin with. What, then, does it mean to say that “the faith that we are defending must begin with, and necessarily include, the Triune God”? What Christian apologetics method fails to do this? Certainly the Classical model does not.

In his second tenet, Oliphint gets closer to the heart of the debate. It would seem that the Presuppositionalist regards arguing from, for example, empirical observations as somehow an assault upon the authority of the Holy Scriptures. He comments, “This means that we cannot begin our discussion with the assumption that the intellectual, moral or conversational ground on which we and the unbeliever are standing is the same.” Whatever else this may mean, it must mean (in order for Presuppositionalism to be a different apologetic method than Classical) that we cannot begin with the type of empirical observations that are common to all human beings as human beings. If this is what he is saying, then, without a doubt, we certainly do have two different starting places. But I would assert that the starting place that the Classical method has, is a starting place that is impossible to avoid as a starting place. That starting place is reality. Our knowledge of that reality begins with our empirical observations that are possible because of the faculties of knowing that God as created us with. These faculties, while finite, cannot be consistently denied as means of initially knowing the real.³

All of Oliphint’s tenets arise out of his Reformed theology. While this not the place to enter into any discussion about the relative merits of Reformed thought, it is evident to me that his apologetic methodology is not necessarily entailed by Reformed theology. I realize that Van Til characterized the apologetic thinking of some of his Reformed predecessors as “less consistent Calvinism.”⁴ It remains that you find both

3. To borrow a point I made in my response to Lisle, if I lived 2,000 years ago and heard the preaching of Jesus first hand, I might believe that Jesus is telling the truth. I might even characterize my belief in Presuppositionalist categories. But notice, the *content* of Jesus’ message is not the reason why I believe that I am hearing the preaching of Jesus. I believe that I am hearing the preaching of Jesus because I am hearing (empirically) the preaching of Jesus. So, as a Presuppositionalist I might think that I know that Jesus is the “ultimate standard” (to use a Presuppositionalist category) of the truth and might even give Presuppositionalist arguments for it. What is not happening is that my knowing that it is Jesus that I am hearing preach is because of any Presuppositionalist criteria.

4. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and

Classical Apologists and Reformed epistemologists within the context of Reformed theology. However, given that I am not Reformed, it perhaps is not my place to referee these aspects of the debate. They can decide among themselves who is failing to be faithful to the Reformed tradition. I will leave these debates to those Classical Apologists within the Reformed camp such as John Gerstner, R. C. Sproul, and Art Lindsley⁵ or to those Reformed Epistemology advocates within the Reformed camp in the vein of Alvin Plantinga's work on warranted Christian belief.⁶

APOLOGETIC METHOD AND THE AGE OF THE EARTH

In light of our discussions, what might be said about apologetic method and the age of the earth? Oliphint says that "the notion of a young earth has not factored into our apologetic discussion . . . for good reason" (134). His good reason is that the age of the earth is not an issue of the founding fathers of the Reformed tradition. Since, as far as Oliphint is concerned, the Covenant Apologetic position arises precisely because of Reformed theology, there is no reason that such an apologetic method should concern itself with a theological tenet not found among the founders of Reformed thinking.⁷ It is a matter of historical fact that none of these foundational Reformed thinkers regarded a young earth (or six literal days of creation) as necessarily arising from Reformed theology. Oliphint regards this historical

Reformed Publishing, 1955), 79–90. Whether Van Til is fair in his assessment, I will let the reader decide. For a consideration that such thinkers might have been misunderstood and, thus, might have been more consistent with Calvinism, see Paul Kjos Helseth, *"Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2010). For a discussion of how certain Reformed thinkers might have misunderstood Aquinas see Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, & Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views of the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: Christian University Press, 1985).

5. See their *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1984).

6. See Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a Classical philosophy critique of (early) Plantinga see Leonard A. Kennedy, ed. *Thomistic Papers IV* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1988).

7. By calling these theologians the founders of Reformed theology, I do not mean to imply that such a theology is not grounding in the Scriptures (since any Reformed thinker would affirm that the Prophets and Apostles (and Jesus Christ Himself) are the "founders" of Reformed theology). I am only making an historical point.

reality as due to “the nature of the text of Scripture, and not to any oversight or undue inattention on the part of the theologians of the Reformation.”

I will not here try to settle any kind of debate as to whether they and Oliphint are right in thinking that the text of Scripture does not necessitate Young Earth Creationism. But he is certainly right when he says that it is an exegetical debate.⁸ But it seems to me that the specific point of contention between the three of us on this matter is this: Lisle asserts that the Bible (or the Christian worldview) is an “ultimate standard” of all knowledge. In other places one might see it phrased as the Bible (or Christianity, or the Christian worldview) is the necessary precondition of intelligibility.⁹ In Lisle’s view, taking the Bible as the “ultimate standard” means that one must accept (what Lisle characterizes as) the “clear meaning of the words” of the Bible.¹⁰ It also means that it prescribes the “necessary conditions of intelligibility.” These two points, in Lisle’s view, entail that the earth is young. While I agree with Lisle that the earth is young, it is with the second of these two points that I disagree with Lisle’s position. In other words, in siding with Lisle’s position on the age of the earth against (what I perceive to be) Oliphint’s, I believe that a sound interpretation of the relevant passages of the Bible supports a young earth position. In siding with Oliphint’s position regarding apologetic method and the age of the earth, I believe that the Presuppositional method as such does not entail Young Earth Creationism. In insisting that it does, Lisle must try to explain two things. First, how is it that some Presuppositionalists are not Young Earth Creationists (e.g., Oliphint)? Second, how is it that some Classical Apologists are Young Earth Creationists (e.g., me)? The latter question is perhaps not hard for Lisle to account for since, in his view, even the non-Christian can have some truth. (So, perhaps it is not too much of a concession to say that even a Classical Apologist

8. I would add this qualification. In saying that it is an exegetical debate, I also mean to include certain principles of hermeneutics that give rise to these exegetical judgments. Where the two (or three) of us might disagree is whether and what philosophical tenets are part of these hermeneutical principles.

9. See Lisle’s *The Ultimate Proof of Creation: Resolving the Origins Debate* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009), 38–42, 45–64; and Tim Chaffey and Jason Lisle, *Old-Earth Creationism on Trial: The Verdict Is In* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 107–127.

10. Chaffey and Lisle, *Old-Earth Creationism*, 110–111.

can have some truth as well.) The former, however, seems to present the more formidable challenge.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps any more responses on my part will just be a repeat of what I have already said in my original article. To be sure, some of the difference between us can only be appreciated with a much more in-depth analysis of the issues. The material abounds for such an analysis and is being added to regularly. It is my hope that the reader who is interested in this issue of apologetic method will avail himself to this material. This is no substitute for reading the proponents of each of the positions. In my opinion, there is no more important voice for the Covenant Apologetics position than K. Scott Oliphint. I believe there is every reason to think that such a debate can be had with the utmost Christian respect for one another. I trust that such respect has been evident in our exchanges here.

PRESUPPOSITIONAL RESPONSE

Jason Lisle, Ph.D.

I VERY MUCH ENJOYED Dr. Scott Oliphint's paper on "A Covenantal Apologetic." It seems that his approach to apologetics is very biblical. It is the "presuppositional" method along the tradition of Greg Bahnsen and Cornelius Van Til. There is much to commend in Oliphint's analysis of apologetic methodology. Until the last section, the paper is very consistent and biblical. But in the closing section, Oliphint switches hermeneutics and argues that we need not take as written the timescale given in Genesis.

In my view, Oliphint's remarks in the final section are the only place in the paper where he departs from biblical authority. So I will focus my critique on that final section.¹ I will begin with a general discussion of the age of the earth, and then move on to examine Oliphint's specific points on the matter.

IS "YOUNG EARTH" THE ISSUE?

I appreciate Oliphint's defense of the presuppositional method. Of course, Oliphint does not like the name "presuppositional." Neither do I, and for basically the same reasons. Along the same lines, I really

1. This is not to detract from the many good points made in the rest of his article.

do not like the term “young earth creationist” (YEC) because it too entails misconceptions. First, the term draws undue attention to the timescale, as if this were the most important aspect of Genesis. In fact, it is not. The timescale is important, certainly – particularly by its implications on major Christian doctrines as I discuss below. But so are many other things in Genesis, and in the rest of the Scriptures for that matter. Second, the Earth *is* old—*really* old. It is probably a bit over six *thousand* years old. It is only because we have been so inundated with the evolutionary philosophy of billions of years that we have come to think of six thousand years as “young.”

