

# *Pushing the Antithesis*



*Pushing the Antithesis:  
The Apologetic Methodology of  
Greg L. Bahnsen*

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Gary DeMar, editor

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This book is dedicated to David L. Bahnsen,  
a faithful son who keeps his father's legacy alive.



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# Foreword

By Gary DeMar

*“It is never about winning, Greg. It is about exposing their inconsistency. God does everything else. Never forget the antithesis.”*

—Cornelius Van Til to Greg L. Bahnsen (1985)<sup>1</sup>

I KNOW THAT GOD must have a sense of humor since I’m writing a Foreword to a book that outlines the apologetic methodology of Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen. Even the phrase “apologetic methodology” has a distant comic ring to it considering that prior to becoming a Christian in 1973, I wouldn’t have had the slightest idea what the phrase meant. If there was ever a relationship where brawn and brain identified the two participants, it was my association and friendship with Dr. Bahnsen.

The focus of my life in high school and college was athletics. Instead of studying, I spent my time training for the shot put, discus, javelin, long jump, with the greatest emphasis on the shot put. For those of you not familiar with this track and field event, think of a man pushing (not throwing) a cannon ball from the confines of a seven-foot circle in an attempt to outdistance his competitors. I spent hours every day training with weights since, in order to throw a 12-pound iron ball, you have to be big and strong. This meant eating an inordinate amount of food every day to get my weight up to 220 pounds as a high school senior. My dedicated efforts led to a new Pennsylvania state record in 1968, a

fifth-place ranking in the nation with a throw of more than 64 feet, participation in the Golden West Invitational track and field meet held in Sacramento, California, as well as 50 scholarship offers to some of the best colleges in the nation. Only one thing was missing: good grades. While I trained diligently, even religiously some might say, I did all of this to the exclusion of studying.<sup>3</sup>

I entered college academically atrophied. But like I said, God has a sense of humor. During my senior year in college, after a steady decline in my athletic ability and interest in sports, God transformed my life spiritually and academically. I truly became a “new creation in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17) with a transformed mind (Rom. 12:2). Realizing that I was far behind in my knowledge about so much, I began to read and study, beginning with C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*, Paul L. Maier’s *First Christmas*, and Josh McDowell’s *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. Hoping to accelerate my re-education, in 1974, I enrolled as a student at Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) in Jackson, Mississippi. It was there that I came in contact with other students of like mind, a large library, a well-stocked bookstore, well-equipped professors, and the most well-equipped of them all, Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen.

When I first came to Christ, I was living in a less than ideal spiritual setting. But even this was for God’s greater purpose. I learned very early that defending the Christian faith took knowledge, skill, and the work of the Holy Spirit. As long as I shared the worldview of those I lived with, there was little to debate. While I did my best to answer serious questions and outright objections thrown at me by my housemates and their friends, it was obvious that I was woefully unprepared. My Christian faith was put to the test immediately by skeptical inquiry. Their questions led me to further study, and I soon realized that the field of Christian apologetics was an area of ministry that might actually be the call of God for my life. But who was I to defend the claims of Christ in an academic setting where history, knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, logic, debate skills, and a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible are required? I was trained as an athlete, not as an apologist. Even so, God seemed to be moving me to specialize in apologetics.

In God's unpredictable providence, I ended up at RTS where brawn met brain. This is not to say that Dr. Bahnsen did not enjoy and participate in athletics; it's just that he did not make sports the focus of his life as I did. While I graduated from Western Michigan University with a degree in Physical Education and was aspiring to coach at the college level, Dr. Bahnsen's academic accomplishments were, to put it kindly for my benefit, on the other end of the spectrum. In 1970, Dr. Bahnsen graduated *magna cum laude* from Westmont College where he received his B.A. in philosophy and was awarded the John Bunyan Smith Award for his overall grade point average. From there he pursued advanced degrees at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he studied under Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) and solidified his understanding and appreciation of the presuppositional methodology of apologetics developed by Van Til. When he graduated in May 1973, Dr. Bahnsen simultaneously received two degrees, Master of Divinity and Master of Theology, as well as the William Benton Greene Prize in apologetics and a Richard Weaver Fellowship from the Intercollegiate Studies Institute. After completing seminary, he began academic work at the University of Southern California (USC), where he studied philosophy, specializing in the theory of knowledge (epistemology). In 1975, after being ordained in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, he became an associate professor of Apologetics and Ethics at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. While there, he completed his doctoral studies at USC, receiving his Ph.D. in 1978 at the age of 30.<sup>3</sup>

As a new Christian living in the den of unbelief during my final semester of college, I found that every time someone raised objections about the authority of the Bible—the reality of miracles, the problem of evil, or the existence of God—and I attempted to answer them, I would be hit with another objection. When I was stumped, as I often was, I spent time researching and returned a day or two later with answers from my study of Scripture and additional information culled from books in my growing library. Sometimes I would get a nod of agreement from my skeptical friends on points I had made, but then out would come a new objection. There had to be a better way to defend the Christian faith than in a “bits and pieces” fashion. I soon learned that there was a better *bib-*

lical way that follows Peter's admonition to "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15). Peter makes it clear that defending the faith is not for a special breed of Christian. We must all be ready. Certainly some are better equipped than others, but there is still the requirement for all Christians to be ready to make a defense. This means that the methodology must be basic enough for any Christian to master.

The "bits and pieces" method I was using relied heavily on evidences. This methodology is best articulated by Josh McDowell in *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, the book I was encouraged to consult by my new Christian friends to make my case for the authenticity of the biblical record and my Christian testimony. Evidences of a factual nature are certainly important in the defense of the Christian faith,<sup>4</sup> but I would soon learn that they should never be viewed independently of a person's worldview. The evidentialist approach assumes facts are neutral, that they "speak for themselves," and that those evaluating the facts are without biases or operating worldview assumptions in their interpretation of the facts. If a skeptic begins with the premise that miracles don't happen, then all the evidence in the world will not convince him otherwise. His operating anti-supernatural starting point will assume that there must be some naturalistic explanation that was not understood by those writing in a pre-scientific time. The anti-supernaturalist might argue: (1) Maybe Lazarus was not really dead when he was entombed. He could have been in a coma and was misdiagnosed by his family and friends who had little medical knowledge. (2) Later writers of the gospel accounts made up stories about Jesus' life and work in order to make Him look like a miracle worker to those who were asked to join the new religion. (3) In terms of what we know about science, it just isn't possible to bring dead people back to life.

