

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

APOLOGETIC METHOD ANALYSIS

PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

APOL 500

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INTRODUCTION/THESIS STATEMENT

An assessment of presuppositional apologetics and its validity in the Christian and secular forum shows that this method is a valid and necessary style of apologetics. The following method of apologetics has a positive effect when used properly and in a loving and kind manner. The apologists who align themselves with presuppositional apologetics have founded an important procedure of bringing the defense of the Christian faith to the offensive.

SUMMARY OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

Presuppositionalism is a school of apologetics that teaches (1) that all knowledge is based on presuppositions that serve as ultimate standards in a system of thought, and (2) that all Christian thought, including apologetics, presupposes the revelation of God given in nature and Scripture. Presuppositional apologetics makes use of “transcendental argument,” which maintains that the God of the Bible is the only possible source of meaning and intelligible discourse.¹ This example of apologetics focuses on positive apologetics in its definition of the apologist having a mindset of focusing on the Triunity of God and using the Bible as an inerrant response to converse arguments against Christianity. Presuppositionalism has three major branches: revelational presuppositionalism, systematic presuppositionalism, and rational presuppositionalism.²

CRITIQUE OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

This style of apologetics is of utmost importance when defending the Christian faith, but breaks down against someone who may not presuppose that the Trinity of God or God Himself even exists. The basis of presuppositional style apologetics aligns itself with positive apologetics

¹ John Frame, February 2, 2010, email message to author.

² Ergun Caner, “Apologetics, Types of”, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics*, ed. Ed Hindson and Ergun Caner (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2008), 66.

in the manner that it utilizes the claims of Christianity to be fundamentally true. This method has to be utilized when defending the faith because as stated found in Isaiah 55:11:

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.³

The converse of the above statements can also be made regarding presuppositional apologetics. Analyzing presuppositionalist style arguments would be somewhat fruitless if an apologist using this approach held too staunchly to his criteria when speaking to an avowed atheist. This apologetic method would need to allow itself to disengage from its fundamental belief of Christianity being logical in its conclusions to avoid closed mindedness from atheistic argument by using the possibility of an evidential apologetic style approach. In an atheist's mindset you must prove the existence of a God before you can begin the discussion of a God revealing Himself – especially in the Bible – which would be a nonissue with an atheist. Norm Geisler expounds on this idea, “The atheist must make his painful choice: Either he loses the basis for his argument against God from evil, or he must admit there is an objective moral law which leads to a Moral Law Giver”⁴ [God]. This lack of belief in God from the atheist's point of view causes an immediate block in the presuppositional apologetic approach. John Frame expounds on this origin of thought, “...since God and Scripture are precisely the matters in question, we obviously must not make assumptions about them in our argument. That would be circular thinking. It would also put an end to evangelism, for if we demand that the unbeliever

³ John MacArthur, ed. *The MacArthur Study Bible – New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1997), 1041.

⁴ Norman Geisler, *Can Atheists Justify Being Good Without God?*, [online], available from <http://www.normangeisler.net/atheismbegood.html>

assume God's existence and the authority of Scripture in order to enter the debate, he will never consent.⁵

THEOLOGIANS WHICH ALIGN WITH PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

Between John M. Frame, Alvin Plantinga, Gordon Clark, and Cornelius Van Til presuppositional apologetics has well established fundamentals. This apologetic style keeps the defense at the Christian's point of view and removes the burden of proof from the Christian and places it squarely on the shoulders of the cynic, skeptic, and critic.

⁵ John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God an Introduction*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1994), 4.

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