Therefore, I prefer the term “biblical creationist” because this best encapsulates my position. Namely, I believe what the Bible teaches about creation. This includes the fact that God created. It includes the fact that fruit trees were created before fish. It includes the fact that Adam and Eve were the first people. It includes the fact that Adam rebelled against God, and we now live in a cursed world as a result. And it includes the fact that the earth is “young” in the sense of thousands of years. All of these facts are biblical. All of these facts are important.

But the timescale is probably the *most* attacked aspect of Genesis today. It is the timescale that secularists use to argue that the Bible cannot possibly be true. And therefore, if we are to be Christians indeed, we should not draw back or surrender this portion of God’s Word. Five hundred years from now, perhaps everyone will recognize and accept the biblical timescale of thousands of years, and there will be some other aspect of Genesis that people are inclined to compromise in order to accommodate the latest secular philosophy. Perhaps the issue then will be that the “trees” mentioned in Genesis 1 were not literal “trees” like we have today, but were actually something else—as one facetious example.² My point is that we must defend the clear teaching of the Word of God at every point where the critics want to argue. We are to cast down any argument that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5).

2. I can just envision the arguments: “But we don’t know that ‘God’s trees’ are the same as our ‘trees.’ They could be something else entirely. Besides, the Hebrew word can also mean “gallows” (Esther 2:23). So it does not have to be literal “trees.”

IS THE TEXT CLEAR?

Does the Bible clearly teach a “young” earth? Genesis is written in straightforward historical narrative form. It is not poetic literature, nor is it a parable that would require a non-literal hermeneutic. And Gen. 1–2:3 indicates that God created everything in six days, each of which is comprised of one evening and one morning. Adam was made on the sixth day (Gen. 1:26–31). The Bible provides sufficient information, such as the timespan between individuals in various genealogies (e.g. Genesis 5), for us to know that the time between the creation of Adam and the incarnation of Christ is around 4000 years. This would make the earth (and the rest of the universe too) about 6000 years old. This is at odds with the secular view of origins. Evolution requires hundreds of millions of years to allegedly turn single-celled prokaryotes into people. Even many people who reject evolution seem to embrace the philosophy of deep time—“billions of years.”

When we hear a claim that is contrary to our understanding of Scripture, there is nothing wrong with double checking our interpretation of a text. After all, there are sections of the Bible that do not mean what we as twenty-first century Americans might assume at first glance. Problems with translation and cultural differences may cause us to miss a figure of speech or wrongly understand some aspect of a passage. Could Genesis be such a passage? Can the Bible really accommodate billions of years?

Since not even secularists believe that human beings were around billions of years ago, the creation week is the only place people will try to argue for deep time.³ But the text of Scripture says directly that God made heaven and earth and all that is in them in six days (Exod. 20:11). To accommodate deep time, some people have suggested that these days are not literal days at all, but vast periods of time. After all, doesn't the Bible say that with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years (2 Pet. 3:8)?⁴ And can't the Hebrew word for “day” mean “a long period of time?”

3. Deep time must be inserted before Adam exists, if the secular timescale is to be upheld.

4. First of all, 2 Pet. 3:8 is not addressing the days of creation at all, and so it is out of context to apply it that way. It is a simile expounding on the fact that God is beyond time as an explanation for His patience. It is not suggesting linguistic relativism; as if words mean something different to God than they do to man. Second, the verse states that with the Lord

But such a view cannot be defended hermeneutically. The Hebrew word for “day” is “*yom*.” It occurs over 2000 times in the Old Testament in singular and plural form. By far, the main meaning of this word is “day” – as in a rotation of the Earth on its axis, or the illuminated portion thereof, as in “daytime.” It is basically the same as our modern English word “day.” The word “day” can be used in a non-literal way to indicate a longer period of time, but only in certain contexts such as when part of a prepositional phrase: “The day of the Lord.” This usage is actually quite rare and is found almost exclusively in poetic or prophetic literature.

Without any qualifiers, “day” is the normal meaning of “*yom*.” But a number of qualifiers reinforce that indeed an ordinary, literal day is definitely what the word means in a given context. For example, when “*yom*” appears with a number as in an ordered list (“the first day, the second day, the third day...”) it always has the meaning of an ordinary day and is always translated as such. When associated with “evening” or “morning,” the word always means an ordinary day since evening and morning mark the boundaries of a day. Frankly, an evening and a morning together must constitute an ordinary day. And when “day” is contrasted with “night” we would naturally understand that the normal, literal meaning is intended.

Interestingly, the Lord uses *all* of these contextual indicators in the Genesis account. Any one of them would be sufficient to constrain the meaning of each of the days of creation to one literal day. Yet God uses *all of them!* In Gen. 1:5 God defines the word “day” in terms of daylight—which eliminates any possibly ambiguity. He contrasts the day with the night, indicating an ordinary day. He puts a number with day: “first” or literally “one.” God indicates that there was evening and morning, which together constitute one literal day. And both evening and morning are used in association with that first day—indeed

a day is like a thousand years *and a thousand years is like a day*. People conveniently leave out this last part because it would make the creation week much shorter if applied the same way they mistakenly apply the first part. No, the only way the two parts of the verse make sense together is to recognize that God is beyond time. Therefore, when God uses temporal language it is always to be understood on human terms. God is eternal and unchanging, and He knows how to tell time. So this verse is not giving us permission to change the word “day” to “a thousand years” everywhere we see it in the Scriptures.

they comprise the first day. And so if we are going to be exegetical, the days of creation must truly be days.

It is also interesting that the plural form of the word “days” (“*yamim*”) *never* indicates anything but literal days in historic narrative. And it is this word that is used in Exod. 20:11 to indicate that God created everything “in six days.” In fact, the context of Exod. 20:11 makes this even clearer. This is part of the Ten Commandments. The Fourth Commandment is given in verses 8–10. Here the Lord explains that we are to work for six days and rest one day. Verse 11 is the explanation for our work week: we are to work six days and rest one *because this is what God did in creation*. The same word for “days” is used in the same context for both the creation week and our work week.⁵ So if God really created over billions of years, then we would have quite a long time to work before the weekend! Clearly the creation days are truly days.

Nor can we put gaps of time in between these days; the text will not allow it. When Exod. 20:11 states, “For in six days . . .” this has the meaning of “in the span of six days.” Even Genesis uses the definite article for the sixth day indicating that it is indeed **the** sixth day. So there just is not any contextual way to get around the fact that these are days, just as God says. The text could not possibly be any clearer.

The motivation for the day–age view is clearly to allow for a reading of Scripture that lines up with the generally accepted secular timescale. But even this will not work because the order of events is different. The secular view has fish coming about long before fruit trees, stars billions of years before the earth, and reptiles millions of years before birds. Genesis 1 records the opposite for all of these. It is simply futile to attempt to reinterpret Genesis to match the (ever–changing) secular opinions on origins. Perhaps we should let God be true though every man a liar (Rom. 3:4).

5. To deny that the same word in the same context has the same meaning is to engage in linguistic relativism. This would make communication impossible. Communication requires the sender and recipient of the information to understand the words in the same way.

IS “YOUNG EARTH” AN IMPORTANT DOCTRINE?

Knowing that the biblical timescale is just one issue of many, perhaps some will be tempted to think, “Therefore, it is not important. We should focus on other issues.” But in fact, the age of the Earth is important for (at least) two reasons.

The first issue at stake is one of *biblical authority*. If the Bible clearly teaches something, may we reinterpret the text in order to accommodate modern opinions on the matter? If so, then Christianity collapses because many foundational truths of Christianity are at odds with modern opinion (resurrection of the dead for example). On the other hand, if we may not reinterpret the text in light of modern opinion, then God really did create in six days. It just will not do to claim that the text is ambiguous on this issue. We have already seen that it is not. That God created in six days is not some speculative inference based on some difficult prophetic passage. It is directly stated in Scripture (Exod. 20:11) as part of the literal historical section. It is part of the Ten Commandments. *That God created “in six days” is written by God’s own finger on stone* (Exod. 31:18).

Six days of creation is a corollary of the inerrancy and perspicuity of Scripture. If something as clear as “in six days” appearing in literal historical narrative does not really mean “in six days,” then the Bible is not perspicuous and any hope of understanding any portion of the Bible is lost.⁶ If it does mean six days, but is false, then the Bible is fallible, and it really cannot be the Word of an infallible God. Thus, we must defend six days of creation as a facet of defending biblical inerrancy and perspicuity.