For those set in their anti-supernatural worldview ways, there will always be some naturalistic reason why miracles are impossible, and no amount of evidence will convince them otherwise. Consider the following humorous story to make the point that evidences only make sense within the context of a person's already accepted worldview:

Once upon a time there was a man who thought he was dead. His concerned wife and friends sent him to the friendly neighborhood psychiatrist. The psychiatrist determined to cure him by convincing him of one fact that contradicted his belief that he was dead. The psychiatrist decided to use the simple truth that dead men do not bleed. He put his patient to work reading medical texts, observing autopsies, etc. After weeks of effort the patient finally said, "All right, all right! You've convinced me. Dead men do not bleed." Whereupon the psychiatrist stuck him in the arm with a needle, and the blood flowed. The man looked down and contorted, ashen faced and cried: "Good Lord! Dead men bleed after all!"<sup>5</sup>

Sounds ridiculous, but as we'll see, there are real-life examples of people who argue in a similar way. The facts for this "dead man" were not convincing because of his operating presupposition. The evidence presented to him was incontrovertible for someone who operated within a worldview with the starting assumption that only living people bleed. In order to maintain the legitimacy of his worldview, our patient only had to make a few adjustments to his worldview to fit in a new "fact" unknown to him before—dead men do bleed. The doctor and the patient were looking at the same fact—the flow of blood—but their operating worldviews cause them to come to different conclusions as to what the evidence meant.

We've all experienced this. The debate over abortion is not just about the evidence. It can't be since the evidence is the same for pro- and anti-abortionists. The same is true in the creation-evolution debate. Biologists, anthropologists, chemists, and philosophers from both positional sides are looking at the same evidence, but they come to different conclusions. What makes the difference? A prior commitment to a set of presuppositions. Consider the following from evolutionist Richard Lewontin:

We take the side of science *in spite of* the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, *in spite of* its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, *in spite of* the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow com-

pel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.<sup>6</sup>

There you have it! I couldn't have made the point any better. Oftentimes it's difficult to convince people that science is not the objective field of study it's made out to be. Even when the facts don't make sense, the unproven prior commitment to materialism must be embraced at all cost, no matter what the facts might say. To loosen the grip just a little means that God must be considered as the prime factor in the equation, and this will never do for the materialist even if it means being irrational and unscientific to protect a worldview that needs God to account for the logic that is used to keep Him out.

The goal in apologetics, as Dr. Bahnsen taught his students, was to approach a person at the level of his worldview, a worldview that is built on a set of operating assumptions about the source and nature of knowledge that gives meaning to the facts and experiences he encounters. Dr. Bahnsen offers the following helpful summary of the methodology:

Everybody thinks and reasons in terms of a broad and fundamental understanding of the nature of reality, of how we know what we know, and of how we should live our lives. This philosophy or outlook is "presupposed" by everything the unbeliever (or believer) says; it is the implicit background that gives meaning to the claims and inferences drawn by people. For this reason, every apologetical encounter is ultimately a conflict of worldviews or fundamental perspectives (whether this is explicitly mentioned or not).<sup>7</sup>

Consider the resurrection. Since the universe was created by God out of things that are not visible (Heb. 11:3), and man was formed "of dust from the ground" (Gen. 2:7), then reanimating a dead body would not be a major task for God. Paul makes the point to King Agrippa: "Why is

it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8). The logic is simple: Since God creates; He can certainly recreate. Accounts of supernatural (from our point of view) events found in the Bible are easily accounted for when the operating presupposition is that the Creator of the cosmos is behind the events. The Bible *begins* with the operating presupposition that “God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). If this is not the starting point, then nothing makes sense. There is no way to account for reason, logic, love, goodness, personhood, or meaning of any kind in a random, matter-only cosmos. “In short,” Dr. Bahnsen argued, “presuppositional apologetics argues for the truth of Christianity ‘from the impossibility of the contrary.’ Someone who is so foolish as to operate in his intellectual life as though there were no God (Ps. 14:1) thereby ‘despises wisdom and instruction’ and ‘hates knowledge’ (Prov. 1:7, 29). He needs to be answered according to his folly—demonstrating where his philosophical principles lead—‘lest he be wise in his own eyes’ (Prov. 26:5).”<sup>8</sup>

So then, instead of beginning with the bits and pieces of a worldview (evidences for this or that doctrine, or this or that god), the starting point is more fixed and fundamental. “Thus, when all is said and done,” Dr. Bahnsen makes clear to us, “apologetics becomes the vindication of the Christian worldview as a whole, not simply a piecemeal defense of isolated, abstractly defined, religious points.”<sup>9</sup> It’s with this operating presupposition that Dr. Bahnsen called his students to “push the antithesis,” that is to force the unbeliever to live consistently with his rationalistic and materialistic presuppositions that underlie and seemingly support his worldview. It’s this push that exposes the inherent faultlines in naturalistic worldviews that begin with the supposed sovereignty of the creature rather than the Creator, which is the essence of the antithesis. “Without the ingredient of *antithesis*, Christianity is not simply anemic, it has altogether forfeited its challenge to all other worldviews.”<sup>10</sup> Dr. Bahnsen continues:

Abraham Kuyper well understood that all men conduct their reasoning and their thinking in terms of an ultimate controlling principle—a most basic presupposition. For the unbeliever, this is

a natural or naturalistic principle, in terms of which man's thinking is taken to be intelligible without recourse to God. For the believer, it is a supernatural principle based on God's involvement in man's history and experience, notably in regeneration—[a] perspective that provides the framework necessary for making sense of anything. These two ultimate commitments—call them naturalism and Christian supernaturalism—are logically incompatible and seek to cancel each other out.<sup>11</sup>

When pushed to be consistent with the operating assumptions of their worldview, naturalists soon learn that matter-only presuppositions don't work and lead to nihilism. R. C. Sproul puts it well when he writes, "Although I do not embrace presuppositional apologetics, I do recognize that the existence of God is the supreme *proto*-supposition for all theoretical thought. God's existence is the chief element in constructing any worldview. To deny this chief premise is to set one's sails for the island of nihilism. This is the darkest continent of the darkened mind—the ultimate paradise of the fool."<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Bahnsen left a lasting legacy that is bearing considerable fruit. As the quotation by R.C. Sproul demonstrates, it's hard to shake the implications and effectiveness of the presuppositional model defended, practiced, and popularized by Dr. Bahnsen. The presuppositional method of apologetics is being acknowledged in other works on the subject. Joe Boot applies the presuppositional methodology in his book *Why I Still Believe*.<sup>13</sup> Doug Powell's *Guide to Christian Apologetics* carries an entire chapter on apologetic methodology where he quotes Cornelius Van Til, John Frame, and Greg Bahnsen in a succinct and reliable way. Powell does an excellent job in describing and distinguishing the various approaches to apologetics and includes well designed graphics to illustrate the antithesis between Christian and non-Christian thought.

