

Copyright © 2019 Jason Matthew Murray

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

CAMPBELL AND “EXPOSITORY APOLOGETICS”:
PRESUPPOSITIONALISM CRITIQUES
CAMPBELL’S “ORIGINAL GOSPEL”

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Educational Ministry

by
Jason Matthew Murray
December 2019

APPROVAL SHEET

CAMPBELL AND “EXPOSITORY APOLOGETICS”:
PRESUPPOSITIONALISM CRITIQUES
CAMPBELL’S “ORIGINAL GOSPEL”

Jason Matthew Murray

Read and Approved by:

Theodore J. Cabal (Faculty Supervisor)

Joseph C. Harrod (Second Reader)

Date _____

For the glory of God

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION: PRESUPPOSITIONAL, CAMPBELLITE APOLOGETICS?	1
Defining Expository Apologetics	3
Defining Campbellite Apologetics	5
Familiarity with the Literature	8
Void in the Literature	11
Thesis	14
Outline of Chapters	16
2. CAMPBELLITE APOLOGETICS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS	21
Qualitative Research Introduction	21
Research Problem	21
Purpose Statement	22
Limits and Delimitations	22
Research Questions	23
Terminology	23
Methodological Design	26
Willisburg Group Findings Analysis	33
Mackville Group Findings Analysis	35
Application and Further Research Indications	36
3. CAMPBELL'S BIBLICIST APOLOGETIC	38
The Preface: Biblical Language as Gospel Defense	38

Chapter	Page
Chapters 1 and 2: Biblical Language Both Prime and Prior	42
Clarifying Campbell’s Biblical Priority: Revelation over Reason	45
Campbell’s “Antithesis”: the “Understanding Distance”	49
Campbell’s Version of the “Vast Gulf”: Who May Cross?	52
Conclusion: Campbell’s Biblicist Apologetic	56
4. BAUCHAM’S PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETIC	58
Baucham’s Presuppositionalism	59
Van Til’s Presuppositionalist “Credo”	65
John Frame Qualifies Van Til’s Presuppositionalism	72
Frame and Van Til’s Antithesis	76
Conclusion: Basic Presuppositional Apologetics	76
5. SYNTHESIS AND CRITIQUE	77
Baucham: Not Presuppositionalist, but Presuppositional	77
Frame and Van Til: Presuppositional, Presuppositionalists	79
Practical Presuppositionalism: Reformed Theology as Apologetic	81
Presuppositionalism as Post-Kantian: Campbell and Van Til in their Times	83
Campbell: Pre-Kantian Revelation in the Owen Debate	85
Theology or Apologetics? Revelation-Based Reason	87
Campbell: Defense by Principles	89
Summarizing the Van Tilian Critique of Campbell	93
Synthesis	96
Critique	98
6. CONCLUSION	99
Appendix	
APPENDIX A: QUALITATIVE STUDY PARTICIPANT COVER LETTER	104
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	106

APPENDIX C: WILLISBURG INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	108
APPENDIX D: WILLISBURG FINDINGS	122
APPENDIX E: MACKVILLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	128
APPENDIX F: MACKVILLE FINDINGS	144
BIBLIOGRAPHY	147

PREFACE

For the space and support needed to write this thesis, I owe thanks in several directions.

The elders, deacons, and other active members of Mackville Christian Church have made a wonderful, supportive home for my family during this season of our lives.

Dr. Bruce Shields, formerly of Emmanuel Christian Seminary, and Dr. Steven Richardson of Hope International University, both former professors of mine, were attentive and supportive as I ventured into doctoral-level study.

Dr. Bill Cook, of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Ninth and O Baptist Church, is the only SBC pastor to ever take on the task of shepherding our family. Once he had encouraged my turn toward apologetics, he never failed to check on my progress.

In serving as my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Theodore J. Cabal exercised not only his world-class scholarship, but his considerable pastoral gifts. His demand for clarity and sound thinking was almost matched by his desire for my joy in this project.

Our sons Iain and Niall, and daughters, Onora and Mairi, began this five-year adventure with the faith of little children, and have continued to believe even as it winds to a close. My wife, Katherine Morgan Murray, played such a role in making this thesis possible. I wish I could list her as a co-author. Instead, I will offer this succinct acknowledgement. “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all” (Prov 31:29).

Jason Murray

Mackville, Kentucky

December 2019

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: PRESUPPOSITIONAL, CAMPBELLITE APOLOGETICS?

In my frequent apologetic encounters as a Campbellite minister, I am more and more aware of the gospel under attack. Ubiquitous, unrelenting assaults on the historic Christian “Good News,” on its foundations, and on its implications, no longer surprise believers, and often fail to stir them. These attacks are part of public consciousness now, so that every gospel sermon enters this arena as soon as it finds an ear. Each time I stand in the pulpit, I ask about this theological discipline, called “apologetics.” Can a Christian Church/Church of Christ preacher successfully defend Christianity, wholesale, from the Bible?

To put it another way, can a Campbellite preacher practice “expository apologetics?” As simple as it sounds, the question contains at least three others. Do Christian churches preach the evangelical gospel, teach it in the full evangelical context of biblical inerrancy, and defend in post-Christian culture? In my fellowship, the simple answer to all three is “yes.” However, the terms *evangelical* and *expository* in the mouth of a Campbellite apologist raise prior theological questions. What is the theology behind *expository apologetics*?

The recent and influential *presuppositionalism* from which “expository apologetics” is derived is a direct function of Dutch Reformed theology, whose full biblical context is the historic Calvinist body of doctrine.¹ The Christian Churches and Churches of Christ are ideological heirs of Alexander Campbell (1788–1866), whose relationship to

¹ For introductory purposes, see Voddie L. Baucham, *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015). His key reference points are in Reformed theology, especially that of Cornelius Van Til. See 21, 36, 85, 95ff, 111ff., and 148.

the Reformed theology of his day was at best defined by polemics. His heirs tend not to *do* Reformed theology, *per se*, Dutch or otherwise.

In fact, by popular perception in many fellowships, Campbellite churches and Reformed evangelical churches could not disagree more. It is true they confess and proclaim the same Savior and Lord, preach from the same New Testament, appeal to the same Apostles, assume the same inerrant, infallible Word of God, and defend as “gospel” the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, for salvation from sin, by grace, through faith. Yet, insiders know that one group leans Arminian and the other Calvinist. One connects believers’ baptism to repentance, the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit; the other brackets those things with justification by faith and describes baptism as an important step in sanctification. One calls its preachers “ministers” and tasks them with general service; the other calls them “pastors” and gives them full charge of the flock of God. One celebrates the Lord’s Supper as often as the congregation meets; the other is often reluctant to celebrate it weekly.

In all these differences, it has been easy to lose sight of the common ground Campbellites and other evangelicals have in the *evangelium*. Few leaders are calling for dialogue, let alone fellowship, between Campbellites and other evangelicals. Fewer still are favorably comparing their theology, and no one at all is interested in comparing their apologetics.² Why, then, should a Campbellite preacher ask to do Reformed, presuppositional “expository apologetics?” He should ask, as this thesis proposes to explain, because Campbell’s most evangelically-oriented heirs have long been doing something very much like it.

² See William Baker, *Evangelicals and the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), whose study group at the Evangelical Theological Society is taking the lead in this dialogue.

Defining Expository Apologetics

What is *expository apologetics*? Simply stated in Voddie Baucham's book bearing that title, it is "the application of the principles of biblical exposition to the art and science of apologetics."³ The simplicity and clarity of this formulation by Baucham (1969–) will define the arena of this thesis. Evangelicals inside and outside the Campbellite tradition happily subscribe to such "biblical" apologetics, but they may be interested in seeing the terminology carefully unpacked and compared.

As a methodology, Baucham's biblical apologetic focuses on simplicity, both for the apologist and those the apologist engages. Arguments rooted in biblical exposition must be easy to remember and understand.⁴ This point raises no contrast with Campbellism, whose entire theology is, both historically and currently, defined by a "common sense" hermeneutic that prizes the common man's understanding and communication ability above all else.⁵ What needs exploration is the claim expository apologetics makes for the philosophical high ground of biblical presuppositionalism, since this is a claim that, as I will show, Campbellite preachers would share, however unwittingly.

Baucham unhesitatingly and repeatedly uses the term *presuppositional* to describe his understanding of how the Bible ought to function in both the appropriation and the defense of truth. He cites Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) and John Frame (1939–), one of Van Til's two main interpreters, as theological sponsors.⁶ Baucham correctly roots

³ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 20.

⁴ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 20, 67.

⁵ See Carisse Mickey Berryhill, "Common Sense Philosophy," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 230-31.

⁶ The other acknowledged theological interpreter is the late Gregory Bahnsen (1948 – 1995). At minimum, the disagreements between Frame and Bahnsen serve to illustrate the complexity of Van Tilian thought and the difficulty of strictly defining presuppositionalism.

their apologetics in a philosophy that presupposes biblical inerrancy and supremacy before, and over against, all other philosophical criteria, especially criteria of reason as defined by the Bible's skeptics.

Presuppositionalism regards most historic apologetics as flawed, misleading, in that traditional apologetics generally presupposed extrabiblical criteria first, then judged the gospel by those standards. Presuppositional apologetics says this is exactly backwards (though Baucham himself is careful not to dismiss, but only to subordinate, other approaches).⁷ Sound defense of the gospel judges reason using biblical faith, not biblical faith using reason. The presuppositionalism Baucham borrows from Van Til and Frame is, like theirs, radically biblicist apologetics.⁸

This thesis undertakes a Campbellite exploration of presuppositional expository apologetics because Campbell's heirs have their own tradition of presuppositional apologetics. The most biblically-driven Campbellite movements employ apologetic philosophies very similar to Baucham's. This similarity was buried long ago in theological disagreements, and in the polemic history that has resulted. Yet, as will be shown, deep parallels exist between the radically biblicist (restorationist) apologetic of the Campbellites, and the radically biblicist (presuppositional) apologetic of the later Reformed evangelicals. This study offers a fresh analysis of the Stone-Campbell "gospel" from a Reformed Apologetics perspective, exploring the promise of reconciling

⁷ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 65-66.

⁸ *Biblicism* is defined in a typical edition of Webster's dictionary as "a literal interpretation of the Bible." See also Dana F. Kellerman, ed., *The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language* (Melrose Park, IL: English Language Institute of America, 1977), s.v. "biblicism." A slightly earlier edition (1964) defines a "biblicist" as "one who adheres to Bible teachings; one who makes the Bible the sole rule of faith." *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged* (New York: Rockville House, 1964), 172. Frame, biblicist in this sense, defines the basis of his presuppositionalism in terms of the Bible, its "ultimacy," and its "infallibility": "An ultimate presupposition is a belief over which no other takes precedence. For a Christian, the content of Scripture must serve as his ultimate presupposition. . . . This doctrine is merely the outworking of the lordship of God in the arena of human thought. It merely applies the doctrine of scriptural infallibility to the realm of knowing." John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (Theology of Lordship)* (Philadelphia: P & R, 1987), 45.

Campbellites and other evangelicals under the biblical banner of presuppositional apologetics.

Defining Campbellite Apologetics

Who and what are Campbellites? “Campbellite” is a shorthand description of the churches historically connected to Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone (1772–1844), the founders of the self-styled “Restoration Movement.” This fellowship appeared as a nineteenth-century reformation in America, which eventually gave rise to three church traditions of around four million total adherents today.⁹ Two of those traditions, the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, enjoy varying degrees of identity with and participation in the evangelical world. However, even when cordial, the relationship between Campbellites and other evangelicals has generally been marked by polemics.

Polemics defined Alexander Campbell’s ministry, and has likewise defined engagement by his movements with other Christian traditions, especially among those evangelicals with whom he was most at home. His apologetic was often eclipsed as he and his followers defended his theology from criticisms based on evangelical canons.¹⁰ His polemical stance rendered him doctrinally suspect from a Reformed point of view, with some justification.¹¹ Campbellites and other evangelicals continue to disagree over

⁹ Mark Noll, foreword to Baker, *Evangelicals and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 9-16.

¹⁰ SBC textbooks on “Campbellism” used to abound in Campbell’s century and are still around. See A. P. Williams, *Campbellism Exposed* (Nashville: Baptist Publishing, 1866); D. B. Ray, *Textbook on Campbellism* (Memphis, TN: Southwestern Publishing, 1867); W. A. Jarrell, “*The Gospel in Water*,” or, *Campbellism; Being an Exposition and Refutation of Campbellism, and an Exposition and a Vindication of the Gospel and the New Testament Church* (St. Louis: The National Baptist Publishing, 1886). Similar polemics can be found today, such as Ben M. Bogard, *Campbellism Exposed: One Hundred One Reasons for Not Being a Campbellite* (Texarkana, TX/AR: Bogard Press, 1965). On the other side, Campbell’s three movements have each in their own way been defined by their efforts to withstand such polemics. See especially Christopher Don DeWalt, *A Diverse People: How the Leaders of the Restoration Movement View Their Own History and Principles* (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Bible Seminary, 1995).

¹¹ As both Campbellites and non-Campbellite evangelicals will sometimes admit. See Baker, *Evangelicals and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, esp. 31-35.

some important matters, which is why the work of scholars such as William Baker is salutary and even necessary.¹² As noted, such matters impact theology proper and remind evangelicals that one advocate of biblical, biblicist apologetics may deeply disagree with another.

