

R.C. Sproul and Greg Bahnsen Debate. (1977)

Dr Richard Dewitt:

The fact that so many are here this evening is an indication of some at least some degree of interest (audience laughing) in the subject matter to be handled. I tell my students that one of the glories of the reformed faith is just its catholicity, its freedom from partisan peculiarity and idiosyncrasy, and so on. (audience laughing). They do not all agree with me (laughing) as a recent batch of examinations will attest. (laughing) That's all right, they don't need to.

We are however this evening to have a demonstration of reformed catholicity and I think that there will be evidence of that catholicity of our faith. We have two distinguished, keen minded, young-ish defenders of the faith who are to speak to us and to lead us in the discussion this evening. And they take rather different points of view, but both of them have noble pedigrees in the reformed tradition. We ought to remember that, I think, that the reformed family is a great family and that there are different streams and different currents of thought in the reformed tradition.

One of the difficult things for students to learn, I find, is that there can be legitimate differences of opinion about certain aspects of the reformed faith, that there is no one single position on some points. Happens to be the truth. Our speakers this evening are, of course, Professor Greg Bahnsen of Reformed Seminary, professor of apologetics and ethics, known to us all. And Dr RC Sproul, president and theologian in residence of the Ligonier Valley Study Center.

I'll never forget my first meeting with Dr Sproul. Few years ago now. We were met by Jack Austere (?) ... Remember that RC?

Sproul: Sure.

Dewitt: In the airport, in Chattanooga. And within 30 seconds, maybe 60 seconds, we were already arguing (audience laughing). Mind you, at that time, I was only a country preacher and he was already a theologian in residence (audience laughing). So I hadn't a chance in the world. The subject of our argument, nota bena, was Rom 1:18 and following, especially, as I recall, Rom 1:21. I don't know that I would stand now, RC, where I stood then. Hope I have developed a little, and I'm now too a theologian in residence (laughing and clapping).

But I'm glad this evening that, as a theologian in residence, I can occupy the untouchable ground in the middle in what is going to take place. We are going to have a presentation, 15 min each, by Prof Bahnsen and Dr Sproul of their points of view and there will be opportunity for questions from the group here and responses on the part of these two apologists for the Christian faith. And because he is our guest, we are going to ask Dr Sproul to speak first and he will be followed without any further announcement unless he goes overtime by Prof Bahnsen who promises that he won't go overtime.

Sproul:

Thank you very much Dr Dewitt. I remember that conversation in the taxi cab too, and I don't remember it as an argument. It was a delightful and stimulating conversation. I remember the suit, I think, more than I remember the (audience laughing).

Well, I told my wife that I didn't dare wear a turtleneck to this place, anywhere where Dr Dewitt was around. And tomorrow I'll have a vest, ok? (audience laughing).

Before I start, and you can deduct this from my time if you will, but I think this is vitally important to underscore what Dr Dewitt said about the different strands within the Calvinistic tradition particular with respect to apologetic methodology. It never ceases to amaze me how sometimes the zeal of discipleship can tear us apart and hurt us very deeply. I think we always have to keep this whole question of apologetic methodology in its historical perspective, that the difference that we're about to be viewing this evening really has its roots in the differences that was articulated between Dr Benjamin Warfield of Princeton and Dr Abraham Kuyper of the University of Amsterdam.

Dr Warfield had such a high regard and respect for Dr Kuyper that he learned the Dutch language solely for the purpose of being able to read Dr Kuyper's work, not to criticize it, but to learn from it. And those men set an example from two apologetic traditions that we're discussing here tonight that I think needs to come before us always, that this debate or difference of approach is an intramural one between men who are passionately committed to Calvinism and to the reformed faith.

I had initially thought that this was going to be a more lengthy presentation and I wanted to go in more directly into my initial remarks into some kind of a case for the classical synthesis. But rather than doing that, I'm sure that can come out in the discussion afterwards, I have found it always helpful to go behind the method and the arguments themselves to see if we can find out what people are really concerned about. By way of example I will be going to CA in a few weeks to meet behind closed doors with David Hubbard, Jack Rogers and Dan Fuller because Greg and I both are very much involved right now in a national question of the authority and inerrancy of the Scripture, which is an even more serious split in the evangelical world, about which I am sure that you are all very much aware, and we are having some of these meetings behind closed doors with gentlemen of the different persuasion, not because we hope to resolve the differences but that we can have a better understanding of what the concerns are, what's all the fuss about in a question such as this.

So what I would like to do is to state briefly the things that we are concerned about, those of us who represent what we call the classical synthesis, or the evidentialist school, or the term I prefer: the analytical school of apologetics. What were concerned about in terms of apologetic methodology, and why we are concerned about it.

First of all, what I am very much interested in and deeply concerned about is a complete reconstruction of natural theology in the 20th century. That is what I am all about, trying to call for a reconstruction of natural theology, and with that, what I believe to be a reconstruction of classical Calvinistic apologetics. Why do I have that concern?

These are few of the reasons why I'm concerned for reconstruction of natural theology:

- 1) I am very much concerned about the problem of the loss of natural law as a cohesive force for the well being of man in his society. If you are aware of jurisprudence, and questions of political matters in our country today, you are aware certainly that the whole idea of natural law as a ground basis or foundation for legislation is one that is not taken very seriously at all in the higher courts or in the academic institutions of jurisprudence. I think there is a direct correlation between the loss of the natural law concept in jurisprudence with the loss of natural theology in the realm of theology and metaphysics. Now if we can talk about the implications of that more later and some of the historical developments of it.. that I think the practical ramifications of the loss of the natural law system in this country are extremely destructive.
- 2) Second of all, I am deeply concerned about the loss of the intellectual credibility of Christianity. I believe that we are living in the most anti-intellectual age in the history of western civilization, not the most anti-academic, not the most anti-technological, but anti-intellect: anti-intellectual in the sense that we have lost confidence in the ability of the mind to be used as a tool for testing and achieving truth.
- 3) Third, I am deeply concerned about the loss of Christian influence on the general culture of our society. This, if I can speak in Calvinistic terms, is a concern of common grace, not a concern so much for evangelism or winning souls, but it is a concern of our responsibility for the general welfare of mankind and also, negatively stated, as a restraint of evil in this world. And I think that we have seen very evidently the loss of the church as a powerful influence in the shaping of our culture.
- 4) Fourth, I am concerned about the loss of, what I would call, the purity of classical and historical Calvinism with respect to the relationship of faith and reason and the intrusion, of what I consider to be, a neo-orthodox methodology into Calvinism.
- 5) Fifth, and this is perhaps, #5 and #6 are probably my two greatest concerns about this whole question of methodology. #5 is the concern of the problem of the intimidation of Christians in our culture. I know from being a college student and a college professor and seminary professor that I find that students in this day and age have been very much intimidated by the skeptical assault of the

intellectual credibility of their faith, and though it may not rob them of their own salvation, we're Calvinists, we don't think that could happen, but nevertheless, it makes them less active, less aggressive, less bold in the confrontation that they are called to have with the world because they feel that the tools of intelligence, of intellect, of sense perception, have been negotiated and granted as the province of the pagan.

6) And finally, I am deeply concerned about a methodology that might lead us into a Christian ghetto, where a Christian community is left with conversation with itself, we're living in a secular society that is assigned to us a reservation, where we can live in peace, as long as we understand the religion and theology is a matter of faith and is divorced and separated from questions of science and questions of rationality and a whole field of empirical investigation, we're allowed to have the province of faith, if we be good boys and girls and stay over on the reservation and mind our own business, they'll leave us alone and that way we can become less and less and less as a driving force in the changing and shaping of this world. I am very much afraid of an apologetic that would lead us to isolationism, rather than direct confrontation with the world on its own terms. Now, I still have three, four minutes here. I want to briefly outline on the board, if I can do this quickly, the way I understand the process by which John Calvin himself, understood the relationship between revelation, reason, apologetics etc...

We begin first of all with an affirmation of general revelation. Calvin clearly confirms, so I don't think there is any dispute about that among Calvinists. And general revelation is objective, it exists apart from us. It comes as part of God's self disclosure. That general revelation, in Calvin's terms, is of two kinds. And this is a crucial point and it is a point that in the interchange that we had in the afternoon, Greg, I didn't get a chance to respond to a comment that you made. But we will get at it later tonight I hope. And that is that that general revelation can be defined under two sub-headings: one of which we call mediate and the other of which we call immediate.

Classic roman catholic apologetics of course rejects the notion of immediate general revelation as being heretical, mystical subjectivism and endorsed Thomas Aquinas' view of mediate general revelation. Mediate general revelation meaning simply that our knowledge of God, this general revelation comes, it gives us a means by which we can know the God who stands behind that general revelation.

Immediate revelation would be a priori knowledge of God, a knowledge of God that is planted basically within the heart and soul and the mind of man.

Immediate revelation is what we call the *sensus divinitatus*, that Calvin speaks of in the Institutes, this inner knowledge and awareness of God, direct and immediate without any kind of external means to stand between man and God. But also, Calvin has a view of mediate general revelation by which nature and, Calvin called it, creation and providence, which we can call history, serve as a

means by which God is known. All right, that's the thomistic notion of mediate general revelation, there is an intermediate stage, we don't have a direct apprehension of God through nature but by studying the works of nature, nature becomes a means of pointing to the God beyond nature.

So we have general revelation which is both mediate and immediate, which produces natural theology. What I mean by natural theology is a knowledge of God that derived from nature itself, a knowledge of God that is derived from nature. The point that I want us to point out and stress, pretty much what we talked about with you in the taxi cab, is that knowledge of general revelation gets through. Rom 1 tells us that simply that there is a general revelation there, objective, available, anybody wants to see it, can read it but then we go around with our eyes closed so that it never gets through, no. It is perceived by man, it is understood by man, and the sin of man by which he is held inexcusable is not that he fails to get that knowledge, but the sin by which he is judged universally in Rom 1 is the fact that he knows God, knowing God, he does not honor him as God neither is he grateful. So the Bible tells us that man does in fact know God through the things that are made, the means or median of creation.