On a personal note, Dr. Bahnsen helped turn an athlete into an apologist, someone who continues to study so that (with God's help) he will be always ready to defend the faith. What began as a teacher to student relationship grew into friendship and a professional relationship. Dr. Bahnsen was the anchor speaker for the three years that American Vision hosted



the “Life Preparation Conference” (1991–1993). He and I presented papers at the “Consultation on the Biblical Role of Civil Government” that was held at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, on June 2 and 3, 1987. Our articles, along with those of the other participants, were published in *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*.<sup>14</sup> In order to help advance Dr. Bahnsen’s teaching ministry and biblical approach to apologetics to a wider audience, I commissioned him to write several articles for American Vision’s *Biblical Worldview Magazine*. These were later published in “Section Five” of *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*.<sup>15</sup> Dr. Bahnsen’s influence on my life demonstrates the truth of what Dr. Gary North wrote on the dedication page of his economic commentary on Numbers:

This book is dedicated to Gary DeMar  
who has proven that there *is* life beyond shot-putting.<sup>17</sup>

With religion so prevalent in the news today, and with the rise of the “New Atheism” movement led by the unholy trinity of Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, and Sam Harris, those of us who saw Greg in action as a debater lament that he is no longer with us to push the antithesis with these men. He left a legacy in the people who God providentially brought under his teaching. There are many who are well equipped to handle the onslaught of unbelieving thought today because Greg showed us how to “push the antithesis” in a thoughtful and cogent way.<sup>16</sup> While his legacy continues with the ever growing number of men and women who have come under his teaching, there was only one Greg L. Bahnsen. All of us who knew Greg sure do miss him. “That same mysterious Providence that gave us Dr. Bahnsen also called him home at the early age of 47—he went to be with his Lord on December 11, 1995.”<sup>17</sup>

**Notes**

1. A conversation between Cornelius Van Til and Greg L. Bahnsen as reported by David L. Bahnsen, "Twenty Years Ago Tonight: The Bahnsen/Stein Debate": [www.dlbthoughts.com/Articles.aspx?IDCol=91](http://www.dlbthoughts.com/Articles.aspx?IDCol=91)
2. For additional background, see Gary DeMar, "Ron Semkiw: A Short But Strong Career," 14:3 *MILO* (December 2006), 49–53 and Gary DeMar, "The Steroid Culture" (December 9, 2004): [www.americanvision.org/articlearchive/12-09-04.asp](http://www.americanvision.org/articlearchive/12-09-04.asp)
3. For a brief biography of Dr. Bahnsen, see David L. Bahnsen, "The Life of Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen," *The Standard Bearer: A Festschrift for Greg L. Bahnsen*, ed. Steven M. Schlissel (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2002), 9–27.
4. Thom Notaro, *Van Til and the Use of Evidence* (Phillipsburg, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).
5. John Warwick Montgomery, *The Altizer-Montgomery Dialogue* (Chicago, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 21–22. For a different illustration of this phenomenon, see the Introduction in Gary DeMar, *Thinking Straight in a Crooked World: A Christian Defense Manual* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2001).
6. Richard Lewontin, "Billions and billions of demons," *The New York Review* (January 9, 1997), 31.
7. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 30.
8. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 6.
9. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 31.
10. Greg L. Bahnsen, "At War with the Word: The Necessity of Biblical Antithesis," *Antithesis*, 1:1 (January/February 1990), 6.
11. Bahnsen, "At War with the Word," 48.
12. R. C. Sproul, *The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts that Shaped our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 171.
13. Joe Boot, *Why I Still Believe (Hint: It's the Only Way the World Makes Sense)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books), 2006.
14. Gary Scott Smith, ed., *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989).
15. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*, ed. Robert R. Booth (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Foundation, 2006).
16. Gary DeMar, "'The Brights': A Worldview with No Light of Their Own," *Biblical Worldview Magazine* 22:10 (October 2006), 4–6 and Gary DeMar, "The Invisible God Called 'Reason,'" *Biblical Worldview Magazine* 22:11 (November 2006), 4–6, 8.
17. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997), v.
18. Robert R. Booth, "Editor's Preface," *Always Ready*, x.

# *Dr. Bahnsen*

## *“Pushing the Antithesis”*

**T**HE FOLLOWING IS an excerpt from “The Great Debate: Does God Exist?” a formal debate between Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen and Dr. Gordon S. Stein that was held at the University of California (Irvine) on February 11, 1985. Dr. Bahnsen begins the cross examination:

**Dr. Bahnsen:** “Are all factual questions answered in the same way?”

**Dr. Stein:** “No, they are not. They’re answered by the use of certain methods, though, that are the same—reason, logic, presenting evidence, and facts.”

**Dr. Bahnsen:** “All right. I heard you mention logical binds and logical self-contradictions in your speech. You did say that?”

**Dr. Stein:** “I said. I used that phrase, yes.”

**Dr. Bahnsen:** “Do you believe there are laws of logic, then?”

**Dr. Stein:** “Absolutely.”

**Dr. Bahnsen:** “Are they universal?”

**Dr. Stein:** “They’re agreed upon by human beings. They aren’t laws that exist out in nature. They’re consensual.”

**Dr. Bahnsen:** “Are they simply conventions, then?”

**Dr. Stein:** “They are conventions, but they are conventions that are self-verifying.”

**Dr. Bahnsen:** “Are they sociological laws or laws of thought?”

**Dr. Stein:** “They are laws of thought which are interpreted by men and promulgated by men.”

**Dr. Bahnsen:** “Are they material in nature?”

**Dr. Stein:** “How can a law be material in nature?”

**Dr. Bahnsen:** “That’s a question I am going to ask you.”

**Dr. Stein:** “I would say no.”

**Moderator:** “Dr. Stein, you now have an opportunity to cross-examine Dr. Bahnsen.”

**Dr. Stein:** “Dr. Bahnsen, would you call God material or immaterial?”

**Dr. Bahnsen:** “Immaterial.”

**Dr. Stein:** “What is something that is immaterial?”

**Dr. Bahnsen:** “Something not extended in space.”

**Dr. Stein:** “Can you give me an example of anything other than God that is immaterial?”

**Dr. Bahnsen:** “The laws of logic.”

**Moderator:** “I am going to have to ask the audience to hold it down please. Please. Refrain from laughter and applause. Can you hold that down please?”

# Introduction

**P**USHING THE ANTITHESIS is based on Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen's lecture series titled *Basic Training for Defending the Christian Faith*. The talks were given at American Vision's first "Life Preparation Conference" in 1991 held at the University of Alabama. High school and college students from around the United States converged on the UA campus for a week of intensive **worldview** study. They had the privilege of sitting under one of the most accomplished Christian apologists the Church has produced. The video tapes of the series sat untouched for more than 15 years until they were noticed sitting in a storage box at American Vision's offices. Considering the advances in technology, we did not have high hopes in the quality of the video production. To our surprise, the production quality was very good. A video series was produced and has enjoyed great success as people who have only read Dr. Bahnsen's books and listened to him on audio tapes and CDs have been introduced to the more personal side of a gifted teacher.

*Pushing the Antithesis* deals with **apologetics**, a word derived from the combination of two Greek words: *apo* ("back, from") and *logos* ("word"), meaning "to give a word back, to respond" in defense. We find this Greek word in several New Testament texts. When Paul was in the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27), some Jews in Asia Minor aroused the city against him (21:30a). The crowd dragged him out of the temple in an attempt to kill him (21:31). The Roman soldiers intervened and ar-

rested him, taking him into protective custody (21:32–33). He was soon allowed to address the Jews to present his defense (21:39–40). He opens with these words: “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense [Gk., *apologias*] which I now offer to you” (Acts 22:1).