However, though polemics-based analysis of Campbell has been thorough, and much of it is accurate, it is incomplete. Though polemics does attend to crucial theology, it falls short in several important ways. Alexander Campbell himself spent much of his public life protesting such largely polemical analysis of his work.¹³ Polemics has not offered much to explain his own alignment and affinities with evangelicalism. Polemics misses Campbell's own intent to mount a positive defense of the "original gospel"—from rationalist skepticism on one hand, and religious speculation on the other.¹⁴ Thus, polemics-based analysis misrepresents not only him but his evangelical heirs and limits the possibility of constructive, working critiques of Campbell's project, even by Campbellites.

An opportunity appears here, an untried *apologetics* approach with potential to account for what polemics cannot. If Campbell regarded himself as an evangelical, expository apologist first, then it is fitting to analyze him from an "expository apologetics" perspective. Further, it can be argued that Campbell pioneered an early species of

¹² William Baker's above-noted Stone-Campbell study group at the Evangelical Theological Society is doing helpful work in this regard.

¹³ Campbell never intended to launch a denomination. After leaving a sect of Scottish Presbyterians, he was a member of two Baptist associations in turn, until polemics arising from his apologetics led to his unwilling separation. See Leroy Garrett, "Alexander Campbell," in Foster et al., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 119-20. Campbell remained aligned with Evangelicals' biblical commitments, and sympathetic to their aims, hopes, and concerns. See William Baker, "Christian Churches (Independent): Are We Evangelical?" in Baker, *Evangelicals and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 31-36.

¹⁴ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System, in Reference to the Union of Christians: And a Restoration of Primitive Christianity, as Pled in the Current Reformation* (Bethany, VA: A. Campbell, 1840), xii.

presuppositional apologetics, strongly foreshadowing in many respects the strongly biblicist apologetics of above-noted Reformed Orthodox Presbyterian theologian Cornelius Van Til.¹⁵ A clear entry point into this comparison is Voddie Baucham's aforementioned book, which presents this biblicist apologetic for popular consumption.

For Campbellites defending the evangelical gospel in its fully biblical context, the applied presuppositional apologetics exemplified by Baucham offers real insight. As presuppositionalism grows in influence among evangelicals, Campbellites need to be informed about its biblicist commitments and arguments. If recent Reformed apologetics theory highlights presuppositionalist approaches that were paralleled earlier by Campbell, then comparisons and contrasts deserve exploring.¹⁶ Most importantly, critiquing Campbell on this basis holds the potential for positive reception by evangelically-oriented Campbellites.¹⁷

¹⁵ See Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*; Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 1998), 1-7; Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity: An Apologetics Handbook* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 40-41; John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995).

¹⁶ See Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 266-72, for a fairly comprehensive and balanced description of the overlaps between "Reformed" and "Presuppositional" apologetics, including and especially its representations by Van Til and Clark scholars John Frame and Ronald Nash.

¹⁷ It is important to note that while polemical notes are essentially absent from Voddie Baucham's work, two of his chapters contain supplementary arguments that fall outside any fruitful apologetics comparison with Campbell. In Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, chap. 5 (85-103), Baucham presents an introduction to historic Reformed Creeds as an aid to instruction in the basics of biblical Christianity. The ecclesiological stance necessitated by the extreme application of Campbell's apologetic did not allow him to treat the historic creeds from any standpoint other than that of church polity, from which he uniformly opposed the historic creeds as being man-made. In chap. 6 (105-23), Baucham makes similar use of the Old Testament as an aid to Christian apologetics, using a theology with which Campbell famously took issue (see "Sermon on the Law," in Garrett, "Alexander Campbell," in Foster et al., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 120). To engage this material would raise important theological issues that rightly divide Campbellite and Reformed heirs. While important, they are beyond the chosen scope of this paper, that of apologetics per se. Neither chapter will enter this comparative analysis of Baucham's apologetic.

Familiarity with the Literature

Several categories of literature serve as preliminary background for understanding Alexander Campbell's apologetic and justifying its constructive critique. First, his own writings show both his intent to set forth an affirmative gospel defense and the immediate polemics into which he was drawn. *The Christian System* (1840) showcases his affirmative apologetic, an effort to undergird the polemics that had begun to fill two series of periodicals he edited, *The Christian Baptist* (1823–1830) and *The Millennial Harbinger* (1830–1870).¹⁸

Because polemics so occupied Campbell and shaped the movement that came after him, the second and greatest category of literature on Campbell is work by Campbellites describing their efforts to withstand those polemics. This is not to say they did not pick up and continue his apologetic, only that the polemics became definitive. A recent example is Don DeWelt's *A Diverse People: How the Leaders of the Restoration Movement View Their Own History and Principles* (1995).¹⁹ Leroy Garrett's *The Stone-Campbell Movement* (1981) serves as a general introduction to the history of these polemics.²⁰ The more recent work of Casey and Foster by the same title (2002) discusses Campbellite thought in contemporary contexts.²¹ Eugene Boring's *Disciples and the Bible* (1997) focuses on how Campbell and his heirs handled Scripture.²² Douglas Foster has edited an encyclopedia (2004) organizing hundreds of articles by sympathetic contributors

¹⁸ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System*; Campbell, *The Christian Baptist* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1983); Campbell, *The Millennial Harbinger* (Bethany, VA: A. Campbell, 1830-1870).

¹⁹ DeWelt, *A Diverse People*.

²⁰ Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1981).

²¹ Michael W. Casey and Douglas A. Foster, eds., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An International Religious Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002).

²² Eugene M. Boring, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples' Biblical Interpretation in North America: Where We've Been—Where We Are—Where Do We Go from Here?* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997).

to shed light on Campbellite thought.²³ Finally, the dissertation of Preston William Free (2007) provides important perspective on the central place of Calvinist ecclesiology and politics in the polemics surrounding Campbell.²⁴

The third category is literature on Campbell by non-Campbellite evangelicals. This material confirms the polemical nature of most analysis. Its tone ranges widely. On one end is the decided lack of sympathy in Ben Bogard's *Campbellism Exposed: One Hundred One Reasons for Not Being a Campbellite* (1965).²⁵ At the other is the irenic and constructive *Evangelicals and the Stone-Campbell Movement*, edited by William Baker and introduced by Mark Noll (2002).²⁶ Common to both is the preoccupation with theological and doctrinal issues historically driving the polemical analysis of Campbell.

In the fourth group of material, a firm starting line has been drawn for apologetics analysis of Campbell. The clearest light so far shed upon Alexander Campbell as a philosophical apologist comes from three researchers. Peter Rasor (2013) demonstrates Campbell's dependence on Scottish Common-Sense philosophy.²⁷ Richard J. Cherok (2008) accurately portrays Campbell as a primarily evidentialist defender of Christianity against the skeptics of his day.²⁸ J. Caleb Clanton (2013) has provided the only available

²³ Foster et al., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*.

²⁴ Preston William Free, *Calvinism and the Early Restoration Movement Leaders* (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Christian University, 2007). Free shows how the implementation of Calvinist thought in civic and church life forced Campbellites to carefully weigh the biblical quality of Calvinist thought.

²⁵ Bogard, *Campbellism Exposed*.

²⁶ Baker, *Evangelicals and the Stone Campbell Movement*.

²⁷ Peter Jay Rasor, "The Influence of Scottish Common-Sense Realism on Alexander Campbell's View of the Nature of Scripture and Hermeneutics" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013).

²⁸ Richard J. Cherok, *Debating for God: Alexander Campbell's Challenge to Skepticism in Antebellum America* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2008).

contemporary analysis of Campbell's philosophy of religion.²⁹ These three researchers may be studied against the historical backdrop provided by a fourth scholar, William J. Humble, in an older work, *Campbell and Controversy: The Story of Alexander Campbell's Great Debates with Catholicism, Presbyterianism, and Skepticism* (1952).³⁰ This volume shows how Campbell's purpose as an apologist was never entirely subsumed in the polemics for which he was better known. Taken together, these Campbell researchers recognize him not merely as a polemicist but as an affirmative apologist.

As noted, the choice of presuppositional, Reformed apologetics as a framework for critiquing Campbell has been guided by recognition of the unity—almost the identity—of Campbellite and Reformed apologetic aims. They were both engaged in setting forth a new, affirmative, wholesale biblicist apologetic. Exemplary of Reformed apologetic aims is Voddie Baucham's popularly conceived and written *Expository Apologetics* (2015).³¹

Baucham's commitment to a homiletic defense of the entire Bible mirrors similar commitments to be found among Campbellites. The rigorous biblicism among them closely resembles the presuppositionalist philosophy Baucham defends. Baucham, in turn, gave credit to Cornelius Van Til, claiming him as the philosophical sponsor of his apologetic. Van Til's efforts to install biblical primacy at the heart of apologetics reveal him to be an apt interlocutor for Campbell. Van Til became the first to argue for the prior and wholesale adoption of biblical presuppositions in defense of biblical theology.³²

²⁹ J. Caleb Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013). Clanton's work on Campbell, though it stands alone in contemporary scholarship, is well-grounded. His philosophical analysis cites five published works by Campbellites dating from 1900 to 1965 and four unpublished dissertations from 1932 to 1978.

³⁰ William J. Humble, *Campbell and Controversy: The Story of Alexander Campbell's Great Debates with Catholicism, Presbyterianism, and Skepticism* (Rosemead, CA: Old Paths Book Club, 1952).

³¹ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*.

³² Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 1-7; Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 40-41.

Van Til's similarities to Campbell call for exploration. Each became the father of a biblicist apologetics movement. Each is as widely and persistently misunderstood as he is popular. Most important, each must be comprehended in light of his unswerving dedication to a wholly biblicist apologetic. Background for Baucham's use of Van Til can be found in anthologies of the two foremost interpreters of Van Til, John Frame (1995) and Greg Bahnsen (1998).³³ This thesis explores the overlap at the heart of two wholesale gospel defenses—Campbellite apologetics and Reformed, presuppositional apologetics—by locating, identifying, and defining the totalizing, biblicist starting points they share.

Void in the Literature

Two specific beginning boundaries for this thesis exist in the relevant literature. First, no standard work on the history of apologetics includes the work of Alexander Campbell. The primary source anthology of Edgar and Oliphint (2011), though it represents apologists across the theological spectra, does not mention him.³⁴ Nor is he referenced in the extensive survey of apologetics by Boa and Bowman, nor in any other standard text on apologetics.

Second, as noted, two researchers successfully laid the groundwork for including Campbell in any list of prominent Christian apologists. J. Caleb Clanton (2013) and Richard J. Cherok (2008) step beyond the polemics-driven analysis in their turns, each skillfully and accurately portraying Alexander Campbell as a prominent, even preeminent, American antebellum apologist. Both do so chiefly in the context of Campbell's defensive or "negative" apologetics. Clanton and Cherok each set the stage for an apologetics-driven analysis of the affirmative apologetic Campbell desired to set forth.

³³ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*; Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*.

³⁴ William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

Cherok demonstrates Campbell's preeminence as a defender of Christianity against the skepticism of his day.³⁵ The key to Campbell's success (and Cherok's analysis) is Campbell's debate with Robert Owen, centered around what Campbell himself called "evidences."³⁶ This debate alone locates Campbell in Boa and Bowman's "evidentialist apologetics," though, as noted, Campbell himself is not recognized.³⁷ No other analysis of Campbell disagrees with the evidentialist label. Thus, while the body of Cherok's work does not specifically prepare the way for a presuppositionalist analysis of Campbell's affirmative apologetic, it does establish Campbell's *bona fides* as a defender of the Christian faith.

J. Caleb Clanton, however, takes a step further. While Campbell is certainly a soft-rationalist Scottish common-sense philosopher, he is more the advocate of a "novel contribution to natural theology."³⁸ This novel contribution is what Clanton calls a "revealed-idea argument for God's existence."³⁹ In this argument, natural theology "serves as the handmaiden" for what Clanton calls Campbell's "revealed theology."⁴⁰ Clanton continues, "Instinct, sense, and reason are all impotent when it comes to the original acquisition of moral truths."⁴¹ Further, "faith is the only faculty through which humans can come into contact with, or believe in, the testimonies of those to whom God

³⁵ As Cherok asserts, "Because of his ceaseless struggles and lucid arguments against unbelief, Campbell established himself as the most significant apologist for the Christian religion in antebellum America." Cherok, *Debating for God*, 159.

³⁶ Cherok, *Debating for God*, 53-76.

³⁷ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 34-35.

³⁸ Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*, 149.

³⁹ Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*, 149.

⁴⁰ Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*, 150.

⁴¹ Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*, 124.

has directly revealed Himself.”⁴² Divine ideas arise neither from sense nor from reason, but as revelation and from revelation.

Clanton concludes that this approach failed Campbell as a theistic argument. However, the argument from revelation was something new—a departure from not only Descartes and Hume, but Locke as well.⁴³ Clanton’s analysis deserves further exploration; specifically, how fully did Campbell’s positive apologetic depend on the epistemic primacy of biblical revelation? Clanton’s overview did not turn further in this direction. Perhaps for this reason it did not carry him deeply into *The Christian System*, Campbell’s affirmative apologetic work.

The question of whether and how much Campbell’s apologetic depended on a prior acceptance of revelation-based criteria largely established the beginning boundary for this thesis, which starts with Campbell’s affirmative, comprehensive defense of the revealed, “original gospel” in *The Christian System*.⁴⁴ He had defended this revealed gospel in his early periodical, *The Christian Baptist*, and later in *The Millennial Harbinger*. If biblical revelation is the basis of reason, then Campbell was not arguing religious conclusions from soft rationalist presuppositions. Instead, like later presuppositionalists, he was arguing “common sense” conclusions from a presupposed framework of biblical revelation.