The second issue concerns the motivation for wanting to insert billions of years, namely the secular belief that fossils were deposited gradually over millions of years. If fossils are really millions of years old, then we have a theological problem. Fossils are the remains of dead creatures.⁷ But the Bible indicates that the world was “very good” before the curse (Gen.s 1:31). Furthermore, the Scriptures teach

6. If one of the most clear, direct statements in Scripture is actually unclear, then is it reasonable to think we will fare better with the more difficult passages?

7. For this argument, I am considering only fossils of animals that the Bible would classify as “living creatures.” We find fossils of such creatures that secular scientists claim are hundreds of millions of years old.

that death came about as a result of Adam's sin (1 Cor. 15:21–22; Rom. 5:12, 8:20–22).

This is not a trivial matter. If fossils are millions of years old, then death came into the world long before Adam sinned. In that case death cannot possibly be the penalty for Adam's sin. And if death is not the penalty for sin, then why did Jesus die on the cross?⁸ *The Gospel message is lost if the secular timescale is true.*

And it is not just that. Does not the Bible teach that the original world was "very good" before sin (Gen. 1:31)? Yet we find fossils with evidence of disease (arthritis, cancer, etc.) that are supposedly millions of years old and therefore allegedly existed long before Adam sinned. We find evidence of animals eating other animals, but does not the Bible say that originally all the animals were vegetarian (Gen. 1:30)? We find thorns in Devonian strata that secularists believe to be over 350 million years old. But does not the Bible say that thorns and thistles were a result of the curse on Adam (Gen. 3:18)? How can something be a result of the curse if it came millions of years earlier?

Many are surprised to learn that Christian geologists who reject the six days of creation also reject the global flood described in Gen. 6–8.⁹ As with the timescale issue, this rejection is driven by external considerations, not textual ones. A global flood can readily account for the bulk of fossil-bearing sediment on Earth. But if the fossils are really millions of years old, then there can be no global flood because such a catastrophe would destroy any previous fossil record. Yes, professing Christians have come up with some clever ways of interpreting Genesis 6–8 to indicate merely a local flood. And no, such notions cannot be hermeneutically defended. Christian theology rapidly unravels when we allow secular philosophies to drive our interpretation of the text.

8. It will not suffice to argue that only spiritual death or only human death entered as a result of Adam's sin. The physical death of Christ shows that the penalty for sin entails physical death. The Bible indicates that the world was "very good" before sin. And so it would not make sense to have death and suffering, even of animals. Fossils indicating disease and bloodshed must have formed after sin. The entire creation groans today because of Adam's sin (Rom. 8:20–22). God instituted animal death at the time of the curse: He killed an animal or animals to provide skins of clothing for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21).

9. The Bible predicted that indeed critics in the "last days" would deny a global flood and embrace the doctrine of uniformitarianism (2 Pet. 3:3–6).

YEC AND COVENENTAL APOLOGEITCS

Oliphint states, “It will be obvious by this point that the notion of a young earth has not factored into our apologetic discussion, neither has it been included in the Ten Tenets . . .” (134). It would have been more accurate for him to say that the notion of a young earth has not been *explicitly mentioned* in his apologetic discussion. But in fact, biblical creation in general and a young earth specifically *are* tacitly assumed throughout Oliphint’s (excellent) discussion of apologetics. In fact, his apologetic discussion would collapse if the history of Genesis (including its timescale) were not literally true.

In Oliphint’s discussion with his unbelieving friend he states, “I knew that he knew that he was a sinner, and that such sin brought certain death (Rom. 1:32)” (116) Quite right. Death is the penalty for sin. But if fossils are millions of years old, if they really are animals that experienced death long before Adam existed, then death is *not* the penalty for sin. Oliphint is tacitly relying on “young earth” theology. I am glad he is. I just wish it were not so tacit.

Later, Oliphint states, “Paul begins, first of all (1:18–23), by asserting that the attributes of God have been both clearly seen and understood since the creation of the world” (124) So how long have people been able to clearly see the attributes of God? Since the creation of the world. Indeed, people were present on the very first week of time itself. But if Adam and Eve were created 13.8 billion years *after* God started the universe (as old-earth creationists claim), then the attributes of God have only been seen and understood in the very last tiny fraction of history. Again, Oliphint’s statement is spot on. But it would be completely wrong if creation happened billions of years ago.

More important than landing on a specific age for the Earth is the hermeneutical approach that leads to it. Genesis is literal history. And because it is literal, its days are literal. Oliphint may think that his apologetic is unrelated to the issue of whether or not we take the words of Genesis literally. But in fact, it is crucial to his entire theology. He says that “the notion of a young earth has not factored into our apologetic discussion, neither has it been included in the Ten Tenets. . . .” But in fact, his discussion depends heavily on a literal, historical Genesis, which therefore includes the notion of a “young” earth. By

my count, seven of his ten tenets of apologetics depend directly upon a literal, historical Genesis.¹⁰

IS “YOUNG EARTH” NOT IMPORTANT HISTORICALLY?

If I understand him correctly, Oliphint is suggesting that the timescale of creation is not clearly specified in the Scriptures. He believes that the absence of discussion on the issue in the confessions is “due to the nature of the text of Scripture.” This seems to be his entire argument on the matter: since Christians historically did not write “six *literal* days” into the confessions, and did not devote much writing to the matter of the length of the days, the text must be unclear.

But this argument makes no sense. Is it not far more reasonable to draw the opposite conclusion? It is because the text is so *clear* that very few people felt the need to comment on the matter. The text states “in six days,” everyone knew what it meant, so there was no need to add “and by the way, they really were days!” The lack of argument on the timescale of creation until the mid-1700s was not due to ambiguity in the text, but rather due to the *clarity* of the text!

10. In tenet two, we read that God’s revelation “initiates a relationship between God and humanity.” Where do we first read of this truth in Scripture? It is found in the literal history of Gen. 2:16–17. In tenet three we read of a “covenantal change from one who is in Adam to one who is in Christ.” This would make no sense apart from a literal Adam who really did sin (Gen. 3:17–24).

In tenet four we read of man being made in the “image of God.” This is revealed in the literal history of Gen. 1:26–27. If Genesis were not literal history, then tenet four would be unjustified. This tenet also indicates that we are obligated to obey God because He is our Creator and Sustainer. Quite right—if Genesis is literally true. This tenet also assumes that God is our Creator and Sustainer, and is therefore sovereign over all of humanity. This is true, but only if Genesis is literal history.

In tenet six, we read of those who remain “in Adam.” This of course ties directly back to the history in Genesis. Again we see a reference to Rom. 1:20, that God has made Himself known through what he created—a biblical creation theme. In tenet seven we read of the antithesis between the Christian and non-Christian positions. This antithesis was instituted by God in Gen. 3:15, when God put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

In tenet eight, we read of the “biblical doctrine of sin,” which of course is founded in Genesis 3. We also read of those who “die in Adam,” which would make no sense if Adam were just a metaphor. In tenet 10 we again read of those who “remain in Adam” being “thoroughly embedded in the world that [God] created,” which only makes sense if Genesis is literal history. Clearly Oliphint’s theology is (commendably) highly dependent on the literal history of Genesis.

It is the same reason why we do not find a lot of confessions that defend the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, as opposed to 100 *billion* years. We do not find a lot of discussion about whether or not these were “literal years.” Few people would bother to ask, “Are God’s years the same as our years?” It is because the text is so *clear* that we do not find a lot of discussion on the matter. So Oliphint’s argument proves the opposite of what he wants it to prove.

He quotes Robert Letham: “None of the great Reformed confessions make any comment on the matter” (134). Of course it just was not necessary at that time for people to defend that notion that “days are in fact days.” The text is clear. But I must also point out that Letham’s claim is false. Letham and Oliphint seem to have overlooked the Westminster confession, which states that God created the world “in the space of six days” (WCF 4:1).

Regarding this matter, reformed theologian Kenneth Gentry states:

It is important to note that here the Confession is not merely picking up the language of Scripture and quoting it, thereby leaving the language open to interpretation. The six day statement is not a catch phrase. The Assembly very clearly speaks of a literal six day creation, when it states in WCF 4:1: “It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good.” The phrase “in the space of” demonstrates their concern with the temporal time-frame of the creative process.¹¹

Oliphint states that “we have to reckon with the question of why the days of creation and the related questions surrounding the age of the earth have taken on such prominence in the (relatively) recent past” (135). This statement suggests that Oliphint is not aware of the history surrounding this issue.¹² Before the middle of the eighteenth century, the consensus of scholars was a “young” earth. With only a

11. Kenneth Gentry, *Westminster and Creation*, G1S 13:57

12. An excellent resource on this issue is Dr. Terry Mortenson’s book *The Great Turning Point* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004) which is based on his Ph.D. dissertation.

few exceptions, people recognized and accepted what the Bible clearly teaches about creation.¹³

This began to change in the mid-1700s when the philosophy of uniformitarianism was popularized by James Hutton. The notion became popular that Earth's features are built and modified by slow-and-gradual processes that required far more time than if such features resulted from a global flood. It was largely Hutton's philosophy that prompted scientists to begin considering that the Earth might be much older than the Bible indicates. In the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Lyell continued to push door open even wider, suggesting that the world is hundreds of millions of years old.