In his first epistle, Peter instructs all Christians how they should conduct themselves. In chapter 3 he exhorts them to be faithful even when persecuted (1 Pet. 3:9–13). Rather than becoming fearful and withdrawing from the opposition or becoming angry and responding in kind, he urges them to: “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense [Gk., *apologian*] to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (3:15). This becomes the key scriptural passage urging Christians to defend their faith.

In his important work on apologetics, Dr. Bahnsen quotes Cornelius Van Til’s succinct and helpful definition of “apologetics”: “Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.”<sup>1</sup> Biblical apologetics does not teach that we are apologizing, as if admitting moral wrong or mental error, when we defend the Christian faith.

In the video series, Dr. Bahnsen uses the American Standard Version of 1901. He favored this translation because of its literal approach to translation theory and practice. Since this particular translation is difficult to find today, the New American Standard Bible will be used. This conservative, evangelical translation that follows the original ASV in attempting to be as literal as possible. Of course, no translation is without bias.

You may find that some key words and technical terms may be unfamiliar, requiring definition. Any term being defined in this study guide will display as **bold** to set it off from the rest of the text. This will alert you to a definition that will appear either in the main text or in a footnote. A “Glossary of Terms and Phrases” has also been provided beginning on page 271. Learning the jargon of apologetics will increase your understanding of the method of apologetics itself. In fact, in his last chapter, Dr. Bahnsen will mention the importance of defining terms any time you are debating.

As you study each lecture, the same basic outline will be followed. Dr. Bahnsen's **Central Concerns** will be summarized and then fleshed out with additional detail. Concentrating on central issues is important to understanding and biblically warranted. Jesus directed the Pharisees to understand the central significance of Scripture when He urged them to focus on Him (John 5:39; cf. Luke 24:25–27). He rebuked them for highlighting minutiae and forgetting the central, weightier issues: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others" (Matt. 23:23).

After this, **Exegetical Observations** will be provided on important biblical texts relevant to the study, driving home the biblical warrant for Dr. Bahnsen's instruction.<sup>2</sup> This is in keeping with Paul's commendation that we be diligent in "handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Luke commends the Bereans, noting that they "were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). This is important, for as Max Reich (1867–1945) once wrote, "the Christian who is careless in Bible reading will be careless in Christian living."

Then we will ask **Review Questions** to reinforce your memory of the material. God often calls us to remember things (e.g., Ps. 105:5; Eccl. 12:1; Isa. 46:8). He even memorializes certain redemptive issues by providing "review lessons" through ceremonial rituals (e.g., Ex. 12:14; 1 Cor. 11:23–25). Review enhances memory.

Following this we will offer **Practical Applications** of the material to enhance your educational experience as a Christian. Your Christian commitment requires both understanding and doing (James 1:22; Matt. 7:24–27; Luke 6:46–49). This course work will stick with you better if you actively work through the lessons and their application assignments.

Finally, we will provide a **Recommended Reading** list to supplement your study of the issues. As a Christian, you should be eager to gain greater knowledge of the issues through research. The Lord en-

courages searching out things, when he teaches you: “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7).

“Come, then, let us reason together” (Isa. 1:18).

## Notes

1. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 34.
2. “Exegesis” is based on two Greek words: *ex*, which means “out of” (we derive our English word “exit” from it) and *ago*, which means “to go.” That is, “exegesis” is that which “goes out from” the text. It is the meaning rooted in the text which is carefully drawn out of it (not read into it) through proper interpretive procedures.



# 1

## *The Myth of Neutrality*

*He who is not with Me is against me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. (Matt. 12:30)*

### **1. Central Concerns**

**Y**OU ARE A Christian. You believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You worship Him in all that you do. You seek to obey His Word. You want to honor Him in all that you do. And as a child of God you want others to believe in Christ and serve God. You want to know *how* to challenge others who do not believe in Jesus Christ and Lord and Savior to submit their lives to Him also.

The main question to consider is how you can best witness for the Lord. America was founded as a Christian nation,<sup>1</sup> and most people today claim to be Christians. There are churches on almost every corner, and many of the people you personally know probably claim to be Christians.<sup>2</sup> Yet you know that many more people do not believe God

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<sup>1</sup>Gary DeMar, *America's Christian History* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1995); Gary DeMar, *America's Christian Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003); David J. Brewer, *The United States: A Christian Nation* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, [1905] 1996); Charles B. Galloway, *Christianity and the American Commonwealth: The Influence of Christianity in Making This Nation* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, [1898] 2005).

<sup>2</sup>According to recent Gallup polls, about 82% of Americans claim to be Christians. <http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/godsofbusiness/galluppoll.shtml>

exists. How can you reach such people? How should you reason with them? What method must you follow to show them that God exists? This is what this book is about.

## Setting up the Issue

It is important to understand that the *proper manner*, the *right method*, and the *correct procedures* for proving God's existence to skeptics, doubters, and unbelievers are essential to the defense of the Christian faith. Not just any old method will do.

We must first consider a critical question: Should you be *neutral* regarding your Christian commitment while arguing for the existence of God to an unbeliever? Many Christians attempt to reach either the atheist or the agnostic<sup>3</sup> by saying something to this effect: "I will set aside my belief in God so that I can prove to you that He exists. I will not depend upon my faith, so that I can show you that God's existence is reasonable and not just my personal bias." These "neutral" apologists will also maintain: "I believe that there are good, independent, unbiased reasons that can lead you to the conclusion that God exists." Unfortunately, this "neutral" approach is neither biblical nor effective. Christians must be committed to *biblically-warranted* procedures for defending the faith. The biblical defense is not only different from the attempted neutrality approach, but it is the *exact opposite*. That's a pretty big difference! Christians must *not* set aside their faith commitment *even temporarily* in an attempt to approach the unbeliever on "neutral ground."

Because Jesus Christ is the solid foundation of every believer, Christians must reject the "myth of neutrality" and affirm that God alone is the *starting point* in their reasoning. Unbelievers, of course, will protest this rejection of neutrality with responses like the following:

- "That's not fair! How can you assume what you are supposed to prove?"
- "You're prejudicial! You can't take Christianity for granted!"

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<sup>3</sup>An **atheist** denies the existence of God. The word "atheist" is derived from two Greek words: *a* means "no," and *theos* means "god." An "agnostic" is one who *doubts* the existence of God; or rather, he holds that any god who may exist is unknowable. The word "agnostic" is from the Greek *a*, which means "no" and *gnostos* which means "known," that is, God can't be known or we don't have enough knowledge

- “Since we have conflicting viewpoints as to whether or not God exists, both of us must approach the matter from a position of neutrality.”
- “You must employ standards that are common to all men, not standards generated out of your Christian convictions.”

The unbeliever will challenge you to build your case for God on *neutral* ground, without building on your foundation in God. Be warned! If you don’t start with God as your basic assumption, *you can’t prove anything*. The assumption of God’s existence is essential to *all* reasoning.