If this supposition stands scrutiny, it renders Campbell subject to comparison and contrast with later presuppositionalist approaches. Because Campbell’s work has seldom been analyzed as apologetics, and never as presuppositional, a void exists in the literature. This thesis addresses that void by engaging Campbell in a rudimentary presuppositionalist analysis and critique. The core of this critique takes up arguments

⁴² Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*, 124.

⁴³ Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*, 150.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *The Christian System*. See especially the preface and 1-55.

derived from the founder of presuppositional apologetics, Cornelius Van Til, as understood by his student, John Frame, and popularized by one of his key advocates, Voddie L. Baucham. Reformed, presuppositional apologetics from this introductory perspective maps differences and similarities to Campbell’s affirmative apologetics using the pivotal issue of the relationships of faith and reason, belief and unbelief, and biblical revelation versus natural revelation.

Thesis

An evangelical, presuppositional apologetics-based comparison of Campbell with Baucham and Van Til shows some agreement on presuppositionalism and some disagreement on antithesis.⁴⁵ Campbellites are thus offered a field of contact with other evangelicals—presuppositionalist reasoning—and a point of critique: antithesis. Biblical presuppositionalism shows how Christian Churches and Churches of Christ are right to use reason in a presuppositionalist defense of the gospel and the Bible, but they must not lose the essential “unreasonability” of the gospel. Otherwise, Campbellite apologetic preaching turns into *mere* reasoning, and risks losing the foolishness of the gospel in the wisdom of fallen man.⁴⁶

As an exercise, this thesis has at least two benefits. First, the presuppositionalist field of contact allows Campbellites to recognize their affinity with Reformed evangelicals, an affinity that derives from the shared biblicist commitments of their respective founding apologists. None argued religious conclusions from soft rationalist presuppositions. All argued that faith in the whole biblical gospel is the answer to the whole of ungodly

⁴⁵ John Frame refers to this concept, recognized by most Reformed apologists contemporary to Van Til, as a “great gulf, a religious antithesis, between orthodox Christianity and its . . . opponents.” Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 23.

⁴⁶ First Cor 1:25 says, “For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

unbelief. All presupposed faith in biblical revelation before, beginning, and throughout his arguments.

In his affirmative apologetic, Campbell was not doing anything so different from Van Til, and still less from Baucham. Campbell's argument presupposed God's reasoning, deriving "common sense" rational conclusions with constant reference to a presupposed framework of biblical revelation. As such, Campbell's positive defense of what he called the "ancient gospel" turns out to concur in substance with both Van Til and Baucham on the basicity, unity, totality, and necessity of biblical truth for the defense of the gospel.⁴⁷

The second benefit is the correct and incisive point of criticism Reformed evangelicals offer Campbellites. There is a fundamental antithesis between the reasoning of a believer and that of an unbeliever. Campbell seemed unconcerned with any such epistemological divide, a divide upon which Van Til would correctly insist, and of which Baucham never loses sight. Campbell's thoroughgoing methodological reliance on "common sense" led him, seemingly, to proceed as if biblical and worldly presuppositions could easily and effectively cooperate in the defense of the gospel.

Taken together, these elements of the "expository apologetics" perspective reveal a key limit to Campbell's "common sense" apologetics.⁴⁸ However helpful the use of "common sense" may be, the gospel is not itself common sense. Defending the gospel cannot be done ultimately on worldly terms, no matter how basic to apologetics such an effort may seem to be. In an important sense, the primary nature of the gospel is wholesale assertion—presuppositional if you will, in character—not explanatory defense.

⁴⁷ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 3.

⁴⁸ "Common Sense" is a label Campbellite scholars use to describe not only the Scottish foundationalist roots of Campbell's theology but his overall epistemology and world-view. For an excellent entry into this background, see especially Rasor, "The Influence of Scottish Common-Sense Realism."

This stipulation is the constructive critique Reformed apologetics can bring to bear on the evangelical heirs of Campbell. Campbell was right to set forth his “Christian System” as a wholesale, presuppositional defense of the biblical gospel; however, Baucham and his teachers help highlight his error of failing to reckon fully with the challenge the gospel poses to the unregenerate mind.

Outline of Chapters

The chapters that follow support the above thesis, providing a basis in presuppositional apologetics for a constructive critique of Alexander Campbell’s defense of the “original gospel.” Each chapter examines two crucial questions pertinent to the comparison of Campbellite and Reformed apologetics: (1) Does it aim to be presuppositional? That is, does the defense start, proceed, and end by presupposing the totality of biblical revelation? (2) Does its use of reason support that aim, so that the subsequent arguments uphold that presuppositional totality? Or, as Van Til feared, does reason subvert revelation?

Chapter 2: Campbellite Apologetics: A Qualitative Analysis

Chapter 2 takes a multi-case study of the apologetics tendencies of two (2) evangelically-oriented Campbellite elderships, constructed from live interviews transcribed, coded, and analyzed according to conventional apologetics taxonomy. The design and the findings of this qualitative research are presented as a real-life snapshot of the theoretical problems and issues explored in the thesis. Do Campbellite leadership groups self-consciously practice apologetics? If and when they do, are these practices measurable by current norms in apologetics? How so? Specifically, this chapter will demonstrate two examples of a pronounced biblicist tendency among evangelical Campbellites, a tendency that mirrors Reformed apologetics in general more closely than other types.

Chapter 3: Campbell's Biblicist Apologetic

Chapter 3 shows how Campbell began definitively with God's revealed reasoning, exhibiting an assertive, presuppositional apologetic argumentation similar to what the Reformed apologists would take up a century later. While he never used the word *presupposition*, Campbell began with the assumption of the Bible's unique and total authority as the sole basis for gospel success, and repeatedly asserted Scripture's foundational role in all human philosophy and religion.⁴⁹ The entire apologetic of *The Christian System* (315 pages) was laced with this language.

Once the Bible's comprehensive and total authority was posited, only then did reason enter in. Reason's role was crucial because as *biblical* reasoning, it was God's reason, not man's.⁵⁰ This point was so deeply and consistently assumed that it became easy for readers to forget its centrality to Campbell's apologetics. His method reflected "common sense," but his arguments were rooted in the organizing principle of the reason of God.

Chapter 4: Baucham's Presuppositional Apologetic

In initial contrast with Campbell, chapter 4 observes that presuppositionalism

⁴⁹ Campbell, *The Christian System*. "There is not a spiritual idea in the whole human race that is not drawn from the Bible" (3). "The Bible . . . contains the full and perfect revelation of God and his will, adapted to man as he now is" (6).

The Bible . . . contains the full and perfect revelation of God and his will. . . . The Bible is to the intellectual and moral world of man what the sun is to the planets in our system—the fountain and source of light and life, spiritual and eternal. There is not a spiritual idea in the whole human race that is not drawn from the Bible. As soon will the philosopher find an independent sunbeam in nature, as the theologian a spiritual conception in man, independent of *The One Best Book*. (3) Thus, the "Bible alone" (x) is a comprehensive "system" (2) of "divine facts" (6) which alone could bring about the "*summum bonum*," the unity Christians to assist the "conversion" of the world (xiv).

⁵⁰ In one explanatory instance, Campbell writes, "When God spoke to man in his own language, he spoke as one person converses with another—in the fair, stipulated, and well-established meaning of the terms. This is essential to its character, as revelation from God; otherwise it would be no revelation." Campbell, *The Christian System*, 6.

does not envision reason as the simple meeting ground for God's revelation to humanity.⁵¹ Van Til recognized the dividing line between a believer and an unbeliever at the level of their presuppositions, and never lost sight of that line. Baucham never uses the word *antithesis*, but his analysis of the target of apologetics shows he recognizes it. For Baucham, all objections to Christian faith are subject to the "cycle of foolishness," which is in turn driven by "the spiral of ungodly unbelief."⁵²

Like Campbell, Cornelius Van Til began with positing the total certitude of divine revelation in the Bible.⁵³ Unlike him, however, Van Til remained methodologically skeptical of the unbeliever's capacity to reason. He believed that the failure of apologetics in general was in its giving the game away to unregenerate minds by ceding their presuppositions, granting their flawed philosophical framework, and arguing biblical conclusions. Instead, God's inerrant Word had to be asserted at the outset, interjected comprehensively throughout, and insisted upon at the end. In Van Til's Dutch Reformed apologetics, reason was used provisionally, but only in a frontal, direct subversion of the unbeliever's competing assumptions and certitudes.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Frame explains, "While 'our argument should claim absolute certainty for its conclusions, never mere probability,' at the same time 'our reasoning must take into account both the noetic effects of sin and common grace. We should reckon on the fact that the unbeliever's intent is to suppress the truth.'" Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 300.

⁵² Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 49-50.

⁵³ For Van Til, as Greg Bahnsen states, God Himself is "foundational . . . to everything else as a principle of explanation" and also "the final reference point in all human predication." Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 714. I note that neither Van Til nor Campbell could make this point without using the sun as an analogy. Van Til asserts, "[God] then is like the sun from which all lights on earth derive their power of illumination. You do not use a candle in order to search for the sun. The idea of a candle is derived from the sun. So the very idea of any fact in the universe is derivative. God has created it." Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 714. Compare Campbell's similar analogy noted above.

⁵⁴ On Frame's summary reading of Van Til, only the confrontation with that total revelation "provides the basis for rational faith." Apologetics must "freely use logical arguments and present evidences for the truth of Scripture" but never in a piecemeal fashion, never without "challenging the unbeliever's philosophy of fact and logic," always seeking "to overturn the very foundations of [the unbeliever's] thinking." Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 300-301.

Chapter 5: Synthesis and Critique

Chapter 5 begins to reveal the presuppositionalist critique of Campbell. Campbell appears to place full trust in God's reason as the vehicle of the revelation whose truth Campbell has presupposed. If the divine "ideas" of Scripture are not conveyed in the words, then, as Campbell said, "It would be no revelation."⁵⁵

Baucham does not delve into this issue directly, but his deployment of biblical arguments in evangelism seem to reflect an expectation that God's ideas will assist the gospel on some level. While man's problem is not to be solved with "information," the gospel itself must "remind people of what they already know" (e.g., God, truth, righteousness, judgment, need for salvation), unseat the fool from his seat of judgment, and "answer questions."⁵⁶

Van Til, meanwhile, does not seem to agree that reason automatically functions for the unbeliever the way it does for the believer. Antithesis comes into play: the noetic effects of sin are at work and the unbeliever resists the gospel against the appeal of reason. Yet, Van Til appears not to reckon with the possibility, raised by Campbell, that one's apologetic brings God's reason under discussion, not man's.

Campbell and the presuppositionalists in view here seem to agree that apologetics starts by positing the whole Bible, and only the Bible, as God's total revelation for man and therefore the basis and standard for all thought. They also appear to agree on the use of language and reasoning to argue for and with this revelation, from that starting point and within that matrix.

As such, none of the three are arguing religious or spiritual conclusions from rationalist assumptions; rather, each is in his own way making a reasoned argument from, amid, and by means of, what he believes to be fully biblical presuppositions. Still, Baucham, practically, and Van Til, philosophically, are concerned to fully bracket reason

⁵⁵ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 3.

⁵⁶ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 59-64.

in a way that did not appear to concern Campbell. An important question remains as to precisely how much Baucham made of Van Til's insistence on the antithesis between believer and unbeliever, but it can be safely assumed that Baucham took the substance of it seriously. In contrast, though Campbell did not believe that unbelievers could reason their way to God without the revelation of the gospel, he did not appear to notice, per se, the problem of antithesis nor its challenge to reason itself.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis concludes with common ground and critique. If Baucham is the exemplar of presuppositional apologetics, then he is assuming and asserting biblical truth which is then used to expose unbelief and answer objections. He is doing so based on the acceptance of God's own reasoning, not man's. If so, Campbell was doing much the same thing a century earlier. This presuppositional aspect to Campbell has been buried in analysis of his evidentialist methods and his polemics. Today's marketplace, however, calls for Campbellites to begin to see the importance of presuppositional thinking in apologetics. They will find it is not a foreign country.

CHAPTER 2

CAMPBELLITE APOLOGETICS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

The question of biblicism in Campbellite apologetics is not simply theoretical. The opening chapter explored the existing research gap regarding the defense of the gospel by Alexander Campbell and his heirs. This chapter will further highlight that gap, illustrating the relevance of this thesis by setting forth a qualitative study of the apologetics tendencies of two evangelical Campbellite elderships. The reader will see the marked propensity of the heirs of Alexander Campbell to use biblicist approaches to the defense of Christianity, a propensity that calls for comparison and contrast with Reformed, practical presuppositionalist apologetics.

Qualitative Research Introduction

A sometimes-forgotten passage in First Peter contains a perhaps neglected measure of sanctification in the church and, if so, a needed measure of maturity and preparedness for church leadership. First Peter 3:15 reminds believers to “always be . . . prepared to make a defense” [ἀπολογία] “to anyone who asks you for a reason” [λόγον] “for the hope that is in you” (ESV). This passage is the basis for the Christian theological discipline of apologetics, an important matter for any church in any age.