Ok, that natural theology for comment is there. However, Calvin says, that knowledge, that natural theology is always met immediately by the problem of the noetic effects of sin. We all know what that is. It's the effects of sin upon our minds. It clouds our reasoning and thinking process. Because of the noetic effects of sin, that general revelation produces the natural theology that gets through, nevertheless immediately becomes distorted and so it is ineffective to do anything other than to leave us without excuse. It's just enough knowledge to send us to hell, not enough knowledge to send us to heaven, because of the noetic effects of sin. It is ineffective in terms of salvation. The only thing that happens is that man distorts it and turns it into idolatry. You know Calvin's famous statement that man is a fabricam idolorum... a maker of idols. That is his natural propensity. All right, so because of that, inadequacy or ineffectiveness of this revelation, we need special revelation. And so he speaks of special revelation, and specifically about the Bible. Now, when Calvin speaks about the Bible, he says that the Bible itself also has objective, an objective basis for its credibility and truthfulness both internal and external indicia, as he calls it, evidences of its truthfulness.

But again, even the special revelation runs head on into man's wickedness, corruption, depravity, noetic effects of sin, that we refuse to submit to the clarity of the evidence. So, in order for even special revelation to bear salvific fruit in the soul, something else has to happen. And that of course is what Calvin calls the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Right? The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit adds no new content, no new argument, no new revelation but what it does, to quote Calvin, is that it gives us now the moral ability to acquiesce into the indici, that is the subjective transformation that the Holy Spirit gives to us, gives me the moral power to submit to the objective evidence. Now as a

Calvinist, I agree from the outset that all the evidence in the world, presented in with all the cogency of the world, will never lead a man to Jesus Christ. But there are other reasons for reconstruction natural theology, which I have already indicated apart from evangelism, and one that Calvin himself mentions that the evidence is there and is powerful enough to “stop the mouths of the obstreperous” who slander Christ with their attacks that there is no objective basis for the hope and the faith that lies within us. The evidentialist is working on the situation of calling attention to the objective ground basis for the subjective response of faith that we have that is evoked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That’s what we’re about, those are what our concerns are. We can talk more about it after Dr Bahnsen has his opportunity to give his presentation.

(20:18 mark)

Bahnsen:

Not only do we have a lot of points of view in common, we have and entangled as well. I want to begin just with a brief personal remark to reinforce what has already been said twice just to let you know how thoroughly I am in agreement with the fact that we are all Calvinists in this here adventure here of apologetics and we all have an awful lot of common concerns. In fact, while I have promised not to respond to the first talk, I think that it should be made clear that RC is talking for more than simply one school of apologetics at many of those points, of which I won’t mention until the question period. But we certainly have a lot in common and RC and I had a very pleasant plane ride for about 3 hours together last winter in which we had a chance to get down to the mat on some of these things and find out that we aren’t really so far apart as one might provisionally think.

And so, there is a lot in common however, this evening it is my job to try and set before you what is a distinctive point of view in apologetics. And I’ll try to do within my time limit. You all know my prevailing sins in that area (audience laughing).

I’m going to say two things apologetics is not. I’m going to give you Scripture verses and then I want to tell you what I see as the apologetical situation, secondly, the requirements of the apologist and finally, the procedure for defending the faith.

An awful lot in 15 minutes.

First thing that apologetics is not

First, two things apologetics is not. Apologetics is not mere persuasion. Much of the popular literature in the area of theistic and anti-theistic apologetics consists of highly polemical and emotional efforts at converting others. And to be sure it is often our duty to seek to convince others of our own position.

Sadly, however, these efforts too frequently take a form that substitutes psychological persuasion for careful and fair argumentation. Both believers and unbelievers are guilty of this, at least in my estimation.

And it is a sad fact of life that logically poor arguments are often psychologically effective in convincing people of the truth of a position. Conversely, good arguments can be psychologically ineffective. And we may consequently find ourselves confronted by a moral dilemma when we discover that certain bad arguments and glib slogans will be found more convincing by a larger audience than what are in fact really good arguments.

And when we, on top of this, judge the issue that is being disputed to be one of high importance in our lives, such as in the case of apologetics, we are especially tempted to put these bad arguments in the service of the truth.

The Christian apologist ought to be the one person on earth who will resist this temptation. For we only dishonor the truth and ultimately dishonor the Lord of truth when we use fraudulent and suspicious forms of argument in promoting the truth. So the first quest of apologetics is not mere persuasion. We may persuade a lot of people to become Christians on the basis of very bad arguments. But our task as apologists is to find good arguments; one which will not be found out later to be fraudulent when somebody with greater intellectual talent comes along to investigate.

Second Thing It Is Not

Secondly, apologetics does not merely deal in probabilities. This is an important point. Apologetics is not merely persuasion. Secondly, apologetics is not merely dealing with probabilities.

We are to have a reasoned defense of the conviction, the hope that is within us, according to 1 Peter 3. And basing our thinking on the apostolic word we can, according to Acts 2:36, know assuredly. In the Greek word, know without any doubt whatsoever, that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. Indeed, the Gospel comes to us that we might, quote, “know the certainty of our Christian teaching” – Luke 1:4.

The Gospel comes not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and full assurance – 1 Thessalonians 1:5. And the word there for “full assurance” ... means full conviction, assurance, certainty, perfect faith not marred by any doubts whatsoever. The Bible speaks of our full assurance of understanding – Colossians 2:2; and our full assurance of hope in Hebrews 6:11.

Abraham is called the father of the faithful and Paul says that he was not weak in faith but had full certainty with respect to God’s word – Romans 4:19 & 21. And thus Hebrews tells us to draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith – Hebrews 10:22. And then verse 23 goes on to exhort us to hold fast the confession of our hope unyieldingly in Christ. We surpass human probabilities. And we can have bold access and confident faith, Paul says, in Ephesians 3. And so while the confidence of the godless is like a spider’s web, Job 8:14, in the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, Proverbs 14:26. And the reason Proverbs says that is that it begins by saying that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge – Proverbs 1:7. And we who put our confidence in Jehovah may, quote, “know the certainty of the words of truth” – Proverbs 22:17-21.

And thus, I maintain it is wrong to think that certainty in epistemological matters is limited to formal logic and mathematics. Certainty, full certainty, full confidence without doubt, without yielding, without qualification, pertains to the matters of the Christian faith.

John's purpose in writing his first epistle was especially that his readers might have confident knowledge of their salvation. And therefore, our confession of faith teaches us that believers "may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace." And it goes on to make very clear what the meaning is when it says this certainty is not a bare conjectural or probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope but is an infallible assurance of faith.

And so, apologetics is dealing with the hope that is in us; the full conviction, not probabilities – full assurance, full demonstration. By the way, talk of moral persuasion and moral certainty at this point is simply a cop out. For whatever that strange state of mind called moral assurance is supposed to be, it certainly cannot be compatible with mere rational probability. Moral assurance is to be based on the apprehended strength of the evidence. And as all philosophers who have spoken of this suspicious state of mind have said, it is to be proportioned to the certainty of the evidence itself.

So apologetics is not merely persuasion and it's not merely dealing in probabilities. Well what is it? It won't get us very far to say what's not. I want to make very clear; we are not talking about how to persuade people. We're talking about the grounds for Christian truth. And we're talking about not "probably true" but "fully true", "unyieldingly true".

What is apologetics?

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:20, "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world (or of this age)? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" In one phrase, I think that's the battle cry of presuppositional apologetics. "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this age?"

And our twofold apologetical procedure can be found in Proverbs 26:4-5. This is how we show the foolishness of the wisdom of this age. Proverbs says, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou be likened to him". Don't answer a fool according to his approach to things; according to his folly; according to his assumptions and presuppositions (if I can import that term). Don't answer him that way, because then you're going to be like him. You are going to be an enemy behind lines.

Proverbs goes right on to say, though, "Answer a fool according to his folly". Not a violation of the law of contradiction; a twofold procedure. First, don't answer him according to his folly lest you fall into the same pit with him. But then, answer him according to his folly. Why? "Lest he be wise in his own conceit". You must show him that he has no grounds for conceited knowledge. You must show him that God has made foolish the wisdom of this age.

Paul says in Colossians 2, “They in Christ are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge”. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; be they pertaining to logic or to causality or to natural science or morality or whatsoever. All knowledge is deposited in Christ and thus Paul goes on to say since, “All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Christ see to it that no one robs you” – through what? – “vain philosophy and empty deception”. And how does he describe vain philosophy? [It is] that which is according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of worldly learning, rather than according to Christ.

A presuppositionalist says, “Answer not a fool according to his elementary principles of learning because you’ll become like him. Rather, answer him according to your own presuppositions, those which are according to Christ.” And then you will be able to conclude with Paul, “Hasn’t God made foolish the wisdom of this world”.

Apologetical Situation

And the nature of the apologetical situation can be briefly put this way. The controversy between the believer and the unbeliever is in principle, I say in principle, an antithesis between two complete systems of thought. And one’s factual evidence will be accepted and evaluated in light of those governing presuppositions.

Thirdly, all chains of argumentation, especially over matters of ultimate personal importance, will trace back to and will depend on starting points which are taken as self [authenticating??]. Thus, circularity in debate will be unavoidable. But that is not to say that all circles that are intelligible are valid.

Fourthly, in that case, appeals to logic, and appeals to fact, and appeals to personality may be necessary in apologetics but they are never apologetically adequate. What is needed is not piecemeal replies; probabilities; or isolated evidences. But, rather [it is] an attack upon the underlying presuppositions of the unbeliever’s system of thought.

And fifthly, the unbeliever’s system of thought can be characterized as follows:

1) By nature, the unbeliever is the image of God and therefore he is inescapably religious. His heart testifies continually to him, as does also the clear revelation of God around him, that God exists and He has a certain character.

2) Secondly, the unbeliever exchanges the truth of God for a lie. He is a fool, who refuses to begin his thinking with reverence to the Lord. He will not build on Christ’s self-evidencing words. He will suppress the unavoidable revelation of God in nature.

3) Third, because he delights not in understanding, but chooses to serve the creature rather than the creator, the unbeliever is self-confidently committed to his own ways of thought. Being convinced that he could not be fundamentally wrong; he flaunts perverse thinking and challenges the self-attesting word of God.