## Documenting the Evidence

The neutrality principle is the alleged operating assumption in *all* unbelieving argumentation, just as it is unfortunately in most evangelical apologetic systems. You must recognize this nearly universal practice in modern thought. Neutrality and its twin, doubt, have long been unchallenged principles in the modern world’s conflict with Christianity. This has been true especially since the **Enlightenment**.<sup>4</sup> Note the following calls to neutrality and doubt:

- David Hume (1711–1776): “Nothing can be more unphilosophical than to be positive or dogmatical on any subject.”
- William Hazlitt (1778–1830): “The great difficulty in philosophy is to come to every question with a mind fresh and unshackled by former theories.”
- C. C. Colton (1780–1832): “Doubt is the vestibule which *all* must pass before they can enter into the temple of wisdom.”
- William H. Seward (1801–1872): “The circumstances of the world are so variable, that an irrevocable purpose or opinion is almost synonymous with a foolish one.”

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<sup>4</sup>According to the *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Encyclopedia*: The **Enlightenment** was the “European intellectual movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in which ideas concerning God, reason, nature, and man were blended into a world-view that inspired revolutionary developments in art, philosophy, and politics. Central to Enlightenment thought were the use and celebration of reason. For Enlightenment thinkers, *received authority*, whether in science or religion, was to be *subject to the investigation of unfettered minds*.” Emphasis added.

- Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841–1935): “To have doubted one’s own first principles is the mark of a civilized man.”
- Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947): “In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly.”
- Bertrand Russell (1872–1970): “In all affairs it’s a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted.”
- Wilson Mizner (1876–1933): “I respect faith, but doubt is what gets you an education.”
- Alan Bloom (1930–1992): “The most important function of the university in an age of reason is to protect reason from itself, by being the model of truly openness.”

The modern mindset claims neutrality as its general operating assumption, and two influential applications of contemporary thought evidence this: evolution and deconstructionism.

## **Evolution**

The world’s hostility to certainty and absolutes as required in the Christian system has become increasingly apparent, especially in the foundational and all-controlling commitment which dominates all of modern Western thought and culture: evolution.

Modern science teaches that man is not the apex of creation, but the ex-ape of evolution. Evolutionary theory is taken for granted *throughout* the college curriculum, just as it is in all aspects of modern thought and experience. Evolution not only influences biological and earth sciences as is to be expected, but also psychology, anthropology, sociology, politics, economics, the media, the arts, medicine, and all other academic disciplines as well.

By the very nature of the case, evolutionary theory resists stability and certainty, which are demanded in the biblical outlook. Instead, it necessitates relentless, random development over time leading to fundamental and wholesale changes in systems. Oliver Wendell Holmes, former Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court (1899–1902), expressed well the modern evolutionary commitment when he asserted, “Nothing

is certain but change.” As is so often the case, this even harkens back to antiquity. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (540–480 B. C.) declared something nearly identical when he stated the following more than 2,500 years ago: “Nothing endures but change.”

## Deconstructionism

One influential contemporary application of evolutionary thinking is called **deconstructionism**. This complicated new philosophy has not been widely known outside of scholarly circles, but it is strongly influencing intellectuals in various fields of study, and it is having an impact in the college classroom. Deconstructionism first appeared as a theory for interpreting literature in 1973 in the writings of the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). His approach to literary criticism gave rise in America to what is called the Yale School of Deconstruction. But what is “deconstructionism”?

Deconstructionism is a principle of modern language analysis which asserts that language refers only to itself rather than to an external reality. It challenges any claims to ultimate truth and obligation by attacking theories of knowledge and ultimate values. This philosophy attempts to “deconstruct” texts to remove all biases and traditional assumptions. Deconstructionists argue, therefore, that no written text communicates any set meaning or conveys any reliable or coherent message. Written texts are always subject to differing interpretations which are affected by one’s culture, biases, language imprecision, and so forth and will always falsify the world due to these and other factors. Consequently, *all* communication is *necessarily* subject to differing, conflicting, and changing interpretations, all of which are irreconcilable. This critical approach is a form of **relativism**<sup>5</sup> or **nihilism**.<sup>6</sup> It has spilled over the academic borders of literary analysis to become a broader principle in much modern philosophy and social criticism.

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<sup>5</sup>**Relativism** teaches that knowledge, truth, and morality are not absolute. Rather, they vary from culture to culture and even from person to person. This is due to the limited state of the mind and that there can be no absolutes to give a set meaning or value to any human thought or action.

<sup>6</sup>**Nihilism** teaches that the world and man are wholly without meaning or purpose. The world and man are so absolutely senseless and useless that there is no comprehensible truth. The word “nihilism” is derived from the Latin *nihil*, which means “nothing.”

Deconstructionism directly confronts the Christian commitment to Scripture.<sup>7</sup> We believe the Bible is the unchanging, authoritative, truthful Word of God. For instance, the psalmist confidently declares: “The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times” (Ps. 12:6). Christ teaches that “the Scriptures cannot be broken” (John 10:35b). Paul informs us that rather than being unreliable and lacking any coherent message, “all Scripture is inspired by God and *profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

But the overt teaching of these two unbelieving systems is not the only problem confronting the Christian student. There are others you must prepare for.

## Hidden Opposition

Even when a college professor or media spokesperson is not *directly* attacking Christianity’s truth claims, he is, nevertheless, *indirectly* warring against them *in principle*. Throughout our secularized culture—especially in the university—anti-Christian principles are taken for granted. Many issues might appear to be wholly unrelated to Christian concerns and seem unopposed to Christian truth claims. Yet because of their hidden nature they often can be the most alluring to the Christian and the most injurious to true faith. They represent powerful erosive forces quietly seeping into the mind of the believer. They gradually wash away the very foundations for the Christian life and commitment to God and His Word. Like an undetected cancer they eat away at the believer’s faith by importing unbelieving assumptions into his thinking. *The Christian Post* reports the following:

Focus on the Family’s Teen Apologetics Director Alex McFarland has been involved in youth ministry for the last 16 years. He

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<sup>7</sup>See the following articles in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:1 (March 2005): Andreas J. Köstenberger, “‘What is Truth?’ Pilate’s Question in Its Johannean and Larger Biblical Context”; R. Albert Mohler, “What is Truth?: Truth and Contemporary Culture”; “Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn”; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics.”

says students are generally ill-equipped to fend for their Christian faith because they lack a good understanding of the facts behind Christianity—scientific, historical, or logical.

According to McFarland, “Teens have a sincere child-like faith but have not been exposed to good apologetics,” which he says is “so necessary to being able to defend their faith.”

He warns parents, “I have counseled with many a distraught, even heartbroken, family, who spent 18 years raising a child in the ways of God only to have that faith demolished through four years at a secular university.”