Research Problem

Given the straightforwardness of the above instruction from the apostle, we might expect apologetics to be emphasized within church leadership. However, in thirty years of vocational ministry I have not found this to be the case in Christian churches. If one important measure of the leadership of any eldership is its awareness of and facility

with the discipline of Christian apologetics, it is also important to find out how Christian church elders are doing. As noted, the rather narrow field of Campbellite apologetics is purely theoretical, and its research is scant to scarce. There is a need for initial qualitative research into what exemplary Christian Church elders are thinking and doing in the field of apologetics.

Purpose Statement

Taking its departure from existing historical and theoretical studies of Campbellite apologetics, this research study used interviews and surveys to provide an introductory description, analysis, and evaluation of the leadership of two sister congregations from the Campbellite heritage in the crucial arena of apologetics. Specifically, that description was analyzed in terms of the elders' instinctive, intuitive, or conscious use of reason and revelation, and of tendencies categorizable as classic, evidentialist, fideist, or Reformed. These terms will be defined below. All of this will serve to shed light on the place of evangelical Campbellite heritage in today's apologetics and lay some groundwork for the thesis to follow.

Limits and Delimitations

The study was delimited as an apologetics rather than a doctrinal study (though overlap cannot be avoided). It was further limited by studying the top leadership by elders, not preaching ministers or other offices in the respective local congregations. Because of the uniformity of Christian Church polity, these boundaries offer hope that the study, though not generalizable, will be transferable to sister congregations, whose elders also lead in apologetics. It is hoped the result of the study will be a deeper awareness of both the current success and future need with regard to the biblical mandate of apologetics in Christian Churches in central Kentucky and beyond. More immediately, the study will illustrate the relevance of practical presuppositionalism for Campbellite apologists.

Research Questions

This chapter's qualitative research project researched the Campbellite elders' articulable awareness of apologetics, locating that awareness in the larger world of Christian apologetics. This awareness level was elicited by interview questions, with answers analyzed for preferred apologetics themes and approaches. Analysis was carried out by labeling, organization, weighing, and mapping of those themes according to current apologetics categories.

Generally, the questions explored the following. To what degree is the elder conscious of and motivated by the biblical mandate of apologetics? What is the elder's preferred or natural approach to apologetics based on his spiritual journey and formation? How would the elder describe both his ideal and his practical understanding of apologetics—how should it work for him? How has it worked for him?

Further discovery pursued primary and probing questions. Primary questions included the following. What are the top questions, objections, or issues from non-Christians that the elder would say require a Christian to be ready to answer? For each, how is the elder, himself, inclined to answer? How does he believe the preaching of the gospel should answer? How does he believe the teaching of sound doctrine should answer? Finally, for each objection, is the elder more inclined to use one or the other of (a) a directly biblical argument or (b) a common sense argument? If so, why would the elder choose this for certain cases? How would the elder do this?

Terminology

The two categories above—reason, and revelation—as well as the four taxonomic terms that followed—classic, evidentialist, fideist and Reformed—are common reference points in the field of apologetics. These were used as ways of tracking gospel defense methods. All six terms were used to categorize, subdivide, compare and contrast apologetics tendencies or approaches, usually in terms of how reason and revelation are construed, each individually as well as in relationship, as did

Bernard Ramm, and as preferred by Steven B. Cowan.¹ This chapter’s research thus combined, below, two well-established comprehensive taxonomies, one from Cowan and the other from Boa and Bowman, to enumerate four main methods and two supplemental ones, naming key authors associated with each.²

The *classical* method, represented by Thomas Aquinas in the medieval period and by Norm Geisler today, intertwines faith and reason, giving prominence to reason. The goal is the proof of a formal logical case for Christianity, generally arguing from nature to theism in one step, then from theism to Christian faith in a second step. The strength of the classical method is perhaps its appeal to worldview, rationality, and ostensible common ground, but it can fall short by overestimating the effectiveness and importance of abstract reasoning.³

Fideist apologetics (Martin Luther, Soren Kierkegaard) subordinates reason entirely to faith. At most, reason is a “minister” to faith.⁴ One cannot reason one’s way into faith, but reason may assist faith. The goal of this method is persuasion, in the context of relationship, and in pursuit of a total faith commitment. A strength of this method is its recognition of the limits of reason. At its weakest, fideist apologetics can dichotomize faith and propositional knowledge, minimizing the importance of

¹ E.g. the taxonomy of Bernard Ramm. See Steven B. Cowan and Stanley N. Gundry, eds., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 12.

² My outline and description of methods 1-4 are dependent on the taxonomy of Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity / An Apologetics Handbook* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2000), 52-58. For two more important methods (3b and 4b in my list), I rely on Cowan and Gundry, *Five Views*, 147-152, 219-223, respectively.

³ Boa and Bowman, *Reasons*, 153. I highlight from their helpful charts of “strengths and weaknesses” here and at notes 13, 14, and 16.

⁴ Cowan and Gundry, *Five Views*, 36: recalling Luther’s claim that for faith, reason is only “minister” not “magister.”

understanding the Word of God.⁵

Reformed apologetics (John Calvin; Alvin Plantinga; Cornelius Van Til) takes as a first principle the fallenness of humanity. Because of sin, we cannot reason well unless and until we believe. However, the method does not eschew argumentation. Logic and reason are rooted in the authority of God's Word and used to challenge the authority and presuppositions of the skeptic. An ironic strength of this approach is its *rational* approach to the irrationality of unbelief. On the other hand, its weakness shows when it overly downplays the importance of empirical thought.⁶ (Though Cowan lists it separately, *presuppositional* apologetics is a leading part of the reformed approach.⁷)

Evidentialist apologetics (Joseph Butler; John Warwick Montgomery; Josh McDowell) appropriates some rational elements in classical apologetics. Reason again makes the case for faith, but its focus is facts. Formal and informal argumentation are used to marshal specific historic and scientific evidences for God, Christ, and Christianity as perceptible and explicable to the nonbeliever. This bent toward facts has focused the method most often, perhaps, on Creation, Miracles, and the Resurrection. The greatest strength of the evidentialist approach may be its power to appeal to the thinking of unbelievers. At its weakest it fails to appreciate the way worldview affects perception of said facts.⁸

⁵ Boa and Bowman, *Reasons*, 446.

⁶ Boa and Bowman, *Reasons*, 359.

⁷ Boa and Bowman's description of the Reformed method (59) highlights its dependence on a biblical examination of the skeptic's presuppositions, a dependence shared by the presuppositional method of John Frame (though he argues it differently: see Cowan and Gundry, *Five Views*, 307-312).

⁸ Boa and Bowman, *Reasons*, 244.

A final approach, called *cumulative case* apologetics, has affinities with the evidentialist method and makes ad hoc use of all the others.⁹ Its contribution is the recognition of a variety of kinds and degrees of argument, eclectically chosen for their compounding effect in a broader argument for Christianity.¹⁰ It is important to note that none of these methods needs to exclude any of the others. The singular goal of a clear, effective apologetic is arguably best served by a readiness to employ any of the above methods, in any helpful combination, in the service of winning people over to the truth.¹¹

What methods are used by leadership in Campbellite churches? Is there a pronounced tendency in one or more directions? Combining the terminologies of Ramm, Cowan, and Boa and Bowman cited above, this study collected and organized themes referenced by the eight elders in the two hours of interviews. First, as per Ramm, these themes were categorized roughly, on how much importance they attach to reason, experience, or revelation in the defense of the gospel. Second, they were mapped onto a continuum, in turn, of classic, evidentialist, fideist and Reformed apologetics.

This study conceptualized an axis, with free-standing *reason* on one end, existential Christian *experience* in the middle, and biblical presuppositional *revelation* on the other, as per Ramm's taxonomy. The four categories of Cowan and Boa and Bowman were laid on the same axis, with "classical" at Ramm's reason-pole and "Reformed" at his revelation-pole, "evidentialist" and "fideist" occupying respective medium positions near Ramm's experience-median.

⁹ Evidentialist Gary Habermas calls Cumulative Case Method a "subspecies" of evidentialism. Cowan and Gundry, *Five Views*, 184.

¹⁰ Cf. Paul D. Feinberg's several criteria in Cowan and Gundry, *Five Views*, 151-2.

¹¹ See the conclusion by Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 502. In my view they make a compelling case for an eclectic and complementary approach to the various apologetic methods.

Methodological Design

As a research method, the case study is a description and analysis of one or more cases in a “bounded system” (by time and space) resulting in a report of a “case description” and “case themes.” The “intent” takes on extra importance, as does “depth” of understanding, yielding “themes or issues or specific situations” that can be analyzed “chronologically” or “across cases,” or developed into a “theoretical model.”¹²

Accordingly, this research carried out a qualitative case study among current and former church elders, chosen in a purposive sample by their service in two sister Campbellite churches, close to the historic hearth of the Stone-Campbell movement.¹³ The elders in each congregation were interviewed with open-ended questions in a complete-observer type of data collection.¹⁴ The answers were grouped, weighted and mapped according to the researcher’s sense of their location on a grid adapted from existing apologetics norms and patterns, then further analyzed and evaluated in the hope of generalizing about the apologetics theory used in these two cases.

Interviews

The study was carried out as follows. First, two groups of elders close to the historic and cultural heartland of Campbellite Christianity were identified and contacted. After hearing about the project and receiving a formal cover letter (featured in the appendices), each elder chairman agreed to participate in an anonymous group interview with the rest of his fellow elders on the topic of First Peter 3:15 and the defense of Christianity. At each of the meetings, all elders verbally agreed to participate and be

¹² See John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Washington, D.C.: Sage Press, 2013), 97-99.

¹³ Mackville Christian Church was one of the earliest Campbellite congregations formally organized, in 1826. Willisburg Christian Church is the closest sister congregation, six miles northwest in the same county. The two churches share both family and community ties, including school district, banking, and convenience shopping—and an old sports rivalry.

¹⁴ Creswell, *Research Design*, 175.

recorded under the conditions described in the study, using the protocol they had all seen (also featured in the appendices) as a point of departure.

Each interview was limited to just over an hour. The interviewer attempted to limit his own contributions to that of an active moderator, clarifying the questions, providing needed context for questions, recapping discussion, and probing further along discussion lines. The interviews were recorded digitally and roughly transcribed automatically using a free online app.¹⁵ The interviewer cleaned up the rough transcription, not correcting grammar, style or content, but providing readability. The app provided a wordcloud for each interview, which was attached to the cleaned-up transcript (not, however, featured here, though the appendices include the protocol and transcripts). The participants were promised access to the results once the study was complete.

Analysis

Once the transcripts were cleaned up, the interviewer developed a relatively simple scheme for organizing, weighing, and comparing the themes that surfaced in the interviews. Part one of this scheme involved locating an apologetics theme according to Ramm’s three types of apologetics, also reviewed by Cowan, conceived on an axis with two ends and a median.¹⁶ Part two further categorized themes corresponding to both Cowan’s and Boa and Bowman’s use of the terms “classic,” “evidentialist,” “fideist,” and “Reformed, ” along essentially the same axis.¹⁷

Thematic Organization: Ramm Axis

The categories “reason,” “experience” and “revelation” were conceived on a linear continuum from natural, logical appeals to common sense on one end, to faith-

¹⁵ Otter Voice Notes (for English), by AISense, Inc., available on Google Play and iTunes.

¹⁶ Cowan, *Five Views*, 12.

¹⁷ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has its Reasons*, 55-58.

based appeals to specific biblical thought on the other. The interview used the polar ends as boundaries for the discussion by asking, generally, whether the elders preferred “common sense” arguments or “directly, explicitly biblical” arguments in defense of the gospel. The interviewer used both his lifelong identity as a Campbellite minister and his judgment about the elders’ meanings to locate their answers closer to the “reason” end, the “revelation” end, or the “experience” zone in the middle.

In effect, this meant that appeals to specific *biblical doctrine*, no matter what doctrine, were located on the “revelation” end. Stronger appeals to *common sense* or truth standards, used in turn to evaluate Christian claims by *natural* standards, were located on the “reason” end, no matter what claims were being so evaluated. Finally, stronger appeals to the *experience* of non-Christians, or of Christians exposed to attack on the gospel, were located in the middle, intermediary “experience” zone. Again, the interviewer used personal judgment according to his identification with the beliefs and culture of the interviewees to place the answers in one of those three categories.

Thematic Organization: Boa and Bowman Grouping

Part two made a second judgment call, classifying each theme as “classic,” “evidentialist,” “fideist,” or “Reformed/presuppositional” according to the apparent position of these four categories more or less along that same conceived axis.¹⁸ This required a little more liberty on the part of the interviewer, in that the precise delineation

¹⁸ The only apologetics analysis of which I’m aware to specifically conceptualize an axis, right to left, is that of Brian K. Morley, *Mapping Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 14-15. His axis operates on nearly the same principle as mine, locating all apologetics somewhere between strict acceptance of revelation (left end) and strict reliance on reason (right end). Morley locates “fideism” as one step closer to his *revelation* end, instead of (as I have) between *revelation* at the end and *experience* at the median. Morley admitted (25) that Gregory Bahnsen wanted to put Reformed/presuppositional apologetics right next to *reason* on his right end, because of presuppositionalism’s certitude. Morley countered that his continuum is a measure, not of subjective certitude, but of respective *independence* from biblical revelation. My own adjustment to Morley’s axis recognizes this exact point, which is why I locate Reformed right next to the *revelation* end, with fideism closer to the middle, since fideism relies on independent experience as well as Scripture.

of these categories is occasionally disputed, and Campbellite lay leaders, in general, are altogether unaware of them. What they do know about the term “Reformed” is, for them, a matter of doctrinal polemics (noted at length in the introduction) not the defense of the gospel in any mainstream way. However, these are general reference points used in apologetics today. Even if they fall short of pinpointing Campbellite thought, they can highlight its position and tendency.