As scientists increasingly began to think in terms of uniformitarianism, the accepted age of the Earth grew far beyond the Biblical age. And many theologians (though not all) began to compromise. They suggested alternative ways to read the text that they felt would allow for billions of years. This is when day-age creationism and gap theory became popular. These ideas were not motivated by careful exegesis of the text, but by the desire to make the Bible line up with what the majority of scientists believed.

But there is not the slightest hint of deep time in the Scriptures. Every biblical author alludes to or references Genesis as literal history. Jesus often quoted from Genesis—and always as history. In fact, Jesus clearly indicated His conviction that the Earth is young in Mark 10:6. In defending the doctrine of marriage, He points out that Adam and Eve were made “from the beginning of creation.” This makes sense if they were there on the first week, but not if man was made 13.8 billion years *after* the beginning.

I certainly agree with Oliphint that apologetics must begin with sanctifying Christ as Lord in our heart (1 Pet. 3:15). This entails believing what Jesus believed about creation. It entails obeying Christ's instruction that we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4)—and that includes the days of creation. The temptation that Satan uses today is the same one he used in the beginning. “Did God really say ____?” (Gen. 3:1). So, did God really say “in six days?” Yes He did (Exod. 20:11).

13. Even the exceptions, I would argue, were motivated by their philosophical positions, not exegesis.

My irony-meter exploded when I read Oliphint's closing sentence: "If one concludes that YEC is the only responsible position to hold, then . . . it may be that science has played too key a role in one's reading of 'God's days' in the beginning" (136). This is historically backwards. It was allegedly on the basis of science that the Earth was deemed to be much older than the Bible teaches. And it was for allegedly scientific considerations that ideas like the day-age theory and the gap theory have come to prominence. None of these positions can be defended from the text. It is precisely because (alleged) science has indeed played too key a role that we must now defend the obvious.

Oliphint's term "God's days" implies linguistic relativism. Do words mean something different to God than they do to us? If so, when God says, "You shall not murder," it might really mean "put turnips in your ears." The notion that words mean different things to different people would make communication impossible. Clearly when God says "days," we can understand that He means "days." The Creator of the universe really does know how to tell time.

In Martin Luther's time, there was a different sort of compromise regarding the timescale of creation. Some scholars were arguing that God actually created the universe and everything in it in only *one* day—not six days. Luther's response to this aberration is still great advice for us today:

When Moses writes that God created heaven and earth and whatever is in them in six days, then let this period continue to have been six days, and do not venture to devise any comment according to which six days were one day. But, if you cannot understand how this could have been done in six days, then grant the Holy Spirit the honor of being more learned than you are.¹⁴

¹⁴. Ewald M. Plass, *What Martin Luther Says – A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 1523.

COVENANTAL REPLY

K. Scott Oliphint, Ph.D.

THANKS TO DRS. Richard Howe and Scott Lisle for their responses. Since there is no adequate way to do justice to their responses in the space available to me, I will pick and choose a thing or two that initially stood out to me as needing some clarification.

First, let me respectfully but adamantly and forcefully reject Lisle's explicit charge that I veer away from Scriptural authority. The issue between us has its focus, not on what Scripture *is*, but on what Scripture *says*. We both affirm that Scripture is the inerrant Word of God. This is an elementary distinction that Lisle overlooks. I should add here, though it should be obvious to anyone with eyes to see, that no one in these discussions denies the historicity of Genesis. Perhaps he was overstating for purposes of emphasis, but, if not, then his charge betrays a myopic bias that is not conducive to mutual discussion. This, I suspect, is due to the inability to extricate his view of what is "literal" from his doctrine of Scripture. I can only plead at this point for a more careful study of such things in hopes that Lisle will disabuse himself of such a serious charge. Anyone who reads current authors who hold to inerrancy and yet do not hold to the view of creation that Lisle has will be hard pressed to show that the problem is one of Scriptural authority. This is doubtless one of the reasons that discussions of this

nature do not progress. As I tried to make clear in my previous paper, the problems are biblical and exegetical. Good and orthodox people disagree on these and many other matters, and we should not impugn to them anything as detrimental to their own profession and confession as the negation of what they claim, until and unless there is clear evidence that their profession and confession is false. Lisle has not shown such restraint in his response and that is most unfortunate.

Second, there are responses—cogent, coherent, biblical responses—to each of Lisle’s points, and there are responses to those responses. There is no need to recount those here: anyone interested in looking at those responses will find them readily available. Having said that, I want also to say that Lisle’s position is, without question, a cogent, coherent, biblical explanation of the creation account. Anyone who holds Lisle’s view would be welcome in the ecclesiastical communion of which I am a part, or any other orthodox communion for that matter, and I would be the first to welcome such a person with those views. The problem that biblical scholars have faced throughout the history of the church (and not, as Lisle indicates, in the relatively recent past) is that the text of Genesis leaves certain questions unanswered. Attempting to answer those questions may make us seem more coherent, but they may also be interpreting something other than what Scripture itself says.

For example, Lisle says, “Oliphint’s term ‘God’s days’ implies linguistic relativism” (160). He then goes on to cite an example of “linguistic relativism” in order to show it absurd, which it is. It is difficult to believe that Lisle has taken what I say seriously, has read it for what it says, and has thought about its implications. This too is unfortunate. Lisle reads my phrase, “God’s days,” eisegetically, with his own views in mind, instead of reading what I said, and so he is unable to see my point. Careful scholarship deserves better. When I say that those days were “God’s days,” I am only citing what Scripture itself teaches. Prior to the sixth day, there was no one there except God. He created “in the space of six days,” and in five of those only God was there. So, those days are not man’s days, but God’s. Eisegesis can lead to whopping *non sequiturs*.

In the same light, Lisle says of my apologetic that “it would collapse if the history of Genesis (including its timescale) were not literally true” (156). This, of course, as I tried to make clear in my original

paper, is patently false. It imputes to Reformed theology a position that has never been present, nor has it needed to be. This was, in part, the point of my citing Letham's article. That article shows that there have been discussions and controversies surrounding the creation texts from the beginning of the church, and not, as Lisle seems to think, only in the context of science. My apologetic method, to be sure, is only as strong as the theology that undergirds it. But that theology has never been dependent on Lisle's view of "literal" in order to be what it is, and it is, nevertheless, as both detractors and devotees affirm, thoroughly biblical and dependent throughout on the absolute authority of Scripture. This criticism, too, shows, at minimum, historical and theological naïveté.

Howe's response brings to the fore (again) issues that have long been discussed between our two positions. We are both trying to protect certain bedrock assumptions in our respective methods. Let me try a clarification or two in response. First, I'll try this again, from Richard Muller:

These early Reformed statements concerning theological presuppositions focus, virtually without exception, on *the problem of the knowledge of God* given the fact not only of human finitude but also of human sin. The critique leveled by the Reformation at medieval theological presuppositions added a soteriological dimension to the epistemological problem. Whereas the medieval doctors had assumed that the fall affected primarily the will and its affections and not the reason, the Reformers assumed also the fallenness of the rational faculty: a generalized or "pagan" natural theology, according to the Reformers, was not merely limited to nonsaving knowledge of God—it was also bound in idolatry. *This view of the problem of knowledge is the single most important contribution of the early Reformed writers to the theological prolegomena of orthodox Protestantism.* Indeed, it is the doctrinal issue that most forcibly presses the Protestant scholastics toward the modification of the medieval models for theological prolegomena.¹

1. Richard A. Muller, *Post-reformation Reformed Dogmatics: the Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725: Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 1:108 (my emphases).