Studies have shown that when students lack good defenses, their faith erodes. And two-thirds will forsake Christianity by their senior year of college. On the other hand, solid faith helps students in all aspects of life.<sup>8</sup>

What a student does not know *will* hurt him. Here are three examples:

1. *Selective considerations.* Even when a college professor does not *directly* criticize the Christian faith, he quietly challenges foundational Christian assumptions. Modern education is effectively **subliminal**<sup>9</sup> advertising for atheism. The professor decides which options are serious, which questions are worthwhile, what evidence should be put before his class. He selects the reading assignments according to his own outlook which locks out Christian principles. The Christian student eventually becomes adapted to that process and begins leaving large fields of study detached from his faith beliefs. This is a subtle form of secularization.

2. *Neutral tolerance.* The university and the media supposedly encourage neutrality by urging tolerance of all views. The call to toleration is simply the application of the neutrality principle to moral issues. But we are all aware that the Christian view is seldom given equal tolerance.

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<sup>8</sup>“What Parents Can Do When College Students Lose Faith,” *The Christian Post* (December 18, 2005): [www.christianpost.com/article/ministries/1660/section/what-parents.can.do.when.college.students.lose.faith/1.htm](http://www.christianpost.com/article/ministries/1660/section/what-parents.can.do.when.college.students.lose.faith/1.htm)

<sup>9</sup>**Subliminal** derives from two Latin words: *sub* (“below”) and *limmen* (“threshold”). It speaks of that which is below the threshold of consciousness, that which is just out of conscious perception. Advertisers have discovered that people unconsciously pick up on and are influenced by flashes of information just below the normal limits of perception. It is claimed that some advertisers have quickly flashed images of their product on a movie screen to unconsciously suggest to the viewer an urge to buy the product.

In fact, the call to tolerance is even self-contradictory in the non-believing system. It is intolerant of views that do not tolerate such things as homosexual conduct or feminism or abortion, for instance. As Tom Beaudoin, assistant professor of religious studies at Santa Clara University, put it: “**Generation X**<sup>10</sup> is not tolerant of an intolerant God.”

3. *Censorship claims.* Libraries claim to resist censorship in the name of neutrality. But some form of censorship is always at work in building a library’s book collection. By necessity the library must select some books over others—unless that library contains all books ever written in the whole world. Consequently, some set of principles *will* apply to book selection. Neutrality is a false illusion in libraries.

## Demonstrating the Problem

Many knowledgeable Christians fall prey to the neutrality myth: “teachers, researchers, and writers are often led to think that honesty demands for them to put aside all distinctly Christian commitments when they study in an area which is not directly related to matters of Sunday worship.”<sup>11</sup> This practice must be avoided. Cornelius Van Til<sup>12</sup> always challenged the unbeliever at the very foundations of his thought. In a philosophical debate, believers *must* begin with biblical commitments.

As Christians we must understand the fundamental importance, wide-ranging implications, and destructive character of the claim to neutrality. We must do so if we are to engage a truly biblical apologetic in a manner that is faithful to God and his revelation in Scripture. Too many apologetic programs require that we suspend our faith commitment in order to allow for a neutral “meeting of the minds” with the

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<sup>10</sup>**Generation X** consists of those whose teen years were touched by the 1980s, i.e. those born in the 1960s and 1970s. The term was popularized by Douglas Coupland’s novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. In Coupland’s usage, the X referred to the difficulty in defining a generation whose only unifying belief was the rejection of the beliefs of their Baby Boomer parents. Although not the first group of Americans to grow up with television, Gen Xers were the first group that never knew life without one.

<sup>11</sup>Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Publications, 1996), 3.

<sup>12</sup>Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) wrote on apologetics, philosophy, ethics, and theology. For a complete bibliography, see Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Reading and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 735–740.



unbeliever. This suspending of faith might truly be called a “suspension bridge” to the world of unbelief. Unfortunately, this “bridge” will get you into the world of unbelief, but will not bring you back.

You must not set aside your faith in God when you consider *anything*—even the proof of the existence of God. Such “neutralist thinking would erase the Christian’s distinctiveness, blur the **antithesis**<sup>13</sup> between worldly and believing mind-sets, and ignore the gulf between the ‘old man’ [our inborn, fallen, sinful nature] and the ‘new man’ [our new birth-generated redeemed nature]. The Christian who strives for neutrality unwittingly endorses assumptions which are hostile to his faith.”<sup>14</sup>

Simply put, you cannot adopt a position of neutrality toward God if you are to remain faithful to Christ. Our Lord never encourages or even allows suspending your faith in order to do anything. Those Christians who attempt neutrality in apologetics actually build their apologetic house on “sinking sand.” Christ, however, teaches that “everyone who hears *these words of Mine*, and *acts upon them*, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock.” He goes on to warn that “everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand” (Matt. 7:24, 26). A wise apologetic method recognizes its Christian foundations and implements them.

Why must you not attempt neutrality in apologetics? The answer is: Because of man’s fall into sin, the world is inherently hostile to the Christian faith. From the time of the fall, enmity is the controlling principle separating the believer and unbeliever (Gen. 3:15; John 15:19; Rom. 5:10; James 4:4).

The Christian message is not congenial to the unbeliever, for it confronts him as a guilty sinner who is at war with his righteous Creator and Judge. The Apostle Paul even goes so far as to declare:

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<sup>13</sup>**Antithesis** is based on two Greek words: *anti* (“against”) and *tithenai* (“to set or place”). “Antithesis” speaks of opposition or a counter point. As Christians we must recognize the fundamental disagreement between biblical thought and all forms of unbelief at the foundational level of our theory of knowing and knowledge. See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the biblical notion of antithesis.

<sup>14</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 23.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who *suppress the truth in unrighteousness*, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that *they are without excuse*. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became *futile in their speculations*, and their *foolish heart was darkened* (Rom. 1:18–21).

This certainly does not sound as if Paul would endorse the neutrality principle in dealing with unbelievers. He teaches that men are *not* neutral, but are actively *hostile* to God Whom they know deep down in their hearts.

To make matters worse for the neutralist approach, Christianity's founding document, the Bible, claims infallible and obligatory authority which *demand*s commitment to its truth claims and obedience to its moral directives: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: *fear God and keep His commandments*, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil" (Eccl. 12:13–14). This absolute demand to fear the true and living God and to obey His obligatory law-word grates on the sinner's central ambition. His sinful desire is "to be as God" determining good and evil for himself, without submitting to God's command (Gen. 3:5; Rom. 8:7). Indeed, "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23) for "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6).

Sinners seek to escape the *dogmatic truth claims* and *obligatory moral directives* of Scripture by resorting to (an alleged) neutrality in thought. Such neutrality actually amounts to *skepticism* regarding the existence of God and the authority of His Word. Unbelievers complain that "nobody knows for sure, therefore the Bible cannot be what it claims to be." Interestingly, the biblical narrative explains the fall of man as arising out of the neutrality principle which encourages doubt about God's absolute authority. You must remember that God clearly

commanded Adam and Eve *not* to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16–17; 3:3). Satan, however, came to them with the temptation to doubt God by assuming a position of neutrality regarding God’s command: “Yea, has God said?” (Gen. 3:1b).