Thus, “classical” and “Reformed” were used to categorize apologetic themes clearly on the “reason” and “revelation” ends of the axis, respectively. Here “Evidentialism” was placed one step from “classical” toward the median of experience, since it deals with real-world, concrete experiences of Christianity in the past, appealed to with logic in the present. “Fideism,” on the other hand, sat one step from “Reformed” toward the median of experience, since it deals with real-world, concrete experiences of Christianity in present memory, appealed to with biblical revelation from the past.

In the interviews, this meant that any themes falling in between the “common sense” vs. “specifically biblical” categories could be categorized further. For example, defending the gospel against its rejection by a grieved former churchgoer involved, for some elders, supplying them a new *experience*, a relationship with a genuinely sanctified Christian. This was treated, first and foremost, a “fideist” apologetic, though it is biblical in general substance. For another instance, defending the gospel by appealing to evidences that Jesus’ apostles told the truth, was classed as an “evidentialist” apologetic. Both these categories surfaced in the interviews, though the study presented no evidence any elder was or is aware of how the categories would be enumerated. In such cases, the coding located “evidentialist” in the experience zone but closer to reason, and “fideist” in the experience zone but closer to revelation.

Goals and Limits of Generalization

Once the themes were grouped this way, the goal was to count the labels, weigh them so as to determine which category received the greatest emphasis in the interviews, and draw a general conclusion about which tendencies marked the two elderships. Finally, the conclusions from each eldership interview were compared. This study intended to offer no possible generalization beyond these two cases. However, a generalization within the cases was expected to raise interest in the question and provide incentive to reproduce the study in adjacent and/or similar cases.

Instrumentation Development

As briefly noted above, the research questions were straightforward, though brand new for the elders interviewed. As nearly as possible, these questions were directly reproduced in the interview protocol. The degree of formal education varied greatly among all the elders interviewed, requiring significant latitude on the part of the interviewer to reword the questions and expand on them during the course of the interview. This posed the risk of possibly obscuring the interviewee's grasp of the question and/or skewing the entire discussion from the intent of the instrument.

In the Mackville interview, for example, the interview deviated from the predesigned protocol by supplying "Satan" as an example of a source behind the attacks on the gospel. In retrospect, this mention skewed the discussion for several minutes in the direction of a fideist response, since the Mackville elders (properly so) viewed the proper primary defense against Satan primarily in terms of personal obedience and holiness. However, skewing from the protocol at that point did not violate the larger purpose of the study, nor did the slightly skewed answer fail to shed light on the research questions. In other ways my dialogue deviated from the printed protocol, it was through informal language crafted to clarify the core questions for the interviewees.

Coding the Interviews

In working through the transcripts, the interview quantified thematic elements for weight and comparison in the following manner. One point made by one elder in one “turn” counted as a thematic unit. Each new turn to speak reset the counter. This somewhat arbitrary decision ran the risk of overlooking varying strengths of conviction between points in the conversation, but there was no consistent way to quantify themes according to how strongly an elder may have wished to make his point. The analysis thus accounted for points made, per elder, per exchange.

The classification system was reproduced in the transcripts provided in the appendices. A new attack on the gospel mentioned by an elder, or a new elaboration on one previously mentioned, was simply cast in bold font, with no highlighting. For Ramm’s axis, once an elder made a point, it was categorized it and marked once, using a bracketing system. A point judged to be closer to “reason” used square brackets: []. If judged closer to “revelation,” the point took pointed brackets: { }. If judged closer the median line of “experience,” the analysis used parentheses: (). If an elder kept elaborating on that same point, it did not count again; but if the next elder agreed, or made the same point, or elaborated on that point, it counted as a second point, and was so categorized.

For Boa and Bowman’s markers, the coding used bold font and text effects, which could overlay the brackets and yet be visually distinct. Once an elder made a point, it was categorized and marked once, **outlined and underlined** for “Reformed,” **outlined** for “fideist,” *italic* for “evidentialist,” and **underlined italics** for “classical.” As above, if the elder kept elaborating on that same point, it counted as a further point; but if the next elder to speak either agreed, or made the same point, or elaborated on that point, it counted as a second point, and was thus categorized. The desired result was ease in counting and weighting the themes, as well as clarity, allowing the reader of the study to

follow the process and evaluate the coded judgments about what categories applied, and where.

Note: As the study progressed, it became clear that the Ramm-axis bracket system was mirroring the font-coding system, so the brackets were treated as identical to their corresponding font-codes. Without deviation, “classical” arguments matched “reason” coding, “evidentialist” and “fideist” arguments matched “experience” coding (the former as historical experience, the latter as current experience), and “Reformed” matched “revelation” coding. By the completion of coding, there was no reason to analyze them separately, because the brackets were shedding no new light on the study. Future iterations of this study would likely leave them out altogether.

Willisburg Interview Findings Analysis

Objections to the Gospel or Christianity, with attendant defenses.

Appendix D contains a list of the themes or ideas foremost in the conversation about specific “attacks” on the gospel as experienced and understood by the elders at Willisburg Christian Church. For simple initial reference, the study numbered points made, whether it was a freestanding apologetics point, or a noted objection. Then explanation was given for the way the apologetic was classified. **Forty separate arguments** were made, including objections and answers, listed and analyzed.

The count was **seventeen separate objections**, with **fifty three separate attempts to answer** given by individual elders throughout the interview. A couple of these objections were not immediately, specifically answered. Many of the answers were unattached to a specific question: this began to happen in the last half of the interview, when the discussion had gotten underway and gathered momentum. Many of the answers were thematically related variations on prior answers.

For the purposes of this study, the Boa and Bowman categories shed the most light on the answers given. The Willisburg group of Campbellite elders deployed only

three clearly evidentialist arguments, and only lightly. Further, all these were also part of a fideist or Reformed argument. There were **seven classical arguments**, most of which, similarly, were *also* part of a Reformed or fideist argument. This means that classical and evidentialist arguments surfaced in less than twenty percent of the answers the elders gave, and even there only as part of larger apologetics arguments. This seems out of character with the career and public persona of Alexander Campbell, who, as noted above, is known (when he is recognized) as a forthrightly rationalist and evidentialist apologist.

However, Campbell himself was a child of both the Lutheran and Calvinist wings of the Protestant Reformation. By far the greatest proportion of *strictly apologetics* answers given by these Campbellite elders fell among the **twenty one Reformed arguments**, a tendency that is surprising if you know Campbellites' historic anti-Calvinist polemics. However, this tendency fits well with the churches' historic biblicist Restorationism referenced in the introductory material. It resonates with the radical biblicism and agreement with Protestantism also referenced there.

The **twenty-seven fideist responses** require some additional comment. First, a Christian Church elder's fideism is not that of Kierkegaard, but that of Luther.¹⁹ Theirs is a *biblical* fideism. Campbell was fully devoted to Reformation ideals, especially *Sola Scriptura*, as noted above. His polemic critiques were based on the ideals of that Reformation. His own fideism would have mirrored that of Luther as noted by Boa and Bowman's categorization of him. There is a solidly biblical fideism that is well within Reform boundaries, and Campbell affirmed those boundaries. It is only in that sense that fideism makes sense among biblicist Campbellites. In this Willisburg case, elders from his heritage are exhibiting fideist arguments that mirror their own heritage.

¹⁹ Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*, 339-340. Luther is not a fideist, but fideism as an apologetic philosophy has roots in Martin Luther's fideism. "Key elements of fideism have their seed in the views of the German reformer."

Secondly, however, there is a question about the possible skewing of the study by interviewing elders. The Willisburg group is keenly conscious of its role as pastors. In Christian Church polity, the elders directly pastor the flock; the preacher “ministers” to them, and to the flock at large, as a servant. As I understand their perspective, these elders are pastors, shepherds, first, and evangelists or teachers next. It is therefore impossible for these men not to see the subjective, personal, existential side of apologetics. It is a reflex for them, one and all, to revert to the relational and sub-rational layers and forces that affect apologetics. Since there was no evident possibility of correcting for it in interviews, the readers of the study should note a possibility—even suspect a likelihood—that the pastoral responsibilities of these men skewed their answers in a fideistic, existential direction. Again, however, this should only be understood in the context of their deeper Biblical roots and commitments as Campbellites.

Mackville Group Interview Findings Analysis

Mackville Christian Church findings are listed in Appendix H. The Mackville interview proved more difficult to analyze than that of the Willisburg group, because the Mackville elders appeared more comfortable with the smaller group and felt free to carry the conversation in any number of directions. It seemed the Mackville elders were more inclined than the Willisburg elders to answer specific “gospel defense” questions in general terms of their broader experience with Christian life and faith. This resulted in fewer clearly analyzable themes, and tougher judgment calls on the part of the interviewer about how to categorize them.

Nonetheless, as with the Willisburg group analysis, since the basic apologetics questions had been asked and repeated throughout the hour, the conversation was treated as an apologetics conversation. The subsequent analysis combed the interview for objections to the Gospel and answers to those objections, and compared the answers for proximity to one of the four points along the proposed Boa and Bowman axis. The Ramm

axis coding was reapplied, but as noted above, left it out of the analysis because of its close correspondence to the Boa and Bowman categories and failure to yield additional insights.

It was difficult to clearly discern any strong, specific, singular objections to the gospel noted by the Mackville elders. Their focus, probably assisted by the interviewer's inadvertent influence on the discussion by mentioning "Satan" early on, moved toward broad and diverse theological issues, for which the arena was always "the heart" and the answer always "the Holy Spirit" and sweeping, eclectic Biblical counsel. This was reflected in the coding of specific apologetic themes, which, like the Willisburg group, came in very light on "evidentialist" and "classical." In contrast to Willisburg, however, the Mackville group gave more thematic weight in the "Reformed" direction than the "fideist."

It would have been possible to divide the Mackville hour into many more discussion points because of the range and diversity of topics. However, even the most casual effort to focus on assertions that had discernible bearing on apologetics allowed the interview to boil down into the twenty four items enumerated above. I counted **sixteen Reformed notes, five fideist, four evidentialist, and three classical.** As noted above, the low incidence of classical and evidentialist apologetic arguments reflects a departure from conventional perception of Alexander Campbell's public career. Like those of the Willisburg group, however, the Mackville elders' Reformed-style assertions reflect the deep, lifelong commitment of Campbell to the Protestant Reformation as well as his agreement and sympathy with Reformed Christianity's commitment to *Sola Scriptura*.

Application and Further Research Indications

Careful evaluation of this study upon its completion suggests at least the following observations. The topic of "defense of the gospel" is in some ways as broad as

Christian theology itself, which presented the challenge of creating a group discussion focused on apologetics. This general challenge was exacerbated by the fact that neither group of elders had ever been part of a group conversation on the topic before. The interview protocol was required to be open-ended, yet directive enough to elicit the topic under study. Future studies could benefit from a shorter, clearer survey instrument. The groups under study in this project could likely yield still more specific insights in repeated discussions on this topic. Finally, it is likely that the fourfold analysis I used (Reformed, fideist, evidentialist, classic) needs honing; that, however, is an ongoing task always underway in apologetics itself. In short, as the first of its kind of which I am aware, this study can only benefit by reiteration with better instruments and analysis.

For the moment, however, this study offers the promise of shedding light for both Campbellite and non-Campbellite evangelicals on the potential of apologetics for unity between Protestant, biblical gospel believers. Both Christian Church elders and (for example) Southern Baptist leaders, at least in some quarters, may well be surprised—I hope, pleasantly—to find that Reformed thinking reaches as far as the heirs of Alexander Campbell. The strength and persistence of these elders’ instincts to Reformed biblical defense and deep biblical fideism should hearten their Southern Baptist brothers and fellow laborers. Even as crucial theology and polity continues to be debated, apologetics may unify us, specifically the biblicist apologetics of which Campbellites and Reformed evangelicals are joint heirs. This proposed common ground will be explored in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3
CAMPBELL'S BIBLICIST APOLOGETIC

The question proposed as the framework for analysis was, does the apologetic under consideration presuppose the Bible as truth? If “expository apologetics” begins, proceeds, and ends with the logically prior assumption of the total authority of Scripture, then Baucham sets a forthright and defensible example of a presuppositionalist gospel defense.¹ This chapter explains that Alexander Campbell the apologist begins and proceeds in much the same way. The prefaces and opening chapters of *The Christian System* suggest he did. *Sola Scriptura* was not only the foundation, but the fabric of his defense of Christianity.

