

**Midway Community Church**  
**"Hot Topics"**  
**Young Earth Presuppositionalism: Handout 1<sup>1</sup>**  
**Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.**

I. First Things

- A. While perhaps most Christians will understand something about how the expression 'young earth' is used (especially with the added term 'creationism'), I suspect that only a few will have encountered the term 'Presuppositionalism.'
- B. Of the latter group, no doubt fewer still (if any) will have ever seen these two expressions in combination.
- C. What is needed, then, is an explanation of such expressions individually and in combination.
  - 1. The title of this work is occasioned by my increasing concerns about the nature and degree of Presuppositionalism (as explained below) which has seemingly become dominate among certain key Young Earth Creationists.
  - 2. My concern arises largely as a function of my concerns about and objections to Presuppositionalism as such.
  - 3. In this work, I seek to document the presence of Presuppositionalism primarily in the thinking of the Young Earth creationist Ken Ham and to offer a corrective to his views.
    - a. In the interest of completeness and coherency, I will try to unpack and extend Ham's position perhaps further than a strict limit of his words might seem to warrant.
    - b. My sources for this unpacking and extending will consist of certain of Ham's defenders and other interested parties who have interacted with me on my blog regarding this matter.<sup>2</sup>
      - (1) I will let the reader decide whether he thinks that such unpacking and extending is faithful to the Ham's methodology.
      - (2) Even if it is not, the fact remains that how I will characterize the matter is found in some who would count themselves as ardent defenders of, if not Ken

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Mr. Eric Gustafson of Southern Evangelical Seminary for drawing my attention to this issue and for suggesting to me the title "Young Earth Presuppositionalism."

<sup>2</sup> See my <http://www.quodlibetalblog.wordpress.com>.



Richard G. Howe



Quodlibetal Blog



Southern Evangelical Seminary

Ham specifically, this Young Earth Presuppositionalism (as I have labeled it here) generally.

## II. What Is the Broader Context?

- A. The broader context within which my concerns arise has to do with this question: What is the proper way for Christians to defend the truth of the Christian faith?
- B. The two main answers to that question are:
  - 1. The Classical method, in terms of which the Christian is to marshal arguments and evidence demonstrating that the Christian faith is true<sup>3</sup>
  - 2. The Presuppositional method, in terms of which the truth of the Christian faith (in its entirety, together with the Bible in its entirety) must be granted to be true before any knowledge or reasoning (even reasoning against the Christian faith) is possible
- C. The above question itself presupposes (no pun intended) several other questions, the answers to which could determine diverse trajectories of subsequent discussions.
  - 1. Is it even proper in the first place for Christians to defend the faith?
    - a. Those who give a 'yes' answer:
      - (1) generally accept (to various degrees and with various qualifications) the legitimacy of human reason.
      - (2) often seek to engage the unbeliever in rational discourse together with a proclamation of the gospel.
    - b. Those who give a 'no' answer:
      - (1) generally reject the legitimacy of human reason in almost all of its forms.
      - (2) usually confine their interaction with the unbeliever to the proclamation of the gospel.
  - 2. If it is proper for the Christian to defend the faith, what is the sense of 'proper'?
    - a. 'Proper' here might mean that the manner of such a defense is by the use of rational argument and evidence.

---

<sup>3</sup> This method may go by different names. Strictly speaking, I am talking about Classical Apologetics. Some writers unfortunately lump this method with evidentialism. While there certainly is overlap, the two methods are not co-extensive.

- b. 'Proper' here might mean that the manner of such a defense is not so much through rational arguments and evidence but, rather, through a proclamation of Scripture alone.