Satan tempted Eve to approach the question of eating from the forbidden tree in a neutral, unbiased fashion. He suggested that she must remain neutral in order to decide who was right, God or Satan. She did not accept God’s word as authoritative and conclusive, but as a true neutralist, determined for herself which option to take (Gen. 3:4–6). Such “neutrality” is dangerous, for as Robert South (1634–1716) expressed it: “He who would fight the devil with his own weapons, must not wonder if he finds himself overmatched.”

Paul relates this historical temptation of Eve to our spiritual failures in our devotion to Christ: “I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). Elsewhere he writes of Eve’s attempted neutrality as a failure brought about by Satanic “deception” (1 Tim. 2:14). As Edwin Hubbel Chapin (1814–1880) stated, “Neutral men are the devil’s allies.” You must remember that the devil presents himself as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14).

You *must not* build your defense of the faith on the principle that led to the fall of mankind. That approach not only failed, but it brought sin, death, destruction, and despair into the world.

As Van Til labored to teach throughout his career . . . , *there simply is no presupposition-free and neutral way to approach reasoning*, especially reasoning about the fundamental and philosophically momentous issues of God’s existence and revelation. To formulate proofs for God that assume otherwise is not only foolish and futile, from a philosophical perspective, but also unfaithful to the Lord. Reasoning is a God-given gift to man, but it does not grant to him any independent authority. The Christian concept of God takes Him to be the highest and absolute authority, even over man’s reasoning: such a God *could not* be proved to exist by some other standard as the highest authority in one’s

reasoning. That would be to assume the contrary of what you are seeking to prove.<sup>15</sup>

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We live in a culture which has for so long been saturated with the claims of intellectual autonomy and the demand for neutrality in scholarship that this ungodly perspective [of neutrality] has been ingrained in us: like the “music of the spheres,” it is so constant and we are so accustomed to it that we fail to discern it. It is common fare, and we simply expect it.<sup>16</sup>

So then, the key point is this: Christian apologetics must not and cannot be neutral. To operate from a position of neutrality is to have surrendered the Christian faith in advance, before any argumentation takes place. We must avoid *the myth of neutrality*, not adopt it.

A busy academic and social schedule in college can easily pull the Christian away from God’s Word. But remember: The Bible calls all believers to the apologetic task. You cannot defend God and his Word if you are not sanctified (set apart) for Him by means of contact with His Word. Too many Christian students drift away from the faith in college because they have not been prepared for the spiritual and apologetical battles they will face. Dr. Gary North once wrote an article advertising a Christian college. The article showed a dejected father who had sent his son off to a secular college. It stated: “I spent \$40,000 to send my son to hell.”

Learning to count is not as important as knowing what counts. Christians must keep themselves before the Lord in Scripture reading and prayer. Unfortunately, as Charles Colson observes: “Our educational establishment seeks to instill a passion for intellectual curiosity and openness, but allows for the existence of no truth worth pursuing.”<sup>17</sup> While in college, Christians should not be passive sponges merely absorbing the material, but instead be active filters sorting out the issues through a biblical grid.

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<sup>15</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 614.

<sup>16</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 31.

<sup>17</sup>Charles Colson, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1989), 85

It is essential to think biblically, to reason as Christians in a “principal” (i.e., principle-based) fashion, to think God’s thoughts after Him, rather than setting aside God’s thoughts as called for with the neutrality principle. God’s Word should be foundational in all thinking and living, for we have been “bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and are “a people for God’s own possession” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Seek to discern the professor’s underlying motives and principles. Biblical apologetics is designed to teach Christians to think *as Christians*, not as neutral observers. No area of life is neutral; even your intellectual life must be surrendered to Christ’s authority. A truly biblical apologetic representing the sovereign Creator of all things requires the surrender of all authority to Christ from the very starting point. First Corinthians 10:31 states that *even whether we eat or drink* we must do so to God’s glory (cf. Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11).

Furthermore, the Bible teaches that *every* Christian should be able to deal with *every* problem at *any* time. God *expects* you to deal with any form of opposition to the Christian faith. The New Testament writers challenge their original audiences—and *you*—to be defenders of the faith. In the verse that serves as the cornerstone of Christian apologetics, Peter commands: “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15; see also Jude 3). Note that Christians-as-such (not just the philosophically-minded among us!) are commanded “always” to answer “every man.” Sadly, few evangelical students learn this in their home churches. The believer must learn apologetics for his or her own spiritual well-being, as well as for becoming an agent of reform for the untrained Christian.

All of this is effectively portrayed for us in Deuteronomy 6: “You shall teach [God’s statutes] diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deut. 6:7–9). This speaks of God’s law-word guiding our daily labors (govern-

ing our “hand”), our thought processes (governing our “head”), and our mundane living for Him in lying down, rising up, sitting, and walking.

## 2. Exegetical Observations

Look at the following important biblical passages impacting our apologetic method. Hopefully this study will enhance our understanding of these texts of Scripture, underscoring the biblical apologetic method and a few additional exegetical observations. The Christian apologist must know God’s Word to function properly.

### Mark 12:30

Mark 12:30 reads, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This statement is taken from Deuteronomy 6:5 immediately after Moses declares that “the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:5). Israel is reminded that only one God exists, in contrast to the numerous competing “gods” in the ancient pagan world surrounding her.<sup>18</sup> Since there is one God (who created and controls all things), there is one truth system, rather than competing systems of explanation. The ancient world had a god for the sun, for fertility, for this and for that. Consequently, their worldview was fragmented and their knowledge lacked coherence.<sup>19</sup>

We should note that Christ emphasizes His call to love God in all things. He does not simply say: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” Rather, He emphasizes the totality of your love for God by repeating “all” before each noun: “You shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, and with *all* your soul, and with *all your mind*, and with *all* your strength.” This repetitious emphasis strengthens His call to lovingly obey God in *all* things. Of course, our special concern in apologetics is on the call to love God with “all your *mind*.” Non-neutrality is inherent in this charge by Christ.

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<sup>18</sup>For instance, God’s ten plagues on Egypt were directed at Egypt’s so-called gods (Ex. 12:12; 18:11; cf. Num. 33:4).

<sup>19</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1967).

## 1 Peter 3:15

We find the classic apologetics text in 1 Peter 3:15: “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” This text is clearly opposed to the neutrality principle.

Notice that Peter commands that you “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts” in order to defend the faith. To “sanctify” means to “set apart, to separate, to distinguish.” A truly biblical apologetic does not *set aside* Christ *from* our hearts, but *sets apart* Christ *in* our hearts. In fact, it sets aside Christ *as Lord* or master. As Paul put it, Christ must “come to have first place in *everything*” (Col. 1:18). Your starting point in reasoning with the unbeliever must be Christ.

You must not miss Peter’s specific point: He is calling on you to set apart Christ *in the very process of defending the faith*. His main point is to call you to “make a defense” and “to give an account” of your hope in Christ. Apologetics is not a side issue here; it is the central point. Again, he makes the point by urging that you set apart Christ in your hearts—in your inner-most being.