The Preface: Biblical Language as Gospel Defense

The preface to Campbell's affirmative apologetic targeted what he saw as a gospel defeated by certain persistent aspects of *human* reasoning. If the gospel could be established on biblical authority alone, apart from humanly-constructed and humanly-defended assertions of truth, then it could begin to succeed. To put it another way, Campbell's biblicism was apologetic, driven by his frustration with the failure of the historic “gospel” to win the world. Conversely, Campbell's apologetic was biblicist, because he saw the solution in a wholesale return to the Bible as the sole basis for Christianity's defense. Such a point is introductory to his entire *Christian System*. From early in the preface to the first edition:

As the Bible was said and constantly affirmed to be the religion of Protestants, it was for some time a mysterious problem why the Bible alone, confessed and

¹ As chap. 4 of this thesis will show.

acknowledged, should work no happier results than the strifes, divisions and retaliatory excommunications of rival Protestant sects. . . . The Bible in the lips, and in the creed in the head and in the heart, will not save the church from strife, emulation and schism. There is no moral, ecclesiastical, or political good by simply acknowledging it in word. It must be obeyed. . . . The Bible alone is the Bible only, in word and deed, in profession and practice, and this alone can reform the world and save the church.²

Campbell agreed with *Sola Scriptura* but doubted it had been obeyed. He regarded this failure to obey as, among other things, a failure of apologetics. Defenses of the gospel before the world had failed because those defenses were argued by sectarians. Such sectarians' apologetics were based on human authority. All such human argumentation Campbell called "the language of Ashdod." He had already labored for a generation to mount a defense that was more strictly biblical. Campbell writes,

Before we applied the Bible alone to our views, or brought our views and religious practice to the Bible, we pled the old theme,—“The Bible alone is the religion of the Protestants.” But we found it an arduous task, and one of twenty years' labor, to correct our diction and purify our speech according to the Bible alone: and even yet we have not wholly practically repudiated the language of Ashdod.³

The impulse to reform was not enough. Campbell quickly adopted the term “principle” as shorthand for biblically-derived propositions that passed his test of language. The first of these “principles” was that only direct, explicit biblical language could be authoritative. Campbell explains,

Having a “thus saith the Lord,” either in express terms, or in approved precedent, “for every article of faith, and item of religious practice” . . . making faith in Christ and obedience to Him that only *test* of Christian character. . . . It was indeed approved by all; but adopted and practiced by none, except the few. . . . None of us who either got up or sustained that project was then aware of what havoc that said principle, if faithfully applied, would make of our views and practices.⁴

² Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System, in Reference to the Union of Christians: and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity, as Pled in the Current Reformation* (Bethany, VA: A. Campbell, 1840), x.

³ Campbell, *The Christian System*, x.

⁴ Campbell, *The Christian System*, xi.

At this point Campbell introduces his occasional language of “restoration,” a term taken up more frequently later, with universally debated effectiveness, by Campbell’s heirs.⁵ Subsequent forms of primitivism should not distract from the specific biblicist apologetic animating Campbell’s earliest insistence on these “principles”:

We flatter ourselves that the principles are now clearly and fully developed. . . . I say, the principles on which the church of Jesus Christ . . . can be united with honor to themselves, and with blessings to the world: on which the gospel and its ordinances can be restored in all their primitive simplicity, excellency, and power, and the church itself shine as a lamp that burneth to the conviction and salvation of the world . . . the *principles themselves* which together constitute the original gospel.⁶

The principles, by which only the Bible’s words could be authoritative, were not merely *about* the gospel. They were part and parcel of it. Campbell believed that the biblical gospel itself, as God’s gospel, demanded to be rigorously distinguished from man’s gospel. The former was its own defense; the latter, even when advanced with the (touted but not obeyed) biblicist claims of Protestantism, was an offense to Christianity.

Thus, while Campbell may have seemed to reduce this to an in-house debate, an (ironic?) polemic against sectarianism, his intent was always apologetics. Though the symptoms of the gospel’s failure manifested as the division in Christ’s church, the worse effect was the success of attacks on the gospel; the underlying pathology was always the

⁵ James B. North, for example, has fully documented how Campbell’s heirs divided over the meaning of “restoration,” essentially splitting into a “unity” camp and a “patternist” camp. See James B. North, *Unity In Truth: An Interpretive History of the Restoration Movement* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1994). However, that debate itself has functioned more or less polemically, as described in the introduction, scarcely if ever touching specifically on the *apologetic* purpose of Alexander Campbell in his original use of the term “restoration.” His preferred term, and that of most of his cohorts, was “reformation,” by which he intended to invoke his considerable agreement and sympathy with Protestantism as a whole. Robert O. Fife writes, “The term ‘restoration’ has been interpreted in a number of different ways. It would seem, however, from their writings, that Barton W. Stone, Thomas Campbell, and Alexander Campbell generally viewed restoration as the reformation of the church in terms of its origin, mission, and hope as set forth in the apostolic writings of the New Testament.” Robert O. Fife, “‘Restoration,’ Meanings of within the Movement,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 638.

⁶ Campbell, *The Christian System*, xii.

corruption of (divine) biblical truth with (merely human) opinion. Campbell writes,

The principle which was inscribed on our banners when we withdrew from the ranks of the sects was “Faith in Jesus as the true Messiah and obedience to him as our Lawgiver and King, the ONLY TEST of Christian character, and the ONLY BOND of Christian union, communion, and cooperation, irrespective of all creeds, opinions, commandments, and traditions of men.”⁷

Thus the “language of Ashdod” had to be deconstructed before the world. That this deconstruction must begin in the church did not make the ultimate aim less a matter of apologetics. For Campbell, the objective was always the strengthening of the defense of the gospel before the skeptical world. The closing two paragraphs of the preface to the first edition contain this statement of purpose:

Having paid a very candid and considerate regard to all that has been offered against these principles. . . . I undertake this work . . . furnishing a new means of defence to those engaged in contending with this generation for primitive Christianity. . . . Our aim is now to offer to the public a more matured view of our cardinal principles . . . to lay before the reader the elements of the gospel itself.⁸

The preface to the second edition four years later expresses, more clearly still, Campbell’s determination to distinguish between human reason and explicitly biblical thought. Here are its closing words:

While, then, we would, if we could, either with the tongue or the pen, proclaim all that we believe, and all that we know, to the ends of the earth, [instead] *we take the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, as foundation of all Christian union and communion.* Those who do not like this will please show us a more excellent way.⁹

What was at stake for Campbell was the effect. This is the mistake in viewing Campbell’s *System* merely as a polemic. When man’s “gospel” was conflated with God’s, no one was drawn to Christ. Rather, men were drawn to men. The world had not been won to the gospel because the church had not elevated, emphasized, and embodied the gospel in God’s own words.

⁷ Campbell, *The Christian System*, xi, emphasis original.

⁸ Campbell, *The Christian System*, xv.

⁹ Campbell, *The Christian System*, xviii, emphasis original.

In summary, Campbell prefaces his affirmative apologetic, *The Christian System*, with a determination to mount what he viewed as a unique, new, comprehensively biblical defense of the gospel. The success of attacks on the gospel had been driven by Christians' failure to think, speak, and act in comprehensively biblical way. His apologetic began with a determination to remedy this failure by reframing the debate in fully biblical terms.

This apologetic labored under his reputation as a schismatic. He was a public biblicist more deeply than he was an in-house polemicist. He was captivated by the divisions of Christendom primarily because they represented a failure to set forth the Bible in its full strength to a skeptical world. Further, apologetics also preceded, logically, Campbell's primitivism. Campbell was himself (not to speak of his heirs) "restorationist," not out of impulse but because of a kind of presuppositionalism. If philosophical reformation called for a recasting of the issues, a reframing of the debates, the only resource was to be found in looking *back* at Scripture. In that sense, both his polemics and primitivism were accidental, and incidental, to his deeply and widely biblicist apologetic.

***Christian System* Chapters 1 and 2: Biblical Language Both Prime and Prior**

Presuppositional apologetics as portrayed by Baucham ascribe not only comprehensive authority, but logical priority, to the Bible. Full biblical authority is fully understood and implemented by the presuppositional apologist in *framing* the defense, which mirrored the commitments of John Frame, Baucham's teacher, and Frame's mentor, Van Til, the ultimate sponsor of Baucham's apologetic. Van Til was a key figure in a twentieth-century movement to remedy a twofold failure of historic apologetics. For Cornelius Van Til, traditional apologetics either failed altogether to *assume* biblical authority (making it contingent on reason first) or it asserted biblical authority piecemeal,

or both.¹⁰ The strength of the new approach was in its argument for a *logically* prior assumption of biblicism as a worldview, a comprehensive claim for all truth. Biblical thought was argued as both complete and authoritative at the logical outset.

Campbell had done similarly a century before in *The Christian System*. While the opening two chapters do not go so far as to propose a recognizably transcendent biblical argument, the effect of the opening two sections is similar. Entitling them “The Universe” and “The Bible” in immediate turn, he began with the unbeliever’s claim to knowledge—any knowledge—of God’s universe and debunked it. Within four paragraphs, he firmly asserted his apologetic position: not an affirmation but a refusal. Campbell began by refusing any skeptic’s pronouncement about the truth of Christianity.

Skeptics’ judgments on Christianity had no standing unless they reckoned with two matters posited at the outset: (1) the totality of God’s universe, the understanding of which cohered in (2) the totality of God’s Word. This is why chapters 1 and 2 were titled, respectively, “The Universe” and “The Bible.” Christianity was being framed as the true “universe,” the Bible as the totality of relevant knowledge. Then, and only then, using that framework, did Campbell proceed to construct an extensive defense of his theology proper.¹¹ Campbell states,

It is a mark of imbecility of mind rather than of strength—of folly rather than of wisdom—for any one to dogmatize with an air of infallibility . . . on any one subject of human thought, without an intimate knowledge of the whole universe. But as such knowledge is beyond the grasp of feeble mortal man . . . it is superlatively

¹⁰ John Frame locates Van Til’s critique of “natural man” in the larger Reformed tradition, following J. Gresham Machen, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd and others: “Van Til’s unregenerates lives on ‘borrowed capital,’ able to avoid utter nihilism only by the inconsistency of acknowledging some elements in God’s revelation.” John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995), 42. In addition, Frame highlights Van Til’s defense of the totality and integrity of Christian faith: “Christianity is a *system* of truth . . . its elements are so profoundly interrelated that to deny one doctrine is implicitly to deny the whole.” Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 44.

¹¹ Thenceforward, Campbell’s apologetic proceeds by topic: theology (chap. 3, “God”), christology (chap. 4, “The Son of God”), pneumatology (chap. 5, “The Spirit of God”), and anthropology (chaps. 6ff, “Man as He Was,” “Man as He Is,” “The Purposes of God Concerning Man,” “Religion for Man and Not Man For Religion,”) and so on throughout *The Christian System*.

incongruous for any son of science, or of religion, to affirm that this or that issue is absolutely irrational, unjust, or unfitting . . . only as he is guided by the oracles of infallible wisdom or the inspirations of the Almighty. . . . Who could pronounce upon the wisdom and utility of a single joint . . . limb . . . body . . . without a perfect intelligence of that incomprehensible Being by whom and for whom all things were created and made?¹²

It is important to recognize Campbell's care to present this refusal up front. Only sentences into the leading chapter, he has an interlocutor: the self-regarding skeptic who presumes to dismiss Christian faith as less than rational. Within moments that presumption is debunked on the precise grounds that it is extrabiblical.

The skeptic pronounces Christians as less than reasonable, but he does it apart from "the oracles of infallible wisdom" and the "inspirations of the Almighty" on the basis of his reason alone, unaided by the Bible's author. He is wrong because he is abiblical. More, the skeptic is ignorant, arguing from partial instead of complete knowledge. He ought to be arguing from the whole, something he cannot do unless he grasps "the oracles of infallible wisdom." Chapter 2, "The Bible," drives this point home. Only the God of Scripture has enough knowledge to inform humanity. Before he begins, Campbell has relativized all human reason.

Long before one should expect, Campbell appears wary of rationalist traps, lest his apologetic proceed on the same erroneously exalted reason as that employed by the skeptic. He closes the paragraph, and the opening chapter, with an assertion of the limits of human reasoning as compared with the "inspirations of the Almighty": "How gracefully, then, sits unassuming modesty on all the reasonings of man! The true philosopher and the true Christian, therefore, delight always to appear in the unaffected costume of humility, candor, and docility."¹³ Campbell has defined key terms ahead of the argument. No human grasp of the universe can sponsor this defense, neither the skeptic's nor that of Campbell himself.

¹² Campbell, *The Christian System*, 2.

¹³ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 2.

It is only after this attempt to relativize both the piecemeal approach of the skeptic's reasonings and Campbell's own knowledge in light of the totality of God's universe that Campbell asserts the foundation, not only of his apologetic to follow, but of reason itself. That foundation is the title of chapter 2, "The Bible." Here, however, he has already established the primacy of the "oracles of infallible wisdom" and the "inspirations of the Almighty." In short, prior to the defense, the Bible is both prime and prior, held foremost and asserted beforehand.

Clarifying Campbell's Biblical Priority: Revelation over Reason

As noted, one unique contribution Campbell made to evidentialist debates was the notion that God-ideas carry the strength of revelation. They defy human origin. J. Caleb Clanton calls this Campbell's "revealed idea" argument:

Contra Locke and Hume (who thought that the idea of God is derived of ideas acquired through sense perception), Campbell believed that we cannot simply explain the origin of the idea of God without allowing that it was divinely presented to humanity, though not as an innate idea, as Descartes believed. And given his emphasis on the revealed origin of the idea of God, Campbell stood in stark contrast not only with many of his philosophical forerunners but also with succeeding generations. . . . The fact that the idea was revealed shows that there is a divine *revealer* . . . his case for theism did not rely on a putatively revealed premise. . . . Campbell's efforts in natural theology—particularly his revealed-idea argument—were indeed aimed at making the case for revealed theology.¹⁴

Clanton is careful not to make too much of this concept. At best, it "suffers from numerous problems" of which he mentions two. First, it "shortchanges" potentially fruitful efforts to conceptualize God apart from direct revelation. Second, it "invites a pernicious and perhaps insuperable regress problem."¹⁵

¹⁴ J. Caleb Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 149-50.