4) Consequently, fourthly, the unbeliever's thinking results in ignorance. In his darkened, futile mind, he actually hates knowledge and can gain only a knowledge falsely so-called, as Paul says at the end of 1st Timothy. To the extent that he actually knows anything, it is due to his unacknowledged dependence upon suppressed truth; the suppressed truth of God within him. And this renders the unbeliever intellectually schizophrenic. By his espoused way of thinking, he is actually opposing himself and showing a need for a radical change of mind, that he might have a genuine knowledge of the truth.

5) Next, the unbeliever's ignorance is nonetheless a culpable ignorance because he is excuse-less for his rebellion against God's revelation. Hence he is, as Paul says, "without an apologetic". [This is] the literal translation of the Greek – "without an apologetic" for his thoughts.

6) And finally, the unbelief of the unbeliever does not stem from a lack of factual evidence, but from his refusal to submit to the authoritative word of God from the beginning of his thinking.

Requirements of the Apologist

Now I say that's the nature of the situation into which we are tossed as apologists. That is the nature of the world, God, revelation and the unbeliever. What are the requirements of us as apologists now?

1) Well, I would say first of all the apologist must have a proper attitude. He can't be arrogant or quarrelsome. He must, with humility and respect, set forth his arguments in a gentle and peaceable fashion.

2) Secondly, the apologist must have a proper starting point. He must take God's word as his self evidencing presupposition; thinking God's thoughts after him, rather than attempting to be neutral in his debate. And viewing God's word as more sure than his personal experience of the facts.

3) Thirdly, the apologist must have a proper method. Working on the unbeliever's unacknowledged presuppositions and being firmly grounded in his own presuppositions, the apologist must aim to cast down every high imagination exalted against the knowledge of God by aiming to bring every thought, his own, as well as his opponents (by the way, every thought) captive to the obedience of Christ.

4) Fourthly, the apologist must have the proper goal; securing the unbelievers unconditional surrender without compromising the apologist's fidelity to the Word. The word of the cross must be used to expose the utter pseudo-wisdom of the world as destructive foolishness. And Christ must be set apart as Lord in one's heart, as Peter says in 1 Peter 3. Thus acknowledging no higher authority than God's word, and refusing to suspend intellectual commitment to the truth of that Word.

Well, that's the nature of the situation. Those are the requirements on the apologist; how does he do his work?

Procedure for Defending the Faith

Lastly, I'll speak on the procedure for defending the faith – five points.

1. One, realizing that the unbeliever is holding back the truth in unrighteousness, the apologist should reject the foolish presuppositions implicit in critical questions and he must rather attempt to educate his opponent.

2. And that will involve presenting the facts, secondly, within the context of the biblical philosophy of fact. Notice we do present the facts; we are evidentialists. But we present them within a presuppositional framework where they make sense. And that framework is that God is the sovereign determiner of all possibility and impossibility. A proper reception and understanding of the facts will require submission to the Lordship of Christ. The facts will be significant to the unbeliever only if he has a presuppositional change of mind from darkness to light. And Scripture has the authority to declare what has happened in history and to interpret what has happened. Not simply to declare that Jesus rose from the dead, but that He did so to secure our justification.

3. Thirdly, the unbeliever's espoused presuppositions must be forcefully attacked asking whether knowledge is even possible given those espoused presuppositions. In order to show that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world, the believer can place himself on the unbeliever's position and answer him according to his folly lest he be wise in his own conceit. That is, demonstrate the outcome of unbelieving thought with its assumptions. The unbelievers claim should be reduced to impotence and impossibility by what I call the internal critique of his system. That is, we must demonstrate the ignorance of unbelief by arguing from the impossibility of anything contrary to Christianity – full assurance of the faith.

4. Fourthly, the apologist should appeal to the unbeliever as the image of God who has the clear and inescapable revelation of God to him, thus giving him an eradicable knowledge of his Creator. And this knowledge can often be exposed by indicating unwitting expressions in the unbeliever or by pointing to the borrowed capital, his un-admitted presuppositions which can be found in his system.

5. And then finally, the apologist should declare the self-evidencing and authoritative truth of God as the precondition of intelligibility and man's only way of salvation from all of the effects of sin, be they ignorance or intellectual vanity. Lest the apologist become like the unbeliever, he should not answer him according to his folly but according to God's word.

The unbeliever can be invited to put himself on the Christian position in order to see that it provides the necessary grounds for intelligible experience and factual knowledge, thereby concluding that it alone is reasonable to hold and that it is the very foundation for proving anything whatsoever.

And finally, the apologist can also explain that Scripture accounts for the unbeliever's state of mind, his hostility, and the failure of men to acknowledge the necessary truth of God's revelation. Moreover, Scripture provides the only

escape from the effects of this hostility and failure, be they intellectual futility or eternal damnation.

Dr Dewitt

Thank you. Now we will have opportunity for questions. I wasn't going to do this, but I am going to take the prerogative as chairman of the meeting and ask one question before I turn the opportunity of asking questions over to you.

Dr Sproul, did I hear you say that the presuppositionalist apologetic represents an abandonment to neo-orthodox methodology?

Sproul: An abandonment?

Dewitt: Well, an adoption of their methodology, in other words an abandonment of classic reformed....(???)

Sproul: You might have it on tape, but I want to...

Dewitt: Something like that, I'd like for you to expatiate on that a little bit, what you meant by that.

Sproul

All right. What I had originally prepared for tonight, but with time did not permit to do, was to give a brief historical reconnaissance of the historical rise of fideism as an alternative to natural theology as a method, metaphysics, philosophy and theology. What I was having in mind there was that from a methodological perspective, neo-orthodoxy is noted, particular Barth, for its very stringent rejection of natural theology and by its replacing natural theology with a fideistic approach or defense of the Christian faith. I am very much afraid of that method's broader implication. I don't know how exactly I said that and enumerated my concerns. But to state the differences as sharply as I can, in terms of the statement of concern, Patrick Dar..... my words carefully here because I am not saying, I am glad that you asked this question, that anybody who is a presuppositionalist is neo-orthodox, as a crypto-neo-orthodox, crypto-Barthian, or crypto-existentialist. I don't mean to say that at all. I want to make that very very clear. But I am afraid of the implications of the method. For these reasons, I think that, first of all that the presuppositionalist approach gives the pagan an excuse for his rejection of God because the pagan is sharp enough to see the fallacy of circular reasoning upon which presuppositionalism is established.

I don't like this to have the pagan to have that excuse to say "Hey God, the reason I didn't believe in you is because all those that were defending you gave me an argument that violated formal canons of logic."

Second of all, when we start our argument by the direct affirmation and assertion and existence of God, we are in a real dangerous bind of subjectivism. Well, I just say "God is". That's my starting point. There is a God. The authority by which I say that, humanly speaking, in terms of the argument, is the fact that I am the one that who is saying it. Now, if I don't have an objective, evidential basis for that, that we call "subjectivism". It's a matter of decision of a faith that is not resting upon objective criteria of evidence. That is what I meant by an intrusion of an existential or neo-orthodox method into theology and philosophy. God forbid

that I should ever call Dr Van Til or any of his disciples existentialists! I don't believe they are, by any means. But I think that it's a happy inconsistency at that point. And this is a fear, a concern. That's why I said it is important for us to see what is... I know that Greg is gonna have the opportunity, I hope he will take the time to say their concerns. Their concerns is that we are yielding too much to the humanists, we're gonna to end up in autonomy, the human mind end up in Cartesian rationalist, and all that sort of thing, and compromise the assuredness that he's already mentioned about the word of God.

But the only argument I hear so far in the presuppositionalist's apologetics is "I start with the assertion of the existence of God" which assertion is precisely the issue under dispute! And I offer no evidence! I just say that's the way it is!

That's good evangelism. But I think it's the death blow, it's fatal to apologetics as a reply to the pretenders of the truth that Greg has so beautifully described. I think we have another problem of the confusion of ontology and epistemology, which I'm sure this discussion will get at sooner or later. But that's answering your question.

Dewitt:

Do you wish to say something, Prof Bahnsen?

Bahnsen:

Yes. (audience laughing). In the first place, I want to make very clear that the position I hold in apologetics and the position advocated for over 40 yrs by Dr Van Til is by no means whatsoever, and it is highly inappropriate to use the word in the same room, fideism. It is not subjectivism, it is not anti-rationalism, it is not a denial of objective criteria and grounds for belief. In fact, you will find strenuous statements in Dr Van Til's literature, as you will find in my limited literature, to the fact that there is an objective argument for the existence of God, that it is inescapable and no man has rational grounds to think that he can reject it. So that's not fideism at all, not at all. It doesn't come close to subjectivism, it doesn't give the pagan an excuse either because it doesn't say to him that we have one circle here and another circle there and well, I guess it's different strokes for different folks, take the one you want.

That isn't the presuppositionalist argument! The argument is "you're reasoning in a circle. And it is a destructive circle. And I may be reasoning in a circle but it is one which it encompasses your thought and everything valid in your thought as well as other things. It gives science a foundation.

Now, this word about presuppositional and circular argumentation needs to be expanded just a bit more. Let us say that I, as a Christian, am dealing with a man who is a committed and exhausted empiricist. He believes that sense perception is the test of all truth, whatsoever. So, his ultimate presupposition is that sense perception is the standard of truth.

Now consider a man who wants to debate with the empiricist at this point. And he brings an argument, we will call it argument A, to bear on the empiricist.

And another man comes into the room and he uses argument B with the empiricist. Now if argument A is in fact predicated on an ultimate presupposition which denies that sense perception is the standard of truth and the empiricist buys argument A, would you please notice that he can only buy that argument by rejecting his presupposition? That is, he can't buy that argument and keep his presupposition because this is predicated on the denial of that as the ultimate standard of truth.

On the other hand, if somebody arguing on the basis of sense perception being the standard of truth goes along with his argument, and the empiricist buys it, he buys it because he is already committed to sense perception as being the standard of truth.