This is a monumentally important point to grasp. Muller is arguing that it was the *epistemological* concerns at the time of the Reformation that were the most important contributions *for* Protestants, and *against* medieval prolegomena. The bifurcation between the metaphysical and epistemological, central in medieval theology, was precisely what the Reformers (rightly) sought to correct. So, when I state that “man’s mind is derivative,” I am not making simply a metaphysical point, as Howe avers. The point has essential epistemological components to it as well. Anything that we know, in order to know it truly, must be known as *what God says it is*. Here, for example, it is not enough simply to affirm that I am “self-conscious.” To the extent that my “self-consciousness” is not aligned with what God says about me, the “self” of which I am “conscious” is an illusion. Unless my “self-consciousness” includes the fact that I am a creature of God’s, made in His image, sinful from birth and (if) redeemed by Christ, then I do not truly know myself. This was Calvin’s point at the beginning of the *Institutes*. True knowledge of God is coterminous with true knowledge of self. Philosophy’s famous dictum, “Know Thyself,” therefore, can only be accomplished on a Christian foundation.

The reason the Reformers saw the deep and crucial need to revise the *epistemology* of the medievals is because, in part, it was exactly that medieval epistemology that gave credence to so much of the theological confusion and error in the church. The only way available to safeguard that confusion and error is with a *principial* change. That change must move to affirm that the *principium essendi* is God, and the *principium cognoscendi* is God’s revelation. The two must go hand in hand.

This does not, of course, mean, as Howe seems to imply, that *principia* are simply stated or held or affirmed in a vacuum. Again, whether one wants to affirm these Protestant *principia* or not, it would certainly behoove one to notice the arguments given for them. With respect to a *doctrine* of Scripture, for example, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646), as well as the *Savoy Declaration* (1658) and the *Baptist Confession* (1689), all state, with regard to Scripture,

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the

author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

There is good and solid biblical exegesis behind these theological truths that can be consulted with great benefit. But we should note that the Reformed view of Scripture was confessed in virtual unison in the seventeenth century, and its view was a *principial* one. To argue that Scripture's authority is a *derived* authority, having its *foundation* in something outside of Scripture, is to move back to a medieval view.

This did not, however, mean that when these affirmations were given, nothing else could be said. *Sola Scriptura* was never *nuda Scriptura*. This is clear in the very next section of each of these three confessions, which states,

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, *are arguments* whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts (my emphasis).

Thus, there is nothing exclusively "Classical" about the affirmation of arguments for our belief in the sole authority of Scripture, or arguments for anything else we believe. Those affirmations were an integral theological foundation for the vast majority of Protestant churches in their confessions, and were in theological sync with the epistemological recovery, against medieval *principia*, that the Reformation produced.

REVIEWS

Norman L. Geisler, Ph.D.

READING THE ARTICLES by Drs. Jason Lisle, Scott Oliphint, and Richard Howe was like watching ships pass in the night, except they were sailing on different seas. One is hesitant to dive into these waters, but I hope I am not too overly optimistic in my hope to bring some clarity and focus to the issue. Let me begin by giving a clear and concise response to the questions they were asked to address in their papers (though the order is altered slightly).

ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. **“Does a faithful commitment to the authority of Scripture lead one to a young earth interpretation?”** No, and for a good reason, namely, they are different issues. One may believe in the authority (and inerrancy) of Scripture and yet hold to different interpretations of it. What Scripture is and how it should be interpreted are two different issues. Most of the founders and framers of the early inerrancy movement of the 1900s (e.g., Warfield and Hodge) and the contemporary movement of the 1970-80s (e.g., the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy) held firmly to inerrancy but saw no necessary tie of it to a Young Earth view.

Further, none of the authors of the above articles demonstrated either biblically or logically that there is a transcendental necessity for such a conclusion. Some scarcely even addressed the question. The one who did never considered the biblical arguments on the other side of the issue (e.g., those of Don Stoner, *A New Look at an Old Earth*¹).

2. **“Does a presuppositional apologetic lead one to a young-earth position?”** No, not necessarily. No such necessary connection was demonstrated by Lisle. The fact is, there are presuppositionalists who are not young-earthers, and there are young-earthers who are not presuppositionalists. Further, no biblical, logical, or theological connection between the two was shown by any participant.

3. **“Is it possible to be a consistent presuppositionalist and an old-earth creationist?”** Yes it is, and as a matter of fact, some are. As a matter of logic, no one has demonstrated a logical connection between one’s view on presuppositional apologetics and the age of the earth. Those who have attempted to logically link presuppositionalism to a young-earth view have left gaping holes in their presentation. Since most proponents agree that presuppositionalism involves a transcendental argument, no one has demonstrated that a young earth is a necessary part of a valid transcendental argument.

4. **“What role, if any, should general revelation play in apologetic encounters with unbelievers?”** It should play a very important part since it is really the only common ground we have with unbelievers. It is, as one participant pointed out, the other part (along with special revelation) of the revelational reality that forms the basis for a Christian world view. Presuppositionalists tend to downplay the role of general revelation or obscure it by their view of the noetic effects of sin. They do not fully appreciate that general revelation is a crucial part of the reality we have from God and the only part of God’s revelation that we share with unbelievers.

5. **“What common ground, if any, does the believer have with the unbeliever to which he can appeal?”** He has the common ground of general revelation in nature (Rom. 1:20-21) and in conscience (Rom. 2:12-14). The apostle Paul set the example of how to use this in Acts 17. While we agree with Presuppositionalists that there is no truth apart from God’s revelation, nonetheless, God’s revelation is not

1. Don Stoner, *A New Look at an Old Earth* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1997).

limited to the Bible. The Bible is the only inspired and *written* authority for believers, but it is not the only source of revelation for us.

6. **“What effect do the noetic effects of sin have on man’s ability to study and interpret Scripture?”** The effects of sin hinder one’s understanding of both of God’s revelations. The image of God (Gen. 1:27) is effaced, but not erased, by sin. Only the work of God can help us overcome this in each case. However, the disadvantage caused by sin does not exist only for general revelation, as some presuppositionalists’ statements might lead us to believe. It also exists for those who are recipients of special revelation. Romans 1 makes it clear that there is no defect in God’s general revelation itself. General revelation is “plain to them” (unbelievers) and can be “clearly perceived” (Rom. 1:20). It is not the objectivity and clarity of either revelations (general or special) that is the problem; the defect is in man. But God by common grace can overcome this with regard to understanding His general revelation, and by special grace it can be overcome for believers with regard to special revelation. One does not need special grace to understand general revelation. He can understand it apart from the special light cast on it by Scripture.

Further, sin also affects the believer’s ability to understand God’s special revelation. So, grace (special grace) is needed here as well. The proliferation of cults, appealing to their twisted view of Scripture, is ample testimony that special revelation is not immune from the effects of depravity that are also seen in man’s inability to interpret Scripture properly.

7. **“Does calling into question man’s ability to correctly interpret general revelation (science) call into question man’s ability to correctly interpret special revelation (hermeneutics)?”** Not necessarily. The two are related but not causally. The defect is not in the revelation but in the fallen human being interpreting it. So, either revelation can be misinterpreted. And each has its own principles of interpretation. But the understanding of both is subject to the noetic effects of sin on the human mind. Hence, neither is immune from distortion.

8. **“When arguing for Christianity, does beginning with philosophy, science, or history elevate man’s reasoning above God’s revelation in the Bible?”** No, it need not be so. For errors do not arise because of flaws in the revelation but because of errors in the inter-

preter. One can have—and fallen men will have—conceptual biases that hamper his interpretation of either revelation from God. So, the problem is not with starting with general revelation; it is with biases one will have about it. And understanding special revelation will not eliminate the problem since biases due to sin are present in interpreting it as well.

Furthermore, this question is based on a false dichotomy. There is no conflict between God's general and special revelations. God cannot contradict Himself, and He instructs us to "avoid . . . contradictions" (Greek: *antitheseis*) in 1 Tim. 6:20. The conflicts arise not on the level of the *revelations* but on the level of human *interpretations*. It is a false dichotomy to locate the conflict between God's special revelation in the Bible and man's misinterpretation of his general revelation in nature. Human reasoning (interpretation) about God's revelation in the Bible can cause problems just as well as faulty reasoning about nature.

9. **"When, if ever, is it permissible to allow data from outside the Bible to interpret the Bible?"** The answer to this is when we are more sure of the interpretation of general revelation (called "data outside the Bible?") than we are of the conflicting interpretations based on special revelation. For example, we are certain of the Law of Non-contradiction, and we know this apart from the aid of special revelation (since it is rationally undeniable). So, any interpretation of the Bible that involves a contradiction cannot be correct. Further, we are empirically certain that the world is not square. So, any interpretation of the Bible like the world having "four corners" (Rev. 7:1) cannot be taken to contradict this empirical certainty. But this does not mean that our given interpretation of God's general revelation always trumps our interpretation of His special revelation. And it certainly does not mean that mere human views outside the Bible trump what the Bible clearly teaches. It simply means that the evidence for the certainty of our interpretation of general revelation in these cases cited is greater in these cases than our evidence for that particular interpretation of the Bible. Sometimes it is the opposite. For example, we judge that our interpretation of God's special revelation about creation is stronger than scientific interpretation of general revelation, which holds to macro-evolution.