These are only two samples from God’s Word; there are many more to study. But the fact is, the Bible presents a theological outlook and practical worldview which clearly deny that neutrality exists in fallen man and his thinking. The Bible demands that Christians recognize that neutrality is a myth and resist it.

## 3. Questions Raised

Attempt to answer the following questions on your own before looking at the text or consulting the **Answer Key**.

1. What is “apologetics”? Define the term and explain the derivation of the word “apologetics.”
2. What is the central point of the first chapter?
3. How is the very principle of evolutionism (even apart from the scientific/biological statement of evolutionary theory) opposed to the Christian faith?

4. What is “deconstructionism”? Where did this philosophy first arise? How does it conflict with basic principles of the Christian faith?

5. List some passages of Scripture that assert the certainty and authority of God’s Word.

6. How does the unbelieving college professor’s worldview subtly confront your faith, even when the professor is not directly mentioning Christianity per se?

7. What is the meaning of the “myth of neutrality”?

8. What statements by Christ discount the possibility of neutrality?

9. Where in Scripture do you first see neutrality regarding God and His Word attempted?

10. Is the attempt at neutrality simply a methodological issue, or is it a moral one as well? Explain.

#### **4. Practical Application**

Now what are some practical things you can do to re-enforce what you have learned? How can you promote this apologetic method among Christian friends?

1. Frequently remind yourself of the nature of spiritual warfare. In order to prepare yourself for your college classes, at the beginning of each semester you should re-read the biblical passages that demonstrate the active antagonism of the unbelieving world against your Christian faith. You must not forget the nature of the unbeliever’s challenge to your holistic faith.

2. Develop a devotional life that reinforces your call to apologetics. Make a list of the biblical passages used in this study and read them for your devotions.

3. Diligently seek to evaluate every thing you are being taught from a principled Christian perspective. After classes each day, jot down comments on the contradictions to the Christian faith which you encountered. Keep them in a notebook. Writing things down is the best secret to a good memory. Reflect on biblical answers to these supposed contradictions.

4. Develop small Bible study and accountability groups with other Christian students on campus. A part of defending the faith involves



promoting its defense even among believers. As a Christian in fellowship with other Christians, you should urge fellow believers to realize their spiritual obligation to defend the faith before an unbelieving world.

5. Seek out any Christian campus ministries that are strongly committed to the Bible and are developing the Christian life. Attend their meetings and involve yourself in their ministries.

6. Find a good church in the area of your college. Commit yourself to attend church regularly. As Christians, we must not be “forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another” (Heb. 10:25).

7. Where possible use class assignments to present the Christian perspective on issues. We would recommend that you avoid narrow testimonial types of papers. You should rather discretely develop worldview oriented themes that work basic Christian principles into the picture. In-your-face testimonials might be an affront to your professor and may appear to be a challenge to him. But working out your biblical principles might alert him to the philosophical implications of Christianity and will certainly help you flesh out your own understanding. You must be about “making the most of your time” while in college (Eph. 5:16).

While you are enrolled in college you are in a full-time, formal educational environment. You are seeking, therefore, to be educated. Dr. Van Til teaches that if education is to be practical it must mold the developing mind of the student so that he is put in the best possible relationship to his environment. Then he explains that man’s ultimate environment is God Himself, because “in Him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:28; cf. Job 12:10; Ps. 139:7–17; Dan. 5:23). You certainly will not find your professors assigning papers that encourage your Christian faith. But you must seek the opportunities—when they are allowed.

8. As a well-rounded Christian seeking to glorify Christ, you must approach your academic studies in a mature and diligent fashion. You are both paying hard-earned money for a college education and spending your God-given time in college; make the most of your investment. Do not cut corners in your studies or simply try to “get by.” Christ calls you to excellence. Some students are naturally lazy, others suffer from volun-

tary inertia. Do not allow your educational experience to inadvertently teach you to be intellectually lazy. Such laziness is disloyalty to Christ.

Most colleges are liberal arts colleges that are supposed to give you a well-rounded education—even when you are obligated to take a required course that you do not particularly enjoy. As G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) mused: “Education is the period during which you are being instructed by somebody you do not know, about something you do not want to know.” Remember also that it will affect your overall grade point average and therefore impact your witness as a Christian student. Besides, you will discover, to your surprise later on, that the knowledge you gained even in that course will prove useful.

The following anonymous comments should cause you to smile at their uncovering of foolishness; they should not summarize your approach to education:

- “College is a fountain of knowledge where some students come to drink, some to sip, but most come just to gargle.”
- “All college students pursue their studies, but some are further behind than others.”
- “Some students take up the arts in college, some take up the sciences, while others just take up space.”

## **5. Recommended Reading**

To enhance your understanding of the antagonism of the unbelieving mind and the dangers of neutrality, we recommend the following additional reading.

Bahnsen, Greg L., *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Nacogdoches, Tex.: Covenant Media Foundation, 1996), chapters 1–2.

DeMar, Gary, *Thinking Straight in a Crooked World: A Christian Defense Manual* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2001)

Gentry, Kenneth L., Jr., *Defending the Faith: An Introduction to Biblical Apologetics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Fountain Inn, SC: KennethGentry.Com, 2001)

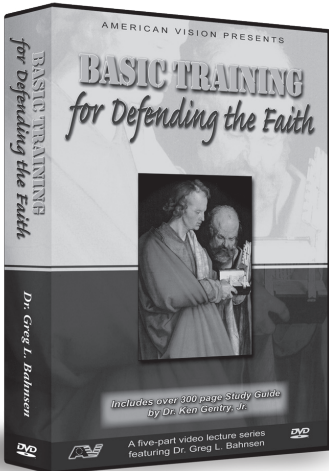
Newport, Frank, “A Look at Americans and Religion Today”: (<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/godsofbusiness/galluppoll.shtm>).

Pratt, Richard L., Jr., *Every Thought Captive* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), chapters 1, 2, 4, 6.

Van Til, Cornelius, "Why I Believe in God": ([www.reformed.org/apologetics/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/why\\_I\\_believe\\_cvt.html](http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/why_I_believe_cvt.html))

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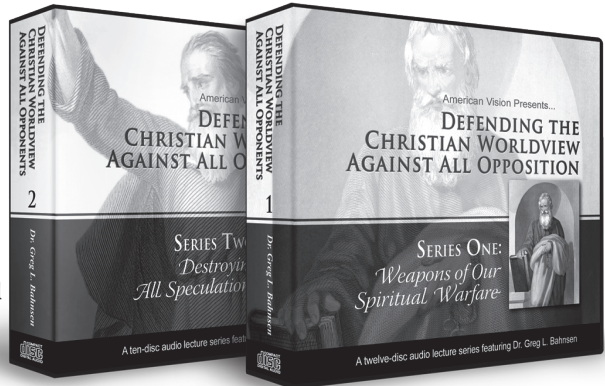
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