Now, nobody is talking about what has been referred to by RC as the elementary logical fallacy of circular reasoning. Nobody says that A is true because A is true. We're talking about transcendental thinking and that's a very important area of epistemology. It goes far beyond elementary (modal?) logic, far beyond Helean empiricism. And in fact, if anything, it has its roots in what is really the continental tradition of Kant of asking about the preconditions of all knowledge, be it logic, or sense perception or whatever.

And what the presuppositionalist says is you must recognize that an ultimate standard is just that: ultimate. And if you have an argument for that ultimate standard that is other than the ultimate standard, then that other argument is your ultimate standard. Do you understand, that you can't establish your ultimate point by going behind it, because if you could go behind it to find some grounds for it there, *that* would be your ultimate standard.

And so then the question is how do you argue to this (pointing to chalkboard)?

And the fact is the only way you can argue is in a way consistent with your presuppositions. And the only way that you can establish your presuppositions is transcendently. And that is circular argumentation. It has nothing to do with the flat line circularity of begging the question.

And then finally, the objective criteria and evidence of the presuppositionalist is precisely the revelation of God, which gets through. I agree with RC, it gets through to every man. And I want to maintain it gets through to every man whether he has been to college or not, whether he has a junior high diploma or not, whether he knows anything about Aristotelian logic or symbolic logic or knows anything about Hume or any philosopher, I don't care if it's Sophie the washwoman, she knows God, and Paul says, is without excuse for her rejection. And I must have a method of argumentation which meets those facts, not simply of mediate, natural theology, but an argument based upon the clear, perspicuous, and certain revelation of God that comes through to everybody though nature.

Sproul: Would you please repeat that last? I didn't hear whether you said mediate or immediate.

Bahnsen: The knowledge which all men have is immediate.

Sproul: And not mediate?

Bahnsen: And not mediate.

Sproul: Do you differ with Calvin at that point?

Bahnsen: I'm not going to debate the historical exegesis of Calvin, really. I don't think I differ with Calvin, but that's really a question for the church history department.

Dewitt: Oh, I wouldn't have (audience laughing). I think you're both wrong on Calvin. (audience laughing). Greg Fresno (audience member), stand up when you ask your questions and tell us your name.

Audience member: My name is Greg RC, you recall in Atlanta, asking a question, which I think is perhaps not right along this lines of argument, but it has to do with mediate and immediate logic, what is your standard for making a decision, thinking God's thoughts after him. And I asked you the question that if Satan came up and tempted Eve and said "Did God tell you...." And she looked at it and she looked at the tree and instead of saying "Yeah, I'll take it" she said, "No, I'm getting fat. I better not take it." I asked you that question, and you said that you would ponder it. I would ask the same question when I return (????) I think that it deals with the question on what standard should she have made her reply. Now I did make the mistake then, when I said, as far as my communication to you, that she was simply to make this reply.... It had to be her reply. But on what standard does that reply be made? So, if she had said, "Nah, I'm getting fat. I won't take it." Would she have sinned? Now I know that granted that this is not how it happened. But this is the point of the argument. And I would also like to ask Dr Bahnsen.

Sproul: Well, before she ate the forbidden fruit and was fallen, I figured that she had the most fantastic figure in the world and she wasn't the least bit worried about getting fat. (audience laughing).. That's right... (unintelligible discussion)... Greg, I'm actually not sure I understand that question. You know? Did you understand that question?

Bahnsen: Yeah.

(audience laughing)

Sproul: Did you? Could you help me with it a little?

Bahnsen: I'll give you something to shoot at. Ok? I'll give an answer and then...

Sproul: We're going to hear him first, and then that maybe will clarify the questions in my mind..

Bahnsen: As I understand it, Greg is asking about the moral foundations of epistemology. You see, Eve is confronted with a situation. Satan says, "Take the fruit." God says, "Don't take the fruit." She's gotta make a decision. On what grounds ought she to make the decision? And by grounds here, we mean what rational grounds should she use, and by "ought" we mean, what morally was her duty?

And I was searching quickly here, and I'm afraid the exact address escapes me, but Paul warns the church at one point, that he doesn't want the church to be

deluded by the, how does he put it now exactly.... As I recall, it's something to the effect with the subtlety with which Eve was led astray. The subtlety with which she was led astray. That is, it's not simply that she was led astray, but it's the very subtle reasoning by which she was led astray. And what was the subtle reasoning of Satan? "Hath God said that?" That is, he questioned the authority of God's self attesting word. And I would answer, as a presuppositionalist, as much as it is the heretical hypothetical "What if Eve would have done this, that or the other", if Eve would have remained pure in the sense that... in the external sense she did not eat the fruit, but wouldn't have done it because she was afraid that would lose that marvelous figure she was given a creation, she would have in fact have sinned, because the question of the fruit wasn't the question of some magical potent or anything like that. It is a question of obedience to the Lordship of God alone. In this case, CS Lewis has made so very clear, he is not a presuppositionalist, Lewis says that that command was totally arbitrary on God's part. It wasn't because the fruit was poisoned or anything like that. It was just to see whether she would have an obedient frame of mind and so I'd say that if she in fact didn't eat the fruit in order to save her figure, she would have then shown that she was using a criteria which was immoral because the real issue is whether she would be submissive to God's thoughts, and not her own.

Sproul: That really helps me understand the question and I would certainly agree that in the conclusion that Greg just gave about she just refrained because of her figure and rather than out of this genuine desire to please God in obedience that that would have been sin even though she would have external conformity to the law, her internal motivation would have been corrupt. I agree with that completely.

However, I just wanted to comment a little bit about the context about that particular situation. First of all, Eve did have direct and immediate communication with our Creator, which we do not have in the same way: face to face, verbal communication.

I think the subtlety of what Satan did was not asking.... he was not asking anything about how do you know this was God who told you to eat or not eat of this tree. You remember the full quotation, when Satan said "Hath God said that you should not" what "eat of any tree in the garden?" There is the subtlety, because God had not said that and Satan knew very well God had not said that. Here, enter Jean-Paul Satre who is telling us every day that unless we are autonomous, we are not really free. If we are answerable on any single point to anyone or anything beyond ourselves, we are not free. In fact, he turns around the classical arguments for the existence of God and uses them as an argument against the existence of God: if man is, God can't be.... because God would destroy the essence of our humanness which is subjective freedom and autonomy.

Now the subtlety of Satan is he's putting the idea in her mind that if God made one restriction on you, you are really not free. But I don't think that there was

anything going on there in terms about the debate about the existence of God. I don't think that was in question at all.

Let me finish this, ok? Let me respond.

But how does she know the truth? Greg's heard me talk about this on other occasions, from the neo-orthodox perspective where they glory in contradictions and (.....) you've heard the statement.. Fruehner made it. Contradiction is the hallmark of truth, ok? Let's assume that that's the case.

Contradiction is the hallmark of truth.

-And now, God says "Don't eat of the tree".

-Serpent comes along and says "You know, eat of the tree."

-God says "if you eat of the tree, you will die. If A, B will follow." Ok?

-Satan says "If you eat of the tree, you will not die, but you will be as God."

-Now God says "If A, then B". Satan comes along and says "If A, then non-B" ok?

Now, he's pretty sharp. He's got out of the noetic effects of sin, that's (unintelligible)

And she says "That's a contradiction. Satan is speaking in direct contradiction to what my Creator, I know to be God, has commanded me to do. Ok?

"But" says Eve "contradiction is the hallmark of truth. So, the serpent must be speaking the truth. God is the truth. The serpent must be a representative of God. It's my moral duty to eat of the tree. That's how neo-orthodoxy works with that one. Ok? So, what I'm saying is rationality and the law of contradiction was built in to that very first..... (audio cut off)..

Dewitt: You gotta be brief. Very brief. (audience laughing).

Bahnsen: Ok. Without a doubt, reason was built into what she was doing. The question becomes an apologetic: what are the foundations of that proper reason she used? After the fall, those foundations are now called into question. And the Scripture text that I was searching for is 2 Cor 11:3. Paul says "I'm afraid lest as the serpent deceive thee by his craftiness that your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion which is to Christ."

Dewitt: I'm sure there must be many questions. Yeah, Bill?

Bill: (unintelligible) Is that based on reason or experiential faith or a combination of both?

Bahnsen: Experiential faith meaning what in your question, Bill?

Bill: (unintelligible)...

Bahnsen: No, that's all right. You've said enough. I know what ballpark you are in. I would say it's neither. That it's not reason, if you mean by that, manipulation of the laws of logic as we might do our homework as seminary students. Or experiential faith in that we have put it to the test in experience and found out that it works out. By the way, neither one of those can give you the assurance, the infallible assurance that you are saved that the Bible offers us. I would say rather that God has given a clear revelation which can be defended because it is the only foundation for knowing anything whatsoever and that that clear revelation in

conjunction with the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit gives us an infallible assurance of our faith. But I do not believe that the Holy Spirit takes probable evidence or uncertain evidence and turns it into certain evidence or certainty or infallible assurance in our hearts. I think he takes certain evidence, infallible evidence and with his infallible moral persuasion turns it into infallible faith in our hearts.

Dewitt: Ok.. Identify yourself.. Josiah...

Audience member: You said something that I just wanted to know what you meant by it. You said.... confrontation with the world on its own terms...

Sproul: What I meant by that is apologetics in the classical sense of an ad hominem response where the world is coming from, where we come off the reservation and we duel with them in their own backyard.

Now I think what I meant by that, Josiah, I don't want to put words in Greg's mouth, but I would assume that that is not a point of controversy between us. I hope not. I'm always looking for more agreement than disagreement. I hope we are not going to uncover more disagreement.

What I mean by that is that the concern at this point is to show, we both agree, that the whole life and world view of the pagan is a built on a lie. God reveals himself clearly to all men. Men have that knowledge. They exchange the truth for the lie, therefore their thoughts become futile. We see brilliant men in the world. We see the Satre's and the Hume's of the world and their formidable minds, intellect, and they construct fantastically complex and intricate philosophical systems. And they are very intimidating to us sometimes to us. Very very clever. But we know that in the final analysis, their whole systems are an exercise in futility. And wouldn't that be the case if their starting point is a rejection of God's revelation, if they refuse to acknowledge what they know to be true at the beginning of their thinking, and Greg and I both agree, there is an objective general revelation, we are both agreeing that there is an objective natural theology. Gene...