10. **“What can be known about God through general revelation [apart from Scripture]?”** General revelation is more general than is generally thought. It includes God’s revelation in nature (Rom. 1:20), conscience (Rom. 2:12), living creatures (Prov. 6:6), history (Acts 17:27), and human nature (Acts 17:26, 27). Space does not permit elaboration on these points (see our *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, chap. 4²). This general revelation would include the laws of human reasoning (logic) as well as the principles of interpretation. Of course, of all these are made possible because they are grounded in God. Nonetheless, man is able to discover and elaborate these findings in the various arts, sciences, and philosophies based on a proper understanding of general revelation. Of course, they, like our interpretation of Scripture, are all subject to human error. And in most cases we are dealing with degrees of probability on one side versus the other.

11. **Is it warranted for the Christian to reject the scientific claim that the universe is billions of years old on the grounds that this claim is based on fallible human reasoning?** No, it is not warranted to reject it on these grounds for several reasons. First, all interpretation of both God’s special and general revelation is fallible. Our reasoning about the age of the earth is not infallible, despite the tacit claim by some apologists on both sides of the debate. There are unprovable assumptions in the arguments on both sides. Even the presuppositionalists who claim certainty, based on his transcendental argument, have not demonstrated that the age of the earth is a necessary part of their transcendental argument.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT SOME POINTS MADE IN THE DIALOGUE

After watching the bouncing ball of charge, counter charge, and counter counter-charge, one is left with several impressions about this debate. First of all, the opposing views in this discussion hold several important things in common. For example, they hold (1) the infallibility of Scripture, (2) the finality of the Christian world view, (3) the reality of general revelation, (4) the value of a transcendental argument, (5) importance of both evidence and reason in Christian

² Norman Geisler, *Introduction, Bible*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002).

apologetics, and (6) the biblical imperative to engage in apologetics, and other things.

Nonetheless, there are some areas in which one must choose between the views. In these areas, it would seem that the Classical approach should be favored in most cases above the Presuppositional view. A few examples can be noted here.

Distinction between Epistemology and Metaphysics

While both sides appear to agree ontologically, they differ epistemologically. Both are in accord on the necessity of the Christian view of God being the ontological ground for all meaning and truth (*what*). However, one would have to agree with the Classical view that *how* we know this is true. Here it seems that some sort of rational argument is needed epistemologically to establish one view over the other. In the final analysis, the Presuppositionalist has not successfully refuted the charge that it confuses epistemology and ontology. In brief, ontologically, the Presuppositional view is correct. Epistemologically, the Classical view is needed. Presuppositionalism is right about in *what* the nature of reality is; Classical Apologetics is correct in *how* we know this reality.

The Insufficiency of the Transcendental Argument

Presuppositionlists do a good job in showing the need for some kind of transcendental move. However, their reasoning (or lack thereof) that the entire Christian theology is a necessary part of the transcendental condition leaves one unconvinced. For example, one can see how it is necessary to posit a theistic God to account for meaning, truth, and morals. However, there seems to be no logical necessity for positing Trinitarianism. Why would not some form of monotheism do the job? Even if a plurality of persons is shown to be necessary, why three persons? Would not two or four persons in the Godhead do? What about seven, which is a perfect number?

Likewise, while it is transcendentally necessary for there to be a revelation from God in order to make sense of the world, what is the logical connection between a canon of 66 books (the Bible) and that conclusion? Would a Bible minus a small book here or there do the same thing? It would seem that whatever good reason one may have for believing in the canon of 66 books known as the Bible, nonethe-

less, these “reasons” do not appear to be a necessary part of the transcendental argument.

The Failure to Distinguish the Word of God and the Bible

Christians believe the Bible is the Word of God, but Muslims believe the Qur’an is the Word of God. Both cannot be right since these two books affirm opposite views of God, man, and salvation (see our book *Answering Islam*³). Presuppositionalists claim that the Word of God is self-authenticating. It needs no proof. It is the basis for all other conclusions, but it has no basis beyond itself. But what they fail to see is that while all of this is true of the Word of God, nonetheless, it is not thereby true of the Bible. For there must be some evidence or good reasons for believing that the Bible is the Word of God, as opposed to contrary views. The statement that “The Bible is the Word of God” is self-evident or self-sustaining. It calls for no evidence. Likewise, no Presuppositionalist would argue that “the Qur’an is the Word of God” is self-authenticating, needing no evidence beyond its own claim to be the written Word of God. And it begs the question to claim that the two statements are different because the Bible is the Word of God and the Qur’an is not. This leads to another problem.

The Unsustainability of the Circular Argument for Presuppositionalism

Presuppositionalists admit the circularity of their argument, and even attempt to defend it. However, this kind of reasoning would not be allowed in any other area. For example, what Christian would accept the argument that the Book of Mormon is the Word of God because it says it is the Word of God? And since God’s Word is the basis for all truth, even the truth that it is the Word of God, then it must be true that it is the Word of God.

Of course, as Presuppositionalists argue, the Word of God stands on its own, with no need of proof beyond it. But it begs the question to claim that “X book is the Word of God”—whether we are talking about the Gita, the Book of Mormon, or whatever. The fact is, that

3. Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2002).

any such truth claim demands evidence and good reason—the kind provided by Classical Apologetics.

It is not sufficient to claim the circular argument for the biblical world view is okay, like the argument for the validity of the laws of logic, because it is not arbitrary but is inescapable. First of all, there is nothing logically inescapable about believing God is Triune or that Third John is in the canon. Second, the Law of Non-contradiction is not considered valid because it is based on the Law of Non-contradiction, but because it is self-evident and undeniable. It cannot be denied without being affirmed in the denial. And the predicate is reducible to the subject. Neither of these is true of the statement “The Bible is true.”

Several other flaws can be noted for which we have no time to elaborate. First, how can God be “Totally Other,” as some Presuppositionalists argue. Totally negative knowledge of God is no knowledge at all. We cannot know God is “not-that” unless we know what “that” is. Second, just because knowledge comes *through* the senses (as classical realists contend) does not mean it is *based on* the senses. Our knowledge of math comes through the senses but is not based on them. Third, no exegesis of Scripture, no matter how good, is rationally inescapable. But Presuppositionalism depends on a valid exegesis of Scripture. Fourth, to deny there is no reality outside of what the Bible’s declarations say there exists is to deny general revelation, which Presuppositionalists claim they accept. Fifth, just because it is necessary to hold that all truth depends on God, it does not follow that we necessarily *know* all that is essential to know about Him.

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.

I APPRECIATE THE INVITATION to review these articles by these fine, dedicated, Christian scholars on this important topic. According to the invitation to join in the debate, the issue before us is a proper assessment of the use of presuppositional apologetics within contemporary young-earth creationist literature. Interestingly, for the debate Dr. Scott Oliphint is committed to presuppositionalist apologetics and old earth advocacy; Dr. Richard Howe is a classical apologist, young earth advocate; and Dr. Jason Lisle is a presuppositionalist, young earth advocate. Due to space limitation I must quickly get to my review.

In reading the articles I feel something like Goldilocks in that (1) Oliphint is too soft. He effectively avoids the topic of discussion by limiting it to his last few paragraphs while admitting that “it will be obvious by this point that the notion of a young earth has not factored into our apologetic discussion.” (2) Howe is too hard. Despite these articles being linked to an open public debate on the matter, Howe continually misses his target audience by referring to *demonstratio quia*, truth-functional relations, the Incompleteness Theorem, essence/existence distinctions, Material Implication, Cartesian Foundationalism, Aristotelian hylomorphism, and so forth. And he does so while admitting “time and space will not allow a thorough critique” and “time, space, and purpose will not allow for a treatment” of various subjects

that he casts into the debate. (3) Lisle is just right. He gets right to the heart of the matter: he argues that biblical authority is the absolute standard of truth for both Christian apologetics *and* universal origins.

Oliphint's article is excellent — as far as it goes (up until his closing observations). Though he is committed to presuppositionalism, which works from a biblical starting-point and establishes the Bible as the absolute standard of truth, his old earth advocacy clashes with his bold affirmation of Scripture. We may see this in two respects.