¹⁵ Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*, 149-50.

This caution appears to parallel two prominent critiques of Baucham’s presuppositionalist mentors: (1) presuppositionalism depends improperly on revelation; and (2) it argues in a circle.¹⁶ If Campbell seems to anticipate presuppositionalist thinking in some ways, it is perhaps no surprise to find him at risk for presuppositionalist mistakes. However, the importance of Clanton’s work for this study is simpler. Biblical revelation is the key to Campbell’s philosophy, as it is to presuppositionalist philosophy.

By acknowledging both the uniqueness and the difficulty of Campbell’s “revealed-idea” argument, Clanton has highlighted the question of the importance of biblical revelation in Campbell’s apologetics. A presuppositionalist analysis of Campbell’s thought depends on the proper recognition of that issue, though by definition the question will interest presuppositional apologists more than other kinds.

There can hardly be a stronger indication of the primacy of revelation in Campbell’s apologetic than its position in *The Christian System*. Its first chapter took up nature (“The Universe”) precisely and specifically to relativize it before “the oracles of infallible wisdom or the inspirations of the Almighty.”¹⁷ Its second chapter developed the case that no moral or intellectual understanding can proceed naturally. It must begin and move with the Bible understood as revelation. Within that chapter, paragraph one of seven continued by once again, and more specifically, subordinating the natural realm to the realm revealed by faith:

One God, one moral system, one Bible. If nature be a system, religion is no less so. . . . There is an intellectual and a moral universe as clearly bounded as the system of material nature. Man belongs to the whole three . . . *sense* is his guide in nature, *faith* in religion, *reason* in both. The Bible contemplates man primarily in his spiritual and eternal relations. It is the history of nature only so far as is necessary to

¹⁶ For example, see John Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, 2nd ed., ed. Joseph E. Torres (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 249-64. After years of defending the philosophy of Van Til, Frame has identified two recurring charges against it, and believes presuppositionalism correctly navigates the respective “Scylla and Charibdys” of *fideism* and *circularity*.

¹⁷ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 2.

show man in his origin and destiny, for it contemplates nature—the universe—only in relation to man’s body, soul, and spirit.¹⁸

It is important in this discussion to bracket, for the moment, Campbell’s introduction of the term *reason*. In describing the Bible and establishing it as both prior and authoritative to his apologetic, Campbell is describing two categories that he called *nature* and *religion*. *Reason* belongs specifically to neither one, because *reason* is of a piece with Campbell’s presupposition about the Bible. Sense and human reason process nature: faith and biblical reason process the “intellectual and . . . moral universe.”¹⁹

The Bible is essentially revelation, as Campbell will now assume and assert, since God purposed that reason apprehend it. This is an assertion of *biblical* philosophy, not natural philosophy. Campbell explains, “The words of the Bible contain all the ideas in it . . . for, when God spoke to man in his own language, he spoke as one person converses with another—in the fair, stipulated and well-established meaning of the terms. This is essential to its character, as a revelation from God: otherwise it would be no revelation.”²⁰ On this basis Campbell now completes his relativizing, and subordinating, the “nature” category to that of “religion”:

The Bible is to the intellectual and moral world of man what the sun is to the planets in our system—the fountain and source of light and life, spiritual and eternal. There is not a spiritual idea in the whole human race that is not drawn from the Bible. As soon will the philosopher find an independent sunbeam in nature, as the theologian a spiritual conception in man, independent of *The One Best Book*.²¹

Thus, on Campbell’s explicit telling in this first formal apologetic, it is the Bible, not nature, that is assumed to be authoritative, and then adopted, asserted, and argued philosophically. He writes, “The Bible, or the Old and New Testaments, in Hebrew and

¹⁸ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 2-3.

¹⁹ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 2-3.

²⁰ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 3.

²¹ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 3.

Greek, contains the full and perfect revelation of God and his will, adapted to man as he now is.”²² In this way, and only in this way, is reason given its place as part of Campbell’s biblical philosophy in paragraph four, as noted immediately above. Reason’s role is to apprehend revelation. Since the Bible is essentially revelation, it, not nature, is “the oracles of infallible wisdom” and “the inspirations of the Almighty” which are “the fountain and source of light and life.” As revelation, this “source” is apprehended through reason; that is, its purpose is to convey meaning to its hearers and readers. He continues, “The words of the Bible contain all the ideas in it. These words, then, rightly understood, and the ideas are clearly perceived. The words and sentences of the Bible are to be translated, interpreted, and understood. . . . This is essential to its character as revelation.”²³ This stipulation helps explain Campbell’s apparent ambiguity above relating reason to the twin categories of “nature” and “religion.” Nature is apprehended by the senses; religion is apprehended by faith. Man uses reason for both, as noted, but there is no hint that Campbell ever imagines defending Christianity using any concept of reason apart from his biblical framework.

This relativizing of natural reason before biblical revelation in *The Christian System* comports with Clanton’s observations about Campbell’s philosophy of religion. Evincing no interest in presuppositionalist antecedents in Campbell, Clanton takes note of Campbell’s frequent and “aggressive” criticism of human reason unaided by revelation:

Much of the literature on Campbell can lead readers in the direction of supposing that he had a low opinion of, or was even opposed to, natural theology. And it is easy enough to see why. . . . For one thing . . . the chief aim of his religious movement was to restore Christianity to the *revealed* model of the New Testament—and to that biblical model exclusively. In addition, he is often aggressively critical of natural religionists and their undertakings, and he repeatedly comments on the failure of unaided human reasoning in acquiring knowledge about God.²⁴

²² Campbell, *The Christian System*, 3.

²³ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 3.

²⁴ Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*, 26.

As noted, Clanton is reading Campbell with an eye for his theistic arguments, as well as his philosophy of religion and morality.²⁵ The presuppositionalist analysis I propose is freer to notice the sweep of Campbell's wider apologetic.

If the opening chapters of *The Christian System* are indicative of that sweep, as I argue they are, Campbell is not *merely* arguing theism, or morality, from a pertinent aspect of revelation. As a biblicist apologist, he is doing more. His stated assumptions, assertion, and subsequent arguments begin with biblical supremacy and logical priority, using reason. Reason is methodologically necessary, but the apologetic, so far, is philosophically biblical. Revelation deploys reason, not the other way around.

Campbell's "Antithesis": The "Understanding Distance"

Presuppositional apologetics depends, to some degree, on a functional "antithesis" between Christians and non-Christians. Frame characterizes antithesis in Van Til's work as "a great gulf, a religious antithesis, between orthodox Christianity and its liberal opponents."²⁶ He explains, "They cannot be synthesized: we can only choose one or the other."²⁷ Frame himself "resist[s] the literal use of Van Til's more extreme formulations" of antithesis but agrees with its essence.²⁸

As noted, Baucham never uses the word "antithesis," but his analysis of the target of apologetics shows he recognizes it. All arguments by unbelievers are subject to the "cycle of foolishness" which is in turn driven by "the spiral of ungodly unbelief."²⁹ Explicit or not, antithesis in presuppositionalism functions as an apologetics backstop

²⁵ Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*, 149-53.

²⁶ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 23.

²⁷ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 41. Frame offers this description, citing J. Gresham Machen as a co-philosopher with Van Til.

²⁸ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 301, point 4.

²⁹ Voddie L. Baucham, *Expository Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 49-50.

against compromising either the essence or the details of Christianity. Two systems are sharply contrasted, clarifying the choice between, not offering a hybrid of, the two systems.

Similarly, Campbell has himself presented a defense of Christianity as a total “system,” one based on, derived entirely from, and operating as a sole function of, the Bible. It is a biblical system. That system cannot be apprehended by reason and the senses, as the philosopher apprehends nature—it must be apprehended by reason and faith, depending on “the full and total revelation” of the Bible. But who can apprehend this? Can any human being simply accept and understand this system?

Perhaps surprisingly to both Campbellite and Reformed apologists, Campbell will answer a resounding “no.” Campbell came close (though not close enough, as one will see) to a working concept of antithesis, asserting at some length that a hardened unrepentant sinner was not, as such, capable of coming within “the understanding distance” and believing the gospel. Campbell writes,

RULE 7. For the salutary and sanctifying intelligence of the Oracles of God. . . . *We must come within the understanding distance.* . . . The wisdom of God is as evident in adapting the light of the Sun of Righteousness to our spiritual and moral vision, as in adjusting the light of day to our eyes. The light reaches us without an effort of our own. . . . If our eyes be sound, we enjoy the natural light of heaven. There is a sound eye in reference to the spiritual light, as well as in reference to material light. . . . The moral *soundness* of vision consists in having the eyes of the understanding fixed solely on God himself, his approbation and complacent affection for us. It is sometimes called a *single* eye because it looks for one thing supremely.³⁰

“For the salutary and sanctifying intelligence of the Oracles of God. . . . We must come within the understanding distance . . . *if our eyes be sound*, we enjoy the natural light of heaven.” This is as close as Campbell comes to describing a precondition for saving faith, and it is foundational to all biblical interpretation, located amid Campbell’s final three numbered sections on the Bible (paragraph 5 and sections 6 and 7), prompted by the movement of his apologetic. If the entire “system” of moral truth is offered in the Bible as “revelation” meant to be understood, how do readers go about

³⁰ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 5, emphasis original.

understanding it? The answer, seven “rules or principles of interpretation,” distills thirteen years (1823–1835) of specific extended debate and discussion over hermeneutics, and it begins with an “understanding distance” no hardened unbeliever may cross.

Having asserted the primacy and priority of the Bible as “full and perfect revelation,” Campbell delivers here what amounts to a Bible study primer in seven points. Their essence is a rejection of the wholesale allegorization of Scripture. The Bible must be read and discerned according to available understanding of authorial intent.³¹ Points 1 through 6 read as if any rational person may understand what is read, but it is the seventh principle that asserts a gulf between the one who can believe and the one who cannot. The “understanding distance” deserves attention here because it shows Campbell admitting the incapacity of sinful man to apprehend biblical revelation.

One should not allow Campbell’s methodological language distract from the direction of his argument. He says, “We must come within the understanding distance,” as if anyone might do so. Yet immediately he requires a “single eye” that “looks for one thing supremely”: “*one aim*, one ardent desire—intent only to know the will of God.” No casual reader, let alone a hardened unbeliever, will meet this standard. The Bible, as God’s revelation, is “framed to illuminate *such, and only such*, with the salutary knowledge of things celestial and divine.”³² This illumination functions within “the understanding distance,” but its boundary is a gulf. Campbell explains,

Humility of mind, or what is in effect the same, prepares the mind for the reception of this light. . . . Amidst the din of all the arguments from the flesh, the world, and Satan, a person is so deaf that he can not hear the still small voice of God’s philanthropy. But, receding from pride, covetousness, and false ambition; from the love of the world; and in coming within that circle, the circumference of which is unfeigned humility, and the center of which is God himself—the voice of God is

³¹ The seven “principles and rules of interpretation” are given in order as subsection VI of Campbell’s chap. 2. Campbell, *The Christian System*, 3-5.

³² Campbell, *The Christian System*, 5, emphasis added.

distinctly heard and understood. All within this circle are taught by God; all without it are under the influence of the wicked one.³³

In context, it is after paragraphs 1-4 on the Bible that section 6 now lays a heavy spiritual requirement on its reader, any reader. Having asserted the primacy and priority of the Bible over nature, sense, and reason, Campbell anchors his deceptively simple “rules of interpretation” with a requirement that should sound draconian to contemporary ears. Only someone who has crossed over from “the influence of the wicked one” into the literal arena of “those taught by God” can follow these “rules of interpretation.”

Lest there be any doubt that Campbell is calling for something radical, something total, he tightens his requirement with a biblical analogy (and a shot at the natural intellect):

He, then, that would interpret the Oracles of God to the salvation of his soul, must approach this volume with the humility and docility of a child, and meditate upon it day and night. Like Mary, he must sit at the Master’s feet, and listen to the word which fall from his lips. To such a one there is an assurance of understanding, a certainty of knowledge, to which the man of letters never attained, and which the mere critic never felt.³⁴

Campbell’s Version of the “Vast Gulf”: Who May Cross?

Campbell conceptualizes the distance between a believer and unbeliever as a circular zone within which *sanctified* reason operates. “In coming within that circle, the circumference of which is unfeigned humility, and the center of which is God himself—the voice of God is distinctly heard and understood. All within this circle are taught by God; all without it are under the influence of the wicked one.”³⁵ Supposing one finds oneself inside this circle, what are the mechanics of revelation for that person? How does the Bible as God’s intended revelation work for the individual inside that “understanding

³³ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 5-6.

³⁴ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 6.

³⁵ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 5-6.

distance?” Campbell reserves the full answer for later in this theology, but introduces the concept of “faith” in “testimony” in the closing paragraph on the Bible.

Campbell’s apologetic separates the topical treatment of “faith” from this question by thirty-four pages. Not until his chapter 14 does he describe “faith in Christ,” after a complete theology proper, Christology, pneumatology, anthropology, and hamartiology.³⁶ The reasons he delays a full approach to faith are important and complex, but they belong to the historic polemics this project takes care to avoid. Within the framework of apologetics, however, one can locate Campbell’s short definition of “faith” within his concept of “the understanding distance.”