Gene: I thought I heard you say that the noise gets through. (audience giggle).

Bahnsen: Objective general revelation. But natural theology is taking knowledge about nature, which does not itself have anything to do with presuppositions of God and all the rest, and moving from them independently and autonomously to another conclusion, namely that there is a god. What we are talking about is objective argument for God's existence, but I don't happen to think that it is natural theology. I think it is a transcendental argument.

Sproul: What I mean about natural theology, is, what I mean by theology is the knowledge of God. What I mean by a natural theology, is a knowledge of God that comes through nature. You don't buy that?

Bahnsen: Oh, I am willing to buy that. But there is a distinction within what you are calling the knowledge of God, whether it is mediate or immediate. And there is also a distinction between types of arguments.

Sproul: Ok.. So... well anyway.. forget it. I just thought that we had a point of agreement there, which obviously we don't. (audience laughing).. because... you're rejecting the mediate dimension?

Bahnsen: No, I am rejecting the nature of argument that the old Princeton school used to substantiate that knowledge of God.

Sproul: Ok.. But we are not into that at this point right now, Greg. We're just talking just simply about whether or not we agree that there was a natural theo... a natural knowledge of God that all men have.

Bahnsen: Again, I would say that it is immediate.

Sproul: Ok. (unintelligible)

Bahnsen: No, I would also say that the apologist can get an immediate, transcendental and an objectively valid proof of God's existence. But that is not what Aquinas is doing.

Sproul: Alright. Aquinas was going for mediate. Mediate, not immediate. He wanted to prove a mediate... That is what I am trying to do. That's what Calvin believed in, and we are ready to go. I've got the quotes here if you want me to document that. I'm not just saying that.. Calvin uses those very terms... mediate.. when he speaks of Rom 1:18-21, check it, look it up.

But the other point I want to get across here is that what we are both trying to do is show that those pagan systems which proceed from a rejection of general revelation, be it immediate or mediate, skip that for a minute, they still know that there is God. And they refuse to acknowledge God as God. Grant that. Ok? They all know that there is a god. Satre knows very well that there is a god. Hume knew that there was a God. Now, their starting point then, from the construction of their philosophy, is based upon a refusal to acknowledge what they knew to be true.

Paul calls that foolishness and if you were a careful exegete, you would realize that "fool" in the New Testament is not merely a judgment of one's intellectual capacity, it's a moral judgment. Foolishness is a sin from the NT perspective. So we have a moral problem of man now in this repression-suppression cycling, holding down... whatever you want to call it, of this general revelation. So, what the task of.. one of the tasks of the apologist is to expose the lie and the bankruptcy of this system that is built upon an initial refusal to acknowledge what man believes to be true. His starting point is a lie. Now on the basis of that lie, he can build very sophisticated and clever worldviews.

Both of us are trying to show the foolishness of it and expose the foolishness of it. I might, let me say this about the presuppositionalist school, in particular Westminster Seminary. I don't think that there is any other school in the history of the Christian church that has produced a more devastating, scintillating, and effective critique of alternate worldviews to Christianity than the advocates of the presuppositionalist school in general and Westminster Seminary in particular. Let me say it again. I don't think that there ever has been, in the history of the church, a single school or, I mean, an institution or a school of thought than the

disciples of Dr Van Til and company of the presuppositionalist school, have been more effective in exposing the weaknesses, and the fallacies in terms of comprehensive critiques of all alternate systems to Christianity. I have no dispute there. When it talks about challenging the grounds upon which these other life and world views are established. There, we are very very close, I think. Where our disagreement is on how we then replace what we have demolished with a positive presentation of the truthfulness of the Christian faith.

Now, getting back to the question about what I meant, Josiah, you were the one asking that, about going out and beating them on their own grounds. What I mean by that is to go out and show them and they say "We have reason... we have reason.. we believe that only that which is rationally demonstrative is true." Their presuppositions is rationalistic, or empiricism that Greg is talking about over here. Now, what I am going to try to show, by arguing on their own grounds is they can't have their cake and eat it too. I'm going to say: If you were really an empiricist, and have any cognizance whatsoever in sense perception, I am going to try to drive them to show them that sense perception as a method of knowing demands that they submit to a notion of God. Because without God, there is no guarantee whatsoever that sense perception has any correspondence to reality. And if he is a rationalist who is vying for the law of contradiction, who is saying, "When I'm gone, there is no guarantee that reality will correspond to reason." So I'm trying to show him, my argument is ... valid in an ad hominem fashion, that he can't have a viable sensory system or empirical system without God. And I am trying to show the rationalist that he can't even have his reason that he is trying to use to critique Christianity without God, because he is ultimately presupposing the existence of God as the basis for his rationality or sense perception without acknowledging that.. Ok?

(In the background, Bahnsen says amen).

Now there is where we are in total agreement. Now when he talks about a transcendental argument in Kantian terms about what is necessary for any of these things to make sense or to be meaningful, ultimately, in Kantian categories: transcendental doesn't mean transcendent in the normal ways that we use it, but he is just asking the question: what are the preconditions of knowledge? In that sense, Dr Van Til himself makes a distinction between ultimate and proximate presuppositions. You're asking me or any advocate of the evidential school... that God must be the ultimate presupposition of any knowledge, fact and truth, we say "Yay and amen, of course. Obviously." Unless there is a God, rationality is meaningless. Unless there is a God, sense perception ... blends into the type of skepticism Dr Clark talks about. We know that. We grant that. We're not dummies. We understand that rationality, for it to have any meaning, has to be based ultimately on God. We believe that and we know that.

The dispute takes place in how we proceed to argue over it. We want to move simply from epistemology to ontology. We must maybe misunderstand the presuppositionalists and this is why we'd like to get together and try to get this

because I only know Dr. Van Til from reading his books. I've met with him and had conversations but I haven't sat in his class and asked him a thousand questions like Greg has and others.

That's why I like to talk with advocates of the presuppositional school as much as we possibly can to clarify these differences, if they are, and maybe they're just tempest in the teapot. I don't know. But the point we're trying to get is we want to start with epistemology and move to ontology. They want to start with ontology and then show that all of epistemology is built upon that.

Bahnsen: Can I give my version of that?

Sproul: Sure.

Bahnsen: We're getting somewhere when we talk about what we have in common and what we don't. And boy, the last few minutes of what RC just sounds like pure presuppositionalism and it's just grand, and he's right. (audience laughing).

The question is, after you've done the internal critique, and you've shown the foolishness of unbelief and you've driven the man to his skepticism and his nihilism and all the rest, how do you then go about showing that it is not simply, you know, a shot in the dark? You know, he will say, "Well, now I want to be a Christian because it is pretty uncomfortable to be a nihilist and all the rest." That is, what is the nature of the positive argument for Christianity? By the way, that is the sort of thing that really encouraged me when RC and I had this plane trip and we were kind of going back and forth because it is quite evident that he and I want to both do that: destroy the unbeliever's system of belief and leave nothing to stand on.

But now if I can just.. what is the type of argumentation that is first morally required and epistemologically sound in dealing with a positive presentation of the Gospel? And I would say that the reason that I have this problem with accepting the term "natural theology" is that natural theology says that on autonomous grounds, that is, without ANY commitment to there being God or not, taking the neutral perspective, we can take some fact about the universe, for instance that every event has a cause and from that, we can reason to there being a god.

Now RC's presentation of the cosmological proof this afternoon for all of its detailed philosophical intricacies we may be talking about, my real problem has to do with this: one, I don't believe that the argument is sound. And secondly, even if it were, it would only lead to probability. And consequently, it is not an adequate apologetical tool. One, because good philosophers can in fact disprove that form of argumentation and secondly, even if they didn't disprove it, it would not give us, in fact, this full assurance we've been talking about.

On the other hand, there is a form of argumentation that's called "transcendental" that would say "nobody is autonomous and nobody is neutral and in fact, while

we all pretend to be autonomous and neutral, we couldn't even say that the grass in the field is green, we couldn't even do predication, as Van Til says, we couldn't predicate one thing of another if we didn't already depend upon the knowledge of God which we have immediately in creation, in conscience and all the rest. And so the transcendentalist says, "What are the preconditions of knowledge?" He doesn't argue from an immanent platform up to a transcendent God. He argues that in fact you couldn't know anything, you couldn't even argue at all one way or another, up, down, or sideways without a God. And so, that's why it is not moving from metaphysics to epistemology or epistemology to metaphysics that separates us. Let me explain that because I know some of you have not been in the technical courses where those terms are used.

Metaphysics is the doctrine of being, what is real, what is true, what is the structure of and what does actually exist in the universe. Those things which have existence: metaphysics. And the doctrine of God is a metaphysical doctrine because we are talking about there being a God, especially a trans-physical being, be it God or laws of logic, whatever it is. Metaphysics.

Epistemology asks, "how do you know what you know, what are the criteria of knowing, what is the belief state and the questions having to do with knowing and the knowing process."

Now RC is saying that he wants to start with epistemology and move to ontology, or metaphysics. Let's just start with the law of non-contradiction, the basic reliability of sense perception and the law of causality. And from those epistemological platforms, from that platform, move to the existence of God. What I want to say is you can't begin even with that platform if you don't already have the existence of God and that's not an ontological statement because we have agreed ontologically that there wouldn't be any logic or sense experience if God hadn't created the world unless there is a coherent God. I am making an epistemological point that it doesn't even make sense to use mathematics or empiricism or natural science of any sort without already knowing that there is a God that is the context in which interpretation and predication is possible. That's the transcendental argument, saying that the precondition of intelligibility and knowledge is already... the existence of God. And that does not purport to be a probable argument for God's existence but a certain argument, a necessary argument, an inescapable argument.