First, the Genesis 1 record clearly, repeatedly, and emphatically speaks of the creation days as literal days, which should lead Oliphint to affirm six day creation — which entails young earth advocacy (unless he believes God created the earth in six days around 13 billion years ago). Note (1) the word “day” has as its primary meaning a normal day-night cycle; (2) the days are explicitly qualified by “evening and morning”; (3) the appearance of “day” with numerical prefixes (“first,” “second,” etc.) always speaks of a literal day in the Bible; (4) each day appears in a numbered series, which invariably presents the common passing of time in Scripture. (5) the word “day” is consistently used throughout Genesis 1, even after the fourth day where the sun was created for the purpose of measuring a day; (6) the fourth commandment uses God's creation week as the divine exemplar for man's normal work week (Exod. 20:9–11); (7) the fourth commandment uses the plural “days,” which always speaks of literal days in Scripture; and (8) Moses could have used an alternative idiom (e.g., “age”) had he not intended us to think of literal days (unless he wanted to confuse us).

Second, in Matt. 19:4 Jesus himself declares that Adam and Eve were created “from the beginning” as “male and female.” And he does so while citing the Genesis creation account. Surely Oliphint does not hold that the creative process continued 13 billion years and only “recently” concluded with the creation of man (two million years ago?). Thus, Oliphint's view of origins appears to clash with his commitment to the absolute standard of Scripture.¹

1. Let me quickly add that I was surprised at Oliphint's citation of Letham, who claims that “none of the great Reformed confessions make any comment on the matter” (134). Letham cites several Reformed confessions but omits the Westminster Standards. WCF 4:2 states rather clearly that God did “create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.”

I believe Howe both misconstrues the presuppositional argument itself and misunderstands presuppositional proponents — all while confounding his readers. (1) Despite Howe's repeated assertions, Van Til, Bahnsen and other presuppositionalists direct their apologetics at *both* epistemological and ontological issues. Indeed, epistemology necessarily entails ontology. Bahnsen is *not* confused over whether he is dealing with an ontological or epistemological problem, as he makes clear repeatedly in his writings. Lisle's response to Howe effectively (and clearly!) demonstrates this.

(2) Contrary to Howe, the presuppositional argument is truly transcendental and is not identical with the cosmological argument, which presuppositionalists vigorously reject: presuppositionalism deals with the *pre-conditions of intelligibility*; not the existence of the world as evidence for God. As Lisle notes (and as frequently heard from presuppositionalists): presuppositionalism "establishes the proof of a foundational claim by showing the impossibility of the contrary" (81). That is, the unbelieving worldview cannot account for the key factors of life (such as reality, laws of logic, mathematics, morality, and so forth) *on their system*. Such is impossible on the non-Christian system. (3) Presuppositionalism does *not* fold into classical apologetics, as per Howe, because it never sets aside its (offensive) commitment to Scripture as the ultimate standard of truth (as God's direct, verbal revelation). Interestingly, at heart classical apologists are closet presuppositionalists. For when the Christian faith is challenged, their reflex is to believe Scripture and forge ahead, rather than to doubt the Bible or the Christian truth claims and consider retreating.

The primary problem with Howe's classical system is that it gives equal footing to the fallen mind of man rather than beginning with the assertion of the absolute primacy of God speaking in His Word. Howe's logically primitive starting point is not the self-attesting God of Scripture, but basically the reasonableness of the fallen mind. This effectively undermines the lordship of Christ. In fact, on his Quodlibetal Blog Howe even states rather surprisingly: "Reality is

Both the temporal limitation (in the space of") and the moral evaluation ("all very good") conflict with old earth views.

the only proper ‘starting point’ and the measure of what it means for any claim to be true.”²

In my opinion, Lisle’s “just right” presentation establishes both issues before us on their proper grounding: God speaking in Scripture. Both our apologetic and our view of universal origins must ultimately derive from Scripture. As Lisle puts it, “For the presuppositionalist, *the Bible is the ultimate standard for all things, even its own defense*” (65). As we can see from what I state above against Oliphint regarding creation, our view of origins is rooted in Scripture. And this is precisely where our defense of the Christian faith must be rooted. We must believe that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7a) and that in Christ “are hidden all [not “some”] the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

The presuppositionalist asks how our ultimate standard (God speaking in His Word) can be our *ultimate* standard if He is “proven” by lesser standards of argumentation. As Lisle warns,

All non-presuppositional methods argue on the basis of some non-biblical standard. They tacitly suppose that man’s mind is the ultimate standard and is in a position to judge God’s Word. They attempt to show that God’s Word passes certain tests (historical verification, scientific accuracy, logical coherence) and as such it is (at least very likely) true, and therefore you should have faith in it. This contradicts the biblical claim that God (and by extension His revelation) is the ultimate standard for knowledge by which all other standards will be judged. (83)

For many years, the modern young earth / six day creation movement was dominated by evidentialists, or classical apologists. This seems to be shifting, beginning with Dr. John Whitcomb at Grace Theological Seminary (in the 1970s) and continuing with Dr. Jason Lisle, Ken Ham, and others today. I think this is good change of method that puts a sure foundation under the certain truth that “in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day” (Exod. 20:11).

2. See his Quodlibetal Blog: <http://quodlibetalblog.wordpress.com/2011/07/12/its-worse-than-i-thought/>

James N. Anderson

AS I UNDERSTAND it, this three-way debate arose out of the concerns of Dr. Richard Howe and others at Southern Evangelical Seminary about the promotion of presuppositional apologetics (PA) by some Young Earth Creationist (YEC) ministries. Presumably, then, the central issue in this exchange is *whether there is a strong connection between YEC and PA*.¹

The answer to this question is largely independent of whether YEC is correct and whether PA is correct. One could believe that YEC and PA go hand-in-hand without holding to either YEC or PA. Likewise, one could affirm both YEC and PA yet think that they are independent issues. Only those who hold to one but not the other have to answer the central question at hand in the negative. Since the cases for YEC and PA (considered separately) have been debated at great length elsewhere, I will not revisit that ground but will direct my remarks to the distinctive element of this debate, viz., *the relationship between YEC and PA*.

In the interests of full disclosure, I will lay my own cards on the table at the outset. I advocate a presuppositional approach in apolo-

1. The concern here is whether there is a *theological* or *philosophical* connection as opposed to a historical or sociological one.

getics; I find myself in substantial agreement with Cornelius Van Til about the implications of Reformed theology and Reformed epistemology for Christian apologetics. However, I have argued that presuppositionalism does not rule out the use of more traditional arguments (e.g., the cosmological and teleological arguments) provided they are formulated and presented in a presuppositionally-sensitive manner. On matters of creation, I firmly reject theistic evolution as inconsistent both with Scripture and with good science. I embraced YEC early on in my Christian life, but after further study came to the conclusion, on exegetical and theological grounds, that the ‘days’ of Genesis 1 are best understood as divine workdays that are not identical to human (24-hour solar) workdays.² I therefore hold that Genesis is consistent with (but does not require) the view that the universe is billions of years old. In short, I affirm PA but not YEC; I believe that PA is *consistent* with YEC but does not *require* it.

As such, I find myself in the pleasant position of concurring with all three participants on some important points. I agree with Lisle and Oliphint on presuppositionalism,³ with Oliphint on whether Genesis teaches a literal six-day creation, with Howe and Oliphint that there is no strong connection between YEC and PA, with all three that YEC is a respectable and exegetically defensible position, and even to some degree with Howe on the value of the classical theistic arguments.

Lisle maintains that there is a strong connection between YEC and PA.⁴ It is not merely that both are true. They ultimately stand or fall *together*. As a Thomist who affirms YEC, Howe is naturally concerned to refute this notion.⁵ So he needs to counter the claim that YEC requires PA.⁶ The approach Howe takes in his opening article is

2. For a defense of this position, see Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (n.p.: Crossway, 2006), 113–147.

3. Presuppositionalism is much more than an apologetic method—it is an epistemological orientation with implications that go beyond the defense of the faith—but our focus here is on the apologetic dimension.

4. “So there is a strong link between what on the surface may seem like two unrelated issues.” Lisle, “Presuppositional Reply,” 109.

5. “My concerns arise out of a commitment to the conclusions of Young Earth Creationism and a passionate celebration of the method of Classical Apologetics.” Howe, “Classical Apologetics & Creationism,” 30.

6. I assume that Howe would not find so problematic the converse claim that PA requires YEC.

to argue against PA. From a logical standpoint, this is rather surprising; for if the claim that YEC requires PA is true, refuting PA would (by *modus tollens*) also refute YEC.⁷ Surely this is not the conclusion Howe wants us to reach! For his purposes it is not sufficient—indeed, not even necessary—to show that PA is mistaken. Rather, he needs to show that YEC can be affirmed *independently of PA*.