### III. What Is My Specific Concern?

- A. My specific and main concern is that the illegitimate method of Presuppositional Apologetics has hijacked Young Earth Creationism.
- B. By this I mean that an overwhelming majority of those Christian apologists who are defending Young Earth Creationism are doing so by means of the Presuppositional Apologetic methodology.
- C. This concern arises from two commitments I have.
  1. I am a Young Earth creationist.
  2. I am a Classical apologist.
- D. As a Young Earth creationist, I regret that this model of creation is being done a disservice by being tethered as much as it is to an illegitimate apologetic methodology.
- E. As a Classical apologist, I desire to show Young Earth creationists that the Presuppositional method not only does not serve to convince the detractors that Young Earth Creationism is true, but it scandalizes Christians in what constitutes sound apologetics in the first place.
- F. This is not to say that every aspect of the Young Earth Creationism case is undermined by its Presuppositionalism. My concern is how the overall debate between Young Earth Creationist and Old Earth Creationists is framed by these Young Earth creationists in the wrong way.

### IV. What Is Classical Apologetics?

1. The Classical method is characterized by the following notions:
  - a. First, when encountering the unbeliever, the Christian must (if the occasion warrants) defend:
    - (1) that reality is knowable
    - (2) that logic applies to reality
    - (3) that morally fallen human beings have some capacity to cognitively understand (even if they personally reject) certain claims of the Christian faith
  - b. Second, once the foundation for rational interaction is in place, arguments are given for the existence of God.

- (1) cosmological argument: God is the cause of the existence of the universe.
  - (2) teleological argument: God is the cause of the design of the universe.
  - (3) Moral argument: God is the grounding for moral reality.
- c. Third, once the existence of God is proven and the possibility of miracles is thereby established, specific arguments (primarily historical) are given for the truth of the Christian faith, including:
- (1) the historical reliability of the Bible
    - (a) manuscript evidence
    - (b) archeological evidence
    - (c) corroborating historical evidence
  - (2) the identity of Jesus as the Son of God from the Bible and other sources
  - (3) Jesus's view of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible

#### V. What Is Presuppositional Apologetics?

- A. Presuppositionalists maintain that a proper apologetics methodology must be built on the solid Reformed (Calvinist) theological doctrines of the sovereignty of God and the total depravity of the human race.
1. To assume an intellectual common ground between the believer and unbeliever from which the believer could launch into a rational argument for God's existence, is de facto to deny the God of Christianity.
  2. The God of Christianity must be presupposed to exist before there could be any coherent or rational thought in the first place.
  3. The unbeliever's attempt to argue against the existence of the Christian God already employs epistemological assumptions that can be the case only if the God of Christianity exists.
- B. Thus, Christians who use the Classical theistic arguments are already compromising the nature of the very God they are trying to prove.
- C. The truth of the Christian world view is demonstrated by a transcendental argument in terms of which a rather full-blown Trinitarian Christian theism is the necessary prerequisite for any rational thought at all.

#### VI. The Presuppositionalism of Ken Ham, et al.

- A. My criticisms of Young Earth Presuppositionalism does not stem from any objections I have to the conclusions of the Young Earth creationists.
1. I probably am not far from Ham's views on many things.
    - a. I might push the age of the Earth a little further back than he does.
    - b. But I hold to a literal reading of Gen. 1-11, which would include maintaining:
      - (1) a literal Adam and Eve
      - (2) the Fall of the human race in Adam's sin
      - (3) the corruption and cursing of the cosmos as a result of this Fall
      - (4) a universal, global, catastrophic flood in Noah's time (together with the Ark and the animals just as Genesis says)
      - (5) the tower of Babel and the confusion of languages.
  2. I might even agree with some of Ham's arguments for some of these particular points. (I am not sure if this is so only because I am not too familiar with Ham's arguments here.)
- B. However, I strongly object to how Ham characterizes the task of how the Christian can or ought to defend the faith.
1. Though I have summarized Presuppositionalism above, I should emphasize that Ham's version may not be as sophisticated as the more robust Presuppositionalism of Van Til, Bahnsen, Oliphint, and others.
  2. For the sake of convenience, I have nevertheless labeled Ham's approach as Presuppositionalism because it does bear enough of a resemblance.
  3. Further, my criticisms of Ham are often of the same nature of my criticisms against the more robust versions.