(1:15 mark)

And so, we may not be able to play this out, we may not be able to do our homework very well but what the program and what the criticism are, formally, is that natural theology, Thomas Aquinas, the old Princeton approach, one, does not use good philosophically sound reasoning, and two, if it did, it would only lead to probability and therefore would leave the unbeliever with an excuse for his unbelief, because there is only probability. Whereas the transcendental or presuppositional approach doesn't move from an autonomous, natural premise to a transcendent conclusion but says that in fact, that it is a transcendental or

precondition of all knowledge that you can't prove anything, you can't even prove that your car is out there in the parking lot without first ultimately presupposing that there is a God. And RC is right, Dr Van Til distinguishes between ultimate and proximate presuppositions.

Dewitt: Prof Bahnsen, how is that an argument?

Bahnsen: The transcendental argument?

Dewitt: How is what you have said now an argument?

Bahnsen: I will give you an example of a transcendental argument.

Dewitt: May I explain that? You've described it as a precondition and presupposition and an argument. I can understand that it is a presupposition and a precondition. But I would like a little clarification as to how it's an argument. How it's an argumentative form.

Bahnsen: Yeah, of course, Kant's not the subject of discussion of tonight that, you can be very sure that Immanuel Kant thought that he was arguing in his Critique of Pure Reason and when he set forth his transcendental philosophy. But I'll give you a simpler thing to follow transcendentially that was much prior to Kant and something which neither RC or I would dispute with, I would imagine, in Aristotle.

Aristotle says "how do you prove the law of non-contradiction?" And in his short paragraph, and it's very short and it's devastating, Aristotle says "Well, you can either try to argue for it on its own grounds, in which case it is circular reasoning. Or you can have an argument that goes to other premises and other premises and other premises which lead to eternity and never settle the issue, because neither one of those are going to be....work. But, he says, we can argue for the law of non-contradiction from the impossibility of the contrary. He says "Pretend that you don't hold to the law of non-contradiction. What are the effects?" In fact, you can't even argue if you don't hold to the law of non-contradiction. And for all this talk about rationality and logic and all that, Dr. Van Til, Frame, Bahnsen and Poythress and all the rest, we've never denied that for a moment. The question is, whether the law of non-contradiction is in fact its own ground epistemologically, or whether there must be something beyond that, and I would argue that there is. But Aristotle has a transcendental argument from the impossibility of contrary and that's exactly Van Til's language when he says we can prove that God exists from the impossibility of the contrary.

Sproul: At that point it's an argument of necessary beings. Let me ask him a question here that may help everybody. When you talk to me about a transcendental argument a la Kant, I said this to you on the plane and we never got a chance to really speak about it. Are you saying, Greg, that, or what I am hearing, is that your understanding of Van Til is that what Van Til is coming up with here is a very sophisticated and somewhat subtle restatement of the ontological argument?

Bahnsen: In my apologetics classes, I have what is called a reconstruction of the ontological argument along presuppositional lines. The difficulty is most of this is

developed by John Frame and myself and you don't find it anywhere in Van Til's literature. In a sense, you can call it a reconstruction of the ontological argument. But you see in another sense, it is a reconstruction of the cosmological argument. And ultimately, I think some interpreters of Van Til are right when they say that it is really a reconstruction of the teleological argument. What it's saying is basically, in Van Til's little pamphlet "Why Do I Believe in God" which is really perhaps the best single statement of what he does in apologetics, you can find (1) it shows the character of the man, a precious Christian gentleman that he is and secondly, it shows the nature of his reason, from the impossibility of the contrary. Van Til says, "You know, on your presuppositions, you cannot account for either order or disorder. That is, unity or disunity in this world. You cannot—you can't, uh, show me why there is unity or disharmony in anything. Why everything is not the same or why everything is not ultimately diverse." He says, "On the other hand, on my system of thought, I can give you the basis for unity and diversity, the one and the many." And therefore, that's a transcendental argument.

But you see, in a subtle sense, that sounds like the teleological argument. I can—I can show you the rational or the intellectual epistemological order of all things if you start with my God, the revelation of my God. It's certainly not teleological in the—in the traditional, natural, theological sense but it has a parallel or an analogy, something of a reflection of that. But you're right, there's elements of the ontological movement in that, uh, transcendental thing as well. By the way, that's, as a philosopher what fascinates me so much: it is a very subtle but powerful argument.

Dewitt: You have a question? Somebody back—Craig, yes.
(1:20 mark)

Craig: [Unintelligible]. I'd like to go for a moment to the ontological argument. That's a separate point, uh, forcing this man or helping this man to [unintelligible] out of his system [unintelligible] is there anything at that point which out of necessity forces him or drives him to move to special revelation [unintelligible] so that he might say "I accept then that the chances of self-existence are greater [unintelligible]"

Sproul: I think that's an excellent question, and the uh, I sort of quickly alluded to the answer to that today but it was so quick that maybe you didn't pick it up, but what I was getting at, in apologetics, defense of the Christian faith, I'm not interested in stopping at this self-existent eternal something. Ok? We want to get to the Cross. And that's why I said where—He says, "Ok, that's all there is." Then we go, as Calvin would say, from creation to providence, which means dealing now with special revelation as it occurs in history and specifically as it's recorded in the Scriptures. So the next major item of apologetics has to be the defense of

the historical integrity and reliability of Holy Writ. Ok? So that's where I would take him next because general revelation only gives us general knowledge of God. It doesn't give us the Trinity; it doesn't give us the redemptive process and all of that.

Can I finish this? And then you can respond.

And of course, as soon as we get into questions of history, as I was saying today, you get more and more and more and more and more into induction. And that's what everybody seems to be all uptight about. Because induction involves the problematics of sense perception and this whole thing that Dr. Bahnsen has been stressing, and that's the question of assurance and certainty. And I'm not—I'd like to take three minutes and connect the answer to your question and at the same time be responding to some of the things that Greg has pointed out, because this whole question of certainty is one that I keep getting all the time. One of the cheap criticisms we get is that all we leave people with are probabilities. Whereas, the Presuppositionalist's approach leaves us with certainty. And I certainly am the first one prepared to say that I can get very muddle-headed at times and miss things that I shouldn't miss. But I still have not been able to see how a higher degree of certainty comes through Presuppositionalism than through our system because it looks to me like we get less certainty.

And let me explain why I'm getting into this and why we get into history and [unintelligible] and the whole thing. Let me use the standard syllogism as an example of the basic problem of, of uh, object/subject, epistemology, and ontology. Let's take the old one. "All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore Socrates is mortal." Now. Let's look at the conclusion, "Socrates is mortal.". Have I proven that Socrates is mortal in this syllogism?

Bahnsen: If your premises are true, yes.

Sproul: If my premises are true, then I have given you demonstrative compelling argumentation for the truth of the conclusion, "Socrates is mortal." That I call philosophical certainty. It's compelling. Rationally compelling. But what is the problem with it? The truth of the conclusion depends on the truth of the premises. How do we know that all men are mortal? Can we ever know with certainty that all men are mortal? I'm talking about philosophical certainty. What would it take for us to know that all men are mortal? All men would have to die. And for me to know that all men are mortal, the only way I can know it is posthumously, [Audience laughing] all right? I can look at ten zillion examples of mortality but,

(1:25 mark)

and from an empirical perspective, an inductive perspective, I'll never be able to know that this side of the grave.

Bahnsen: Unless God told you before you...

Sproul: Unless God told me. Ok? But then I have to face the question, “How do I know that

the voice I heard in my ear was the voice of God?” Because I’m still dependant upon my sense perception and induction at that point of distinguishing that voice from the voice of the devil. So, anyway, in terms of my syllogism here, my primary premise is dependant to some degree on induction, which throws me into a level of uncertainty. How do I know Socrates—even if I do know that all men are mortal, how do I know that this particular fellow, Socrates, is a man? Maybe he’s a clone. See? [Audience laughing]. Maybe he’s a bi—you know, a first century or fourth century BC bionic reconstruction. You know. There were a lot of good slight of hand magicians in those days. How do I know for sure he’s a man? For absolute certainty? No. The evidence is pretty strong, empirically, that he is, but I don’t know that for certainty. I don’t know all there is to know about that individual. All I can say is that if all men are mortal, if Socrates is a man, then certainly he’s mortal. I can tell you that much. Ok?

That’s where I was trying to get to actually today, that if something exists now, I can tell you this much: something’s always existed ‘cause something can’t come from nothing. That I’m certain about. Ok? Now. But the fact that something exists, that anything exists, that even I exist, involves induction, and that gives us uncertainty. The only way we can have absolute philosophical certainty about anything is in the pure formal realm. [Audio issue; repeats last two sentences]. Now unfortunately that doesn’t get us into the real world. And as soon as we get into induction, we get into the level of uncertainty. Ok?

And here’s the problem with that word “certainty. That word “certainty” is used in at least three different ways. One, in terms of philosophical, rational, demonstrability, that is compelling. Ok? My assertion is only formal logic and deduction can do that. That doesn’t help us in terms of getting to the real world. Two, the term “certainty” is used to describe a feeling state that is associated with an idea or an assertion. Here I think David Hume has done us a great service in his analysis of the nature of belief. You can say to me, “Do I believe in God?” and I can say to you, “No!”, or I can say to you, “No”, or I can say, “I don’t think so”, or I can say, “I don’t know”, or I can say, “Maybe”, or I can say, “I think so”, or I can say, “Yeah”, or I can say “Yes! And I’m ready to die for it”. All those are different degrees of statements of feeling state that associate with an idea. We talk about surety or an assurance, the anchor that holds our souls, that makes us go the way they go.

Then the other kind of certainty we talk about is what we call—that Greg called moral, er, a cop-out, and that’s moral certainty. I don’t think it is a cop-out. We use it very effectively in our society. Let me give you an example of what I’m talking about. Guy comes into a courtroom, he’s on trial for murder. Let’s take Jack Ruby. On a television screen fifty million people watch him shoot down Lee Harvey Oswald in a Dallas Police Station. Not only fifty million people see it on tv and record it on video-tape, but there’s fifty people in the room that see him do it in person. The gun is in his hands, his fingerprints are all over the gun, the bullet in the body, and the ballistics matches the chamber of the gun and the barrel of the gun and all of that stuff. Ok? Now we come to the courtroom with the evidence

(1:30 mark)

that Ruby shot Oswald. Is it absolutely certain that Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald? Certainly not. Certainly not. The whole thing could have been staged by NBC to delude fifty million people. And the fifty guys in the station could have been corroborative or they could all have been on an acid-trip while it was going on and it was done with mirrors. But you say, “Wait a minute, the guy’s fingerprints were all over the gun, and we know that no two people in this world have the same set of fingerprints”. We don’t know that no two people in this world have the same set of fingerprints any more than we know that all men are mortal because we haven’t examined every set of fingerprints. No two that we’ve found yet are exactly the same, but maybe one that we’ll find tomorrow.