One way to accomplish this would be to argue against PA *and for YEC*.⁸ But as far as I can see, in none of his contributions does Howe make a positive argument for YEC, whether exegetical or scientific. Perhaps he means to direct a kind of *ad hominem* argument against Lisle, taking YEC for granted.⁹ Still, from a bystander's perspective the strategy of only arguing against PA might seem rather counterproductive.

Turn now to Lisle's contributions. In his opening article and his first response to Howe, Lisle argues forcefully for PA but does not say anything in defense of YEC. In his first response to Oliphint, he celebrates their agreement about PA and then argues forcefully for YEC on exegetical and theological grounds. What we do not find, however, in any of Lisle's articles is a clear argument for a direct relationship between PA and YEC *as such*. At points it seems that Lisle means to argue as follows:

PA shows that the Christian worldview is necessary to account for human knowledge.

YEC is part of the Christian worldview.

Therefore, PA shows that YEC is necessary to account for human knowledge.¹⁰

Of course, (2) depends crucially on whether Lisle is correct about the teaching of Scripture. So certainly his arguments on this point are relevant to the question at hand. Nevertheless, just because Scripture

7. If P requires Q, and Q is false, it follows that P is false too.

8. One way to refute the claim that $P \rightarrow Q$ is to argue independently for P and $\neg Q$.

9. I don't mean an *abusive* ad hominem argument: Dr. Howe has treated his interlocutors with the utmost respect. I'm referring to the legitimate form of "to the man" argument in which one tries to refute an opponent on their own terms, taking their position as true for the sake of argument.

10. Lisle offers an argument along these lines in his book *The Ultimate Proof of Creation* (n.p.: Master Books, 2009).

teaches X, it does not follow that X is part of the Christian worldview. Scripture teaches that Lydia came from Thyatira. Is *that* part of the Christian worldview? Is *that* necessary to account for human knowledge? Or to take a less trivial example, suppose the premillennialists are right about how to interpret Revelation 20. Is premillennialism part of the Christian worldview? Is a literal future millennium necessary to account for human knowledge? Surely not. So there needs to be more argument from Lisle about the presuppositional necessity of YEC. Why would we be unable to account for human knowledge if YEC were mistaken?¹¹

At the end of his concluding article, Lisle states that the connection between PA and YEC boils down to a matter of biblical authority. “If the Bible is our ultimate epistemological standard for all truth claims, then we all should be six-day creationists *and* presuppositionalists” (114). Again, this depends on whether the Bible *really does* teach YEC. Furthermore—and this is the crux of the matter—there is nothing *distinctive* about YEC in this regard. A premillennialist presuppositionalist might argue on the very same basis for a strong connection between PA and premillennial eschatology. And so on for any other doctrine one takes to be taught in Scripture.

Lisle suggests another line of argument in his responses, which can be summarized as follows:

To reject YEC is to reject the authority, inerrancy, and perspicuity of Scripture.

The authority, inerrancy, and perspicuity of Scripture are presuppositionally necessary.

Therefore, YEC is presuppositionally necessary.¹²

This is certainly a more intriguing argument. It is logically valid, and I will not take issue with (5). The disputable premise is (4). To his credit, Lisle does give his reasons for believing it. I have no space here to engage with his arguments; I will only say that I think Oliphint’s rebuttals are cogent. One can consistently affirm the Protestant doctrine

11. In other words, how does human knowledge depend on *YEC specifically* as opposed to *biblical authority generally*? This question needs to be answered without begging the question in favor of YEC exegesis.

12. By “presuppositionally necessary” I mean this: X is presuppositionally necessary if (and only if) X is a necessary precondition of human thought or knowledge.

of Scripture without accepting a young-earth reading of Genesis. YEC is not on a par with, say, the doctrine of the Trinity.

Lisle is indebted to Greg Bahnsen for his approach to apologetics,¹³ and Bahnsen followed the presuppositionalism of Cornelius Van Til. It is worth noting that Bahnsen affirmed YEC, but Van Til did not.¹⁴ Westminster Theological Seminary, still a bastion of Van Tilian presuppositionalism, has never required its professors to affirm YEC (although some individual professors have held to it).¹⁵ If there is indeed a strong connection between PA and YEC, Van Til and many of his followers have missed it. Moreover, Van Til argued that natural revelation has all the attributes of special revelation: authority, necessity, sufficiency, and perspicuity.¹⁶ While I cannot develop the point here, I wonder to what extent Lisle is committed in practice to the *perspicuity* of natural revelation.

So I agree with Howe and Oliphint that there is no strong connection between YEC and PA. Nevertheless, PA may well be *practically* necessary for YEC—at least given the current state of science.¹⁷ I do not think it is too controversial to suggest that our collective observations of the universe to date are more naturally accommodated by an old-earth chronology than a young-earth one.¹⁸ I agree with Lisle that there are no brute facts: all evidences must be interpreted in terms of one's presuppositions. Yet it is also true that some evidences fit more naturally into some paradigms than others.¹⁹

13. Lisle, *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*, 3.

14. For some documentation on this point, see: http://www.reformed.org/creation/van_til_on_creation.html.

15. See: <http://www.wts.edu/about/beliefs/statements/creation.html>.

16. John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 116–119.

17. Lisle discusses the “pragmatic necessity” of PA in his opening article; his point there has some connection to mine here.

18. I am thinking here particularly of distant starlight, the radioactive properties of rocks, the fossil record, and the physiology of carnivorous animals. I do not deny that there are some empirical evidences supportive of a young-earth chronology or that future scientific discoveries may be more favorable to YEC. But many YECs admit that their position *currently* lacks good scientific support. I have come across some Reformed YECs who have embraced scientific anti-realism precisely so as to bypass the empirical problem.

19. To use a Kuhnian term, YEC seems to face more ‘anomalies’. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

If I am right about this, Howe may need presuppositionalism more than he appreciates. He (admirably) holds to YEC because he believes it to be the correct interpretation of the Bible, not for scientific reasons. He admits that he avoids dealing with the scientific arguments for and against YEC, and he opts to “suspend judgment” on the science.²⁰ How very presuppositionalist! I suspect that if Howe were to engage more with the empirical data, his favored epistemology would not serve him very well. If one aspect of natural revelation (philosophical reason) is given priority in his hermeneutic, why not other aspects of it (empirical observations)?

Howe repeatedly avers that truth claims must be settled by “an appeal to reality.”²¹ Lisle rightly points out that on the Christian view *reality includes the Bible*—not merely as an ancient historical document but as a divinely inspired Scripture. Moreover, we should be committed to the Bible as *our only infallible and authoritative interpretation* of reality. For Howe, it seems, “reality” in apologetics is restricted to what can be known solely through natural reason and sense experience. But if *that* conception of “reality” is the standard, I wonder how his commitment to YEC will fare. Frankly, if I were to become persuaded (again) of the young-earth reading of Genesis, I would be all the more glad to be a presuppositionalist!

Let me conclude by thanking Drs. Howe, Lisle, and Oliphint for a truly stimulating and enlightening exchange.

20. Howe, “Classical Apologetics & Creationism,” 27–28, fn. 49.

21. As an aside, this strikes me as either logically trivial or epistemologically naïve. Of course our knowledge must conform to reality. But as Lisle correctly observes, only God has direct access to reality. The pertinent issue is *by what God-ordained means do we come to know that reality?* This represents a clear dividing line between Classical Apologetics and Presuppositional Apologetics.

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Jason Lisle, Ph.D.

As Director of Research, Dr. Jason Lisle leads the gifted team of scientists at the Institute for Creation Research who continue to investigate and demonstrate the evidence for creation. He graduated summa cum laude from Ohio Wesleyan University where he double-majored in physics and astronomy and minored in mathematics. He earned a master's degree and a Ph.D. in astrophysics at the University of Colorado. Dr. Lisle specialized in solar astrophysics and has made a number of scientific discoveries regarding the solar photosphere and has contributed to the field of general relativity. Since completion of his research at the University of Colorado, Dr. Lisle began working in full-time apologetics ministry, focusing on the defense of Genesis. Dr. Lisle was instrumental in developing the planetarium at the Creation Museum in Kentucky, writing and directing popular planetarium shows including "The Created Cosmos." Dr. Lisle speaks on topics relating to science and the defense of the Christian faith using logic and correct reasoning; he has authored numerous articles and books demonstrating that biblical creation is the only logical possibility for origins.

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