The final section of his apologetic for the Bible now features his second use of the term “faith.” He has removed the Bible as revelation completely from the purview of the natural man, taken it away to the deep interior of a revelatory circle whose center is none other than God. He will now establish that circle, and that circle alone, as the realm of supreme “facts” revealed to faith. Their revealed, believed “meaning” is the precise point of access: “The Bible is a book of facts, not of opinions, theories, abstract generalities, nor of verbal definitions. It is a book of awful facts, grand and sublime beyond description. These facts reveal God and man, and contain within them the reasons of all piety and righteousness . . . the meaning of the Bible facts is the true biblical doctrine.”³⁷

Faith in true witness is that access. Because the Bible (not nature, nor reason per se) is the heart of “facts,” its record is neither legend nor even merely past events. It is “history,” the witness borne to what God has truly said He has done. Accessing and understanding that witness begins, precisely, with believing it—with faith. Campbell

³⁶ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 6-37.

³⁷ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 6.

writes, “History is, therefore, the plan pursued in both Testaments; for testimony has primarily to do with faith. . . . History has, we say, to do with facts—and religion springs from them. Hence, history of the past . . . and prophecy, make up exactly four-fifths of all the volumes of inspiration.”³⁸ It seems that in Campbell’s biblical apologetic the bulk of the “volumes of inspiration” constitute a specific witness to be “believed” as truthful: testimony borne and accepted. However, this “faith” can only take place within the revelatory circle, the “unfeigned humility” of the understanding distance.

This discourse concludes Campbell’s effort to relativize the skeptic’s philosophy before the supremacy and priority of the Bible, relegating “facts” to the realm of Scripture—facts which, in turn, are accessible by accepting biblical witness as truthful. Thus, it is the factual “words” and “ideas” contained in the revelation of God that are “salutary and sanctifying,” but available only to the person who has crossed into “unfeigned humility.” That person does this by “faith” in the witness of Scripture.

At this point one should not allow Campbell’s piecemeal treatment of “faith” to prevent from noticing its crucial role in his apologetic. His focus in *The Christian System* is on the theological subjects of his defense, which begin with the Bible itself and proceed through (as noted) further chapters on God, the Son, the Spirit, humanity, sin, and salvation, before dealing with “faith.” Not until after all this does he approach “faith” as a theological topic, not an apologetics one, in chapter 14.

Nor should one be sidetracked by Campbell’s chapter on “Conversion/Regeneration” (chap. 17). This topic for study is beyond this thesis because significant and important theological differences exist among those who lay claim to “biblical” evangelical apologetics. The precise, especially temporal, relationship between faith and regeneration stands out among those disputed issues. Such later chapters are Campbell’s own attempt, in his time and amid his concerns, to untangle his apologetic

³⁸ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 6.

from theological controversy. They may shed subsequent light on comparative biblicist apologetics, but they are beyond the scope of this comparison and critique. What is important here is that, for Campbell, biblical faith is both “believing” the gospel of Christ (what is witnessed) and “believing” in Christ the Person (the witness Himself). This belief is the “necessary” “means of attainment” and “means of enjoyment” of all that he defended in his *The Christian System*: “The things done for us will truly be to us as though they were not, unless they are believed . . . faith is necessary only as a means of attainment; as a means of enjoyment. It is not, then, an arbitrary enactment or requisition, but a gracious means of salvation.”³⁹

For reasons related to his polemic, Campbell briefly distinguishes “faith” from “belief,” though practically and functionally he will merge them again. One pertains to believing the claims of Christ and the apostles, that is, the gospel; the other pertains to a (subsequent) trust in Christ, the person. Believing the gospel “fact” comes first:

Faith in Christ is the effect of belief. Belief is the *cause*, and trust, confidence or faith *in* Christ, the *effect*. . . . While, then, faith is the simple belief of testimony, of of the truth, and can never be more nor less than that; as a *principle of action* it has respect to a person or thing interesting to us; and is confidence or trust in that person or thing. Now the belief of what Christ says of himself, terminates in trust or confidence in him.⁴⁰

In part because of his focus on “belief” as acceptance of a “factual” testimony, Campbell takes pains lest faith in the gospel end up as mere assent to an abstraction:

That faith in Christ which is essential to salvation is not the belief of any doctrine, testimony, or truth, abstractly, but belief *in* Christ; trust or confidence in him as a person, not a thing. . . . Any belief, then, that does not terminate in our personal confidence in Jesus as the Christ, and to induce trustful submission to him, is not faith unfeigned; but a dead faith, and can not save the soul.⁴¹

Taken together, these points allow one to see the function of biblical, saving

³⁹ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 37.

⁴⁰ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 37, emphasis original.

⁴¹ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 38, emphasis original.

faith in Campbell's apologetic. Faith cannot happen in a person outside the "understanding distance." For Campbell, while moving from "The Bible" into a full discussion of "faith" was a jump over several intervening chapters, for the purposes of this thesis the two topics may be connected in recognition of Campbell's biblicism. The *Christian System* is trusting the Bible, believing the facts it contains about the salvation and sanctification God offers through Christ, but not just any "rational" person can believe those facts. Such faith can only occur within the revelatory circle of the "understanding distance," into which no hardened unbeliever may cross. Once accessed, however, these facts are the basis of both salvation and sanctification: the "salutary and sanctifying intelligence of the oracles of God."⁴²

It seems that on Campbell's account, man cannot know anything beyond sensation, apart from revelation. Conversely, everything truly knowable, apart from sensation, begins with faith in revelation. What can be defended in the gospel proceeds by faith, based on revelation, using reason, but never from outside the "understanding distance." This special metaphor describes a person in a morally prepared state to accept God's truth, a person of "unfeigned humility"—and *only such* a person. Though this understanding differs from the later "antithesis" conceptualized in Baucham's presuppositionalism, it parallels it in important ways, as explored next.

Conclusion: Campbell's Biblicist Apologetic

This chapter attempted to show how Campbell began definitively with God's revealed reasoning, exhibiting an assertive biblicist apologetic argumentation similar to what the Reformed apologists would take up a century later. While he never used the word "presupposition," Campbell began with assumed "principles" of the Bible's unique and total authority as the sole basis for gospel success. He methodically reasserted

⁴² Campbell, *The Christian System*, 5.

Scripture's foundational role in all human philosophy and religion. While he never conceived of "antithesis," he recognized a fixed distance between those prepared, and unprepared, to believe revelation. Only on the basis of the Bible's comprehensive and total authority, and only after that authority was asserted, did reason enter in. Thereafter, only by faith did that reason take hold. Reason was restricted by Campbell to an integral function *of the Bible*, as revelation, apprehended in faith. To what extent does this compare with practical presuppositionalism? Chapter 4 turns to a description of the latter.

CHAPTER 4

BAUCHAM'S PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETIC

Presuppositional apologetics has become a large field of study, both fruitful and controversial. A principal virtue of Voddie L. Baucham's *Expository Apologetics* is that it serves as an entry point into this field. Arising from Baucham's own experience as an expository preacher and personal evangelist, the book is an "application of the principles of biblical exposition to the art and science of apologetics."¹ Underneath this deceptively simple definition is the apologetics of Cornelius Van Til. Baucham writes,

Cornelius Van Til defined apologetics as "the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life." This will serve as the philosophical baseline of our approach to expository apologetics. Whether we preach or teach, when we witness to a stranger, or when we are making disciples in our home or church, it is important to keep this definition in mind. We stand before people who have been bombarded every day of their lives by philosophies of life that contradict Christianity. When they open their Bibles, they are rarely aware of how many presuppositions they bring to the encounter, let alone how contradictory they are. They need someone willing to vindicate a Christian philosophy of life.²

Baucham's deployment of Van Til's broad definition in the same breath as his approach to "presuppositions" is neither accidental nor uninformed. Though Baucham is not interested in an exposition of Van Til's presuppositionalism, "this book . . . at its core . . . [is] a practical expression of presuppositional apologetics."³ Van Til's broad definition

¹ Voddie L. Baucham, *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 20.

² Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 21-22.

³ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 14.

of apologetics as “the vindication of the Christian word and life view” is repeated twice more in the book.⁴

Taking these cues, in this chapter I attempt four objectives. First, I outline Baucham’s understanding of presuppositionalism. Second, I compare that understanding to an introductory sampling of Van Til’s own expression of these concepts, as Van Til himself offered in “My Credo,” the “basic, non-philosophical introduction to his own thought” published in the seminal Van Til symposium of 1971.⁵ Third, I further compare this working understanding of presuppositionalism with an introductory look at relevant commentary by John Frame, preeminent among contemporary presuppositional apologists and a student of Van Til’s, who is also mentioned in passing as a key influence on Baucham’s theology.⁶ For this comparison I make use of Frame’s own summary of his analysis of Van Til’s thought.⁷ Fourth and finally, I summarize in preparation for closer comparison with the biblicist, restorationist apologetic of Alexander Campbell.

Baucham’s Presuppositionalism

Expository Apologetics is mainly practical, requiring that expository apologetics be biblical, memorable, and conversational.⁸ A great deal of Baucham’s work develops the latter two requirements in engaging detail. His pragmatic focus is equipping all believers to win hearts and minds through clarity and winsomeness, which makes him a

⁴ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 85, 102.

⁵ See E. R. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1971), ix.

⁶ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 111-12. Baucham mentions Frame as formative to his understanding of Christian ethics, especially as informed by the Old Testament. Interestingly, Frame’s apologetics work is only mentioned in passing, though favorably.

⁷ John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995), especially the introductory and concluding sections.

⁸ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 20, 67, 105-6.

fitting comparison (if also an instructive contrast) to Alexander Campbell, the populist and popular editor and communicator:

We must be able to share truth in a manner that is natural, reasonable, and winsome. . . . I'm not talking about preparing to defeat Christopher Hitchens in a formal debate. The goal here is to be able to answer him or anyone else in the normal flow of conversation as you share your faith in a natural way. This is about freeing you up to do what every believer is called, commanded, and expected to do in the process of living out the Christian life.⁹

It is the *biblical* component, however, that summarizes Baucham's presuppositionalism. As has been shown, Baucham shares Van Til's assumption that "biblical" summarizes the singular and fully authoritative "world and life view" contained in Scripture. Expository apologetics is "based on the inerrancy, infallibility, sufficiency, and authority of the Bible," not "acquiring the latest knowledge in fields like astronomy, geology, physics, or comparative religion . . . our view is always toward gospel proclamation."¹⁰

Thus, presuppositionalism for Baucham not only describes starting biblically, but aiming biblically. The gospel of Jesus Christ as the *telos* of the Bible, not to be lost amid the objections which frame the apologist's defense. This thesis has used the term "biblicist." Baucham explains,

Remember, the goal here is not to be consumed with the objections that are out there. On the contrary, our emphasis is on the truth to which people object. Our goal is to grow deeper in our understanding of a commitment to the gospel. In the process we become aware of the objections people have to it. If we start with objections, we begin an endless spiral that will consume time and energy and move us away from our life of devotion to Christ. However, starting with the gospel drives us deeper in our devotion. Our goal is God!¹¹

This "endless spiral" of which Baucham warns to beware partakes of his larger metaphor for Van Til's antithesis—the essential difference between believing thought and

⁹ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 20.

¹⁰ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 20.

¹¹ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 180.

unbelieving thought. Baucham describes the mind of the unbeliever as trapped in a “spiral of ungodly unbelief”; a spiral to be arrested, not with arguments, but with “the faith.”¹²

Not only does presuppositionalism begin and end with “the faith,” but it proceeds by arguments that assume the truth of that faith. The Bible is both the logical foundation of Baucham’s arguments and the source of those arguments. Baucham uses this biblical presuppositionalism in mainly two ways. First, he delimits the possible objections using the gospel’s nature as “limited and limiting,” by which he means that the range of possible arguments against the gospel is constrained by the unchangeability of the gospel itself. Second, he draws directly upon the New Testament for arguments used by the apostles. The two points are interrelated:

Expository apologetics takes into account the fact that the gospel, by its very nature, is limited and limiting. It is limited because we are operating from a closed canon. No new truths are being revealed. It is limiting because the objections that must be answered cannot exceed the propositions being put forth. Thus, there are a limited number of objections. . . . If there are a limited number of objections to the gospel message, and these objections have been answered by biblical authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then their answers will certainly be more authoritative and effective than any we could devise on our own.¹³

After a brief additional point about clarity and exegetical rigor, Baucham concludes, “This, in essence, is expository apologetics.”¹⁴

The biblicist nature of this apologetic requires that Baucham treat his apologetics as a total *system*. Although he never uses that exact language, Baucham’s approach brings all of “the faith” to bear on each objection, bearing in mind that the objections are part of a total “spiral of ungodly unbelief” noted above.¹⁵ In each answer to each objection, the whole of biblical faith answers the whole of biblical unbelief. “[V]indicat[ing] a Christian

¹² Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 50-51.

¹³ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 21.

¹⁴ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 21.

¹⁵ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 50-51.

philosophy of life” is “not the same as vindicating ourselves, or our own opinions” (Rom 12:19-21). The object of this vindication is God’s truth. Nor is the approach to this vindication left to chance. Baucham insists, “An examination of the principal apologetics texts in the New Testament reveals at least three forms this vindication should take.”¹⁶ In short, these three forms specifically target objections, errors, and contradictions as measured by the totality of biblical doctrine. Each criterion is based on an apostolic directive (1 Pet 3:15; Jude 1-4; 2 Cor 10:5-6; Rom 12:2; Titus 1:9). The criteria are not rationality, factuality, historicity, or efficacy, but conformity to Christian teaching as a whole.¹⁷

Even the need for apologetics is, in fact, the need for the