See this is the probability quotient of skepticism that Hume gives us would show that, that maybe Lee Harvey Oswald—or that Jack Ruby didn’t, in fact, fire the gun. So here, I’m the defense attorney and I stand up in court and say, “Maybe the whole thing was a massively contrived deal by NBC, mass illusion by the people there, they were all on LSD, and Jack Ruby’s fingerprints may match the ones on the gun, but they’re not the same guy”. And I can argue philosophically that the court can not prove his guilt. That’s why we have a category in this world of reasonable doubt, of moral culpability. How much evidence is required for God to give the world before He holds us accountable? Who says that we have to have rationally inescapable arguments before we’re morally culpable to respond to Jesus Christ? Who ever added that into the game? The Bible doesn’t say that. The Bible says that God is holding us accountable for the evidence He has given us. That it’s sufficient to cause us to acquiesce to the evidence that has been brought forth.

Now if you want philosophically perfect evidence of perfect knowledge, of anything, including your own existence not to mention the Word of God or the existence of God, I’m going to tell you what you’re going to have to have. You’re going to have to do better than a transcendental presupposition. Because you always face a choice that your own presupposition of the existence of God is arbitrary. And sure, it’s the only thing that makes sense out of the world, it’s the

only thing that makes rationality out of the world, but what if maybe the world doesn't make sense? Big deal if that's the only one that'll work. That's where the nihilist comes back and says, "Sir I'll tell you what. Don't give me that stuff about 'We start with God'. You don't have any certainty there, you have a preference. You have a personal assertion, philosophically". You have not certainty because it's subjective than you have when you have objective data to support this. Now let me finish this, ok, before you get all excited. [Audience laughing]. [Unintelligible].

The problem we're dealing with here is the problem of creatureliness. The only way I can think of to have absolute certainty about anything is to have omniscience. And that we don't have. That belongs only to God. We're creatures who deal on the basis of the information and the testimony by which God gives us. And what kind of evidence does God give to the world by which He holds the world culpable? Does God just give presuppositions? Or does He raise Jesus Christ from the dead and have eyewitness testimony in a manner of history and says therefore, you know, these former days of ignorance did God overlook but now God commands all men everywhere to repent? 'Cause He has shown that He has judged people [unintelligible] by this one whom He has proven, you see, by resurrection. And I consider the resurrection of Jesus Christ as evidence that makes the whole world morally culpable to it. Sure we don't have perfect certainty. We've got enough to send us to Hell if we don't submit to it.

Bahnsen: I think that, uh, a lot more needs to be said about certainty and we're not going to get to a lot of questions if I say as much as I'd like to, but let me give just a few very quick points about certainty as R. C. as mentioned it. He says that certainty applies only to deductive certainty like that. I'd like to say it doesn't even apply to that. As strange as it may seem in terms of modern logic, and in terms of transcendental argumentation,

(1:35 mark)

I can show you that, in fact, that's not even a certain proposition. I mean, give you the truth of the premises, notice that this is a form of the argument

Sproul: Rationally certain, that's all.

Bahnsen: Not even rationally certain. "All A is B. C is A." And therefore what? "C is B". Now there's two reasons why that, in fact, is not deductively certain. First of all, if this is certain, it must be an application of the law of *modus ponens*. Alright? That's a basic law of logic. "If A, then B. A, therefore B." Now, do I know that this is an application of the law of *modus ponens*? Well, we're pretty sure, seems rather simple. We couldn't be wrong. Until you take your analogy of logic to mathematics, and start saying, "Well, is two plus two four?" Are we certain of that? Well, we seem to be because it seems, you know, fairly easy, it's low-level and all that. But now, very quickly, if I had to give you a five digit number and a five digit number and then give you an answer and say, "Now, is that also true?" Well, we might look at it quickly and say, "Yeah, that's true, too." And then, lo and

behold, you go back and you say, “As much as I know the rules of math, and as much as I know what those figures are, my senses didn’t deceive me, in fact, I made a mistake in math.” So it’s not a question about the laws of math it’s a question of whether I have applied the laws of math. And even in low-level cases of, you know, all men being mortal and Socrates being a man, the question arises, even for logicians, “Are you applying your formal laws?” You can be mistaken in identifying a case of *modus ponens*.

And you see that’s one of the things that pagan man, that Willard Van Orman Quine, the logician at Harvard, has pointed out so tellingly, that nobody can be purely formal, and nobody can have deductive certainty of that sort. And secondly, there’s this question: why is the law of *modus ponens* to be accepted? Well I’ll give you a very “black-box” explanation of it. *Modus Ponens*, this “If A, then B. A, therefore B” is to be accepted on these grounds. If this black box is true, and I’m not going to fill in all the technical philosophy for you because it’d just bore you and probably, you know, send you home, but whatever it is, if that is true, then *modus ponens* holds. Second premise, all those things said in the black box are true. Conclusion, *modus ponens* holds. Now how do you know that *modus ponens* is a valid form of logical argumentation? Well, this is my argument for *modus ponens*, simply put. What’s the problem? The very argument is using *modus ponens* to prove *modus ponens*. Even though there’s something beyond *modus ponens*, in a sense, it still has to be cast in this form. And therefore, that argument, in fact, is uncertain in the most radical sense. In two senses, one ‘cause I’m not sure it is a case of *modus ponens*, because I can always make mistakes in math and logic, and secondly, even *modus ponens* cannot be argued for without *modus ponens*. And so, if it’s the case that only logic and math give us certainty, my answer is, just playing the part of the devil’s advocate, even they don’t give you certainty.

Well, what does give you certainty? Well, it’s been a Reformed distinctive, you know, for these four hundred years, *sola Scriptura*. Not my reasoning. Not my identification of the green grass. Nothing is certain in this world, not even my apologetical arguments, for that matter. The only thing that is certain is the Word of God.

Sproul(?): How’s that certain?

Bahnsen: It’s certain because the One who speaks it can make no mistakes.

Sproul: How do you know it’s the Word of God?

Bahnsen: Well, now we’re going to get to that. [Audience laughing]. Let me see, as Calvin put it, there is this, uh, objective general revelation and the self-attestation of the Scripture, and as the Westminster Confession says, that “By all these means it does show itself to be the Word of God”, and Paul says that, in fact, all men are without excuse if they don’t accept the preaching of the Gospel.

Now what kind of argument could Paul have been thinking of? Well, in the, in Romans and in 1 Corinthians where he makes these kinds of statements, he talks about the foolishness of unbelief and what happens if you reject those statements. I daresay that that is a primitive form of the transcendental argument. He's arguing from the impossibility of the contrary.

By the way, I have an article entitled, um, "Pragmatism, Prejudice, and Presuppositionalism" which talks about philosophical or epistemological certainty and how Presuppositionalists deal with that, and I'm just going to refer you to that. If you have only probability, as, uh, if you have only probability that the Bible is the Word of God or that God exists or all the rest, that must mean at least this: that while there are many reasons to think that the Bible is the Word of God, there are some to think that it's not. Because if there were no reasons to think that the Bible's not the Word of God, it wouldn't be probability it'd be certainty. And so when R. C. or any

(1:40 mark)

old Princeton apologist says that very probably the Bible is the Word of God, he is also saying there's a slight probability that it's not. Slight—you may think that the probability that it is is greater than the other, although, I daresay nobody knows how to rate probability when it comes to those kind of arguments, so saying one is more than the other doesn't get anywhere. Everybody's lost in a sea of skepticism if it's only probability. But even if you could say there's a greater probability that the Bible's the Word of God than it's not, you're still saying that there's some reason to think that it's not. And I daresay that you haven't met Paul's condition of leaving the believer without excuse, because on the day of judgment he could say, that, "Lord, don't you see there was some reason to think that the Bible wasn't the Word of God." Paul says there is no reason to think that, that the man is without an apologetic. And that's why I say we've got to press the man back, back, back to see that if he doesn't have a transcendental foundation, he doesn't have anything, and that is a form of certainty.

Sproul: Greg?

Bahnsen: One last point, and then I really want to let another question come. Is the Resurrection evidence, and is it God's proof that Jesus is divine? Without a doubt. God has given us evidence of all sorts. You know, from the five hundred witnesses of the Resurrection to the millions of stars in the sky, everything that exists, every fact is proof that God exists and holds us morally accountable, and the Resurrection is evidence *par excellence*. But notice what Peter says, "Let the house of Israel know with full assurance," not just probably that He rose from the dead, "with full assurance." The apostolic word gives us, in fact, absolute certainty of the Resurrection and not just moral persuasion, not simply probability. And I'd say that's possible because the apostles realized that *sola Scriptura*, the Word of God is the foundation of all certainty, and to deny that one had to deny the very conditions of intelligibility.

Sproul: Greg, how do you know the Bible's the Word of God? I haven't a single response to that question. You've quoted the Bible, but you haven't answered—

Bahnsen: I know it from the impossibility of the contrary.

Dewitt: James, you—

James: Mr. Bahnsen, I wonder if you might give us your evaluation of Paul's apologetical method that he used on Mars Hill. I think you will try and show us that he was a Presuppositionalist, and I wonder then if you would allow R. C. to respond to that.

Dewitt: Uh, we have, uh, twelve minutes, that's a formidable project—

Bahnsen: Let me just say that I have a published essay that deals with that question that's available in the bookstore and R. C.'s going to speak on that subject tomorrow night, so maybe that will suffice.

Dewitt: You had a chance, now, David?

David: [Unintelligible]. [Audience laughing].

Dewitt: Identify yourself, Sir.

David: [Unintelligible]. [Audience laughing]. If you know nothing, uh, for certain, empirically or inductively, right? That's what you're saying? Then you can't know anything at all for certain, right? It seems to me, though, that Scripture, and I'm hearing, in fact, the same argument, that Scripture does say you can know certainly, that over and over again in Scripture the writers are saying these things are written so that you can know certainly, and that, uh, we are, uh, you say men know certainly that God exists, uh, but you can't know for certain that men know that God exists. It seems you show [?] the same skepticism that Gordon Clark does, and I would wonder what your response to that would be.

Sproul: Again, let me repeat the difference between how the word "certainty" is used. The Bible speaks of having assurance. I have a blessed assurance. But my knowledge of what the Bible is and what the Bible says is fallible. 'Cause I'm less than omniscient. When I'm talking about certainty, I'm talking about philosophical certainty in a very technically defined manner. And in that sense, I don't have certainty about anything. Even that I'm right here. Deduction, I think, can give us far more certainty than Greg allows, in terms of the relationships of propositions and the laws of mediate inference and that sort of thing. But, I grant, that that's even then only if rationality is valid. And the only way you can have rationality as valid, I've already yielded, is that, ultimately, that God exists. But I cannot know for certainty, by, you know, that God exists. I can have full assurance of heart when the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit comes—see, I look at the evidence, all the evidence is overwhelming, Holy Spirit tells me, "Hey, that evidence is true. That's for real." You know? Cool. How will I know for sure that the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit isn't indigestion? I'm playing devil's

advocate now. I have to deal with pagans everyday. And not just Christians. And I'm not going to go up to them and say, "Because I say so."

(1:45 mark)

And that's what you're left with. And that gives you precious little certainty. Because then, in the final analysis, all I have is the autonomy of your presuppositions about the boldest assertion the world has ever heard, the existence of God. And I want to know how you escape subjectivism, I want to know how you escape fideism, I haven't heard it yet. I keep hearing denials about fideism. Fideism historically means the rejection of natural theology, by definition. You know, historically, going all the way back to [unintelligible] right up through the history of, of, uh, philosophy, the term "fideism" has meant that any knowledge of God must come not through natural theology but through faith. I've heard all night that we don't come through natural theology, we do come through faith, but we're not fideists. I'm absolutely bewildered at that point.

Bahnsen: Could I, could I answer before you go any further? That in fact the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with rational argumentation, it has to do with subjective persuasion.

Sproul: Right.

Bahnsen: And that it's the objective evidence that the apologist has to deal with. And then we must pray, you know, God-willing in His grace that the subjective testimony of the Spirit accompanies that making a man pliable to the evidence. But Van Til and the Presuppositionalists have, are not saying, that we know it's true because of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. They're saying there's a self-attesting revelation of God that, if it is denied, you have denied the grounds of rational argumentation.

Sproul: But how do you know that your presupposition is true? Where does your certainty come from? That's what I keep trying to ask.

Bahnsen: From the impossibility of the contrary.

Sproul: Alright, how is the contrary impossible?

Bahnsen: Well, want me to go through a few of the schools of philosophy and show you?

Sproul: How is it, is it utterly impossible, utterly impossible and unthinkable that there be no God?

Bahnsen: We have one school of thought, Rationalism. Rationalism says that anything that is true has got to be coherent. Alright? You have another school of thought, empiricism. Anything that's true has got to meet a standard of sense experience. Then there are other schools of thought that try to combine Rationalism and Empiricism in any number of ways—a lot of permutations of the combinations. Now I'm saying that we know the Bible is the Word of God from

the impossibility of the contrary. If somebody denies that the Bible is the Word of God and that the sovereign, triune God of Scripture doesn't exist, and he wants to be a Rationalist, then we can we start asking him about the possibility of coherence in a chance universe. Because as R. C. as shown, if nothing else, in his lecture this afternoon, those are the alternatives.

Alright. We can show, in fact, that the Rationalist has to be a pure Rationalist to get his Rationalism going. How 'bout the Empiricist? Well, he says sense experience, it won't do any good to be up here in the clouds with all these formal systems that don't do anything material for us. Empiricist says sense experience is the criterion of truth. And then you say, "Well, do you know that sense experience is the criterion of truth because you validated that through sense experience?" "No, I haven't." "Well, then, you don't know that it's true, and so you've undermined your ultimate presupposition". And then there are people who say, "Yeah, but what if we try to put the two together and prop them up and make, you know, some sort of epistemology that way?" And as Anthony Flew says, what good is it going to do you to take one leaky bucket and add it to another leaky bucket? You're just going to have a twofold leaky bucket now. And so all of those things are just the same thing.

That's the history of philosophy in a thumbnail sketch. From the impossibility of the contrary, you can't have logic, you can't have sense experience without something that goes beyond them, a transcendental foundation.

Sproul: Time-out. That's not the impossibility of the contrary.

Bahnsen: It is.

Sproul: That's what—what you have done is shown us that without God, we've got leaky buckets. Ok?

Bahnsen: Without God you can't even—

Sproul: What you haven't shown me, is you haven't shown me why we can't be in one big leaky bucket.

[Audience laughing].

Dewitt: Identify yourself.

Unidentified man: [Unintelligible]of uh, presuppositionalism [unintelligible] in neo-orthodox thinking. It seems to me to get away from the historical findings and what happens with Platonian thinking on apologetics. How they allowed it to, uh, seep into their, uh, systematic theology [unintelligible] how they allowed their natural theology to be the basis of their proving of Scripture, particularly [unintelligible] and even as far as Thornwell and all the Presbyterians, uh, fall into the same trap. If you're going to follow, uh, your natural theology you're going to have to cut it off at some point, uh, of where it's going to be just your apologetics and your apologetics is not able to be linked to your systematic theology. And in my opinion, you don't have that problem with, uh, Presuppositionalism [unintelligible].

(1:50 mark)

Dewitt: One observation before I let you answer. I think we ought to be careful of saying, of men like Thornwell and others that they “fell into a trap”. If they thought something, we had better take it seriously even though we come to the conclusion that they were wrong. Dr. Sproul.

Sproul: I’m perfectly delighted with what the Princeton school did with their defense of Scripture. I think it’s the best defense of Scripture that the world has ever seen. I don’t think it’s been improved upon and I wish we’d get back to it. I have no reason to apologize for B.B. Warfield’s defense of the infallibility of Scripture because it does provide objective evidence and not just a gratuitous assumption that this is the Word of God. That the, that it’s—I’d like to know the difference between how a Presuppositionalist defends the Scripture as the Word of God and a Muslim defends the Koran. Now, I know how Gordon Clark does it: this is the Word of God, it says it’s the Word of God, since it is the Word of God, and it says the words “Word of God” it must be the Word of God. That’s, that’s—you know you may call that a beautiful circle. I call it a vicious circle, and that does give the pagan an excuse for rejecting it.

Bahnsen: I agree.

Sproul: Good.

[Audience laughing].

Dewitt: Go ahead.

Unidentified: Uh, I, in the midst of my question I’m going to ask you a “yes or no” question. [Audience laughing]. What you’re saying is that, philosophically, men cannot be certain. You’ve said that, right?

Sproul: Ultimately, yes.

Unidentified man: And could God therefore, since He is the source of all logic, the source of truth and wisdom, is He certain?

Sproul: Can God be certain?

Unidentified man: Yes.

Sproul: Yes.

Unidentified man: Ok, I knew you would say yes to that. [Audience laughing]. Well, then, what I really want to know, is, I want to be sure of your position, I want to know exactly what you meant. Are you saying then that the only one that is philosophically certain is God?

Sproul: Yes.

Unidentified man: And therefore, for us to have any certainty at all, you know, and, and not, not the philosophical, but the, the feeling certainty you were talking about, is to look at God’s revelation of Himself and that gives us, uh, the certainty and the Holy Spirit working within us? That those together give us that feeling certainty that you were talking about, and therefore that the only way we can have that feeling certainty is to look to God’s revelation in nature—

Sproul: Nope.

Unidentified man: That’s not what you were saying?

Sproul: No, I'm saying that God has created us as creatures, now I'm talking as a Christian now, obviously. I think He's created us as creatures, He's giving us, He's given us finite capacity for learning. I'm not a skeptic with respect to meaningful knowledge and meaningful discourse. I am a skeptic with respect to the technical concept of absolute philosophical certainty. But I'm not a common sense skeptic, you know, I think that God has given us creaturely ability to learn things. He's given us a mind by which we can learn that two and two are four. He's given us, uh, not perfect sense perception. Our senses can, in fact, be deceived. Nonetheless, when I see a truck coming down the street, I get out of the way. You know?

[Audience laughing].

I have enough trust in the basic reliability of my sense perception on a common sense level. I am a creature, created in the image of God, finite, limited in my perception, dim and dull in certain aspects of my, uh, abilities. Nonetheless, I have a talent for knowledge that is workable, it is practical, for which I am culpable of making creaturely, moral decisions. All I'm saying at that point is that I'm not omniscient. I don't think that warrants at all the kind of skepticism that Hume was talking about or even that, uh, Dr. Clark talks about. And I—and, and it's almost unfair to say that what we say is “Well, probably God exists”. There's an emotive connotation to that word. And it's one thing for me to say, “Ah, yeah, probably God exists”. It's another thing for me to say, “I grant, that I'm not infallible, and I'm not omniscient, and I can't give you the kind of certainty that God can speak with, but I'll tell you what, pal, the evidence for the existence of God is so overwhelming that you better repent in a hurry”, you know. I'm not saying “Probably there's a God”, I'm saying “Surely there's a God! I'm sure there's a God, here's why I'm sure.” I think the evidence is overwhelming

(1:55 mark)

that there's a God, and that you have to flee from reason, and flee from normal sense perception in order to escape the evidence for the existence of God. We're saying that the evidence of the existence of God is so overwhelming that if a man denies the existence of God he's flying in the face of moral, you know, it's an immoral decision. Not because there's a deficiency of the objective evidence. Calvin never says the evidence is insufficient to make us culpable. The insufficiency rests with our moral disposition against God.

[copied from <https://creaturelyconsideration.wordpress.com/2017/08/23/r-c-sproul-and-greg-bahnsen-debate-transcript/>, accessed 08/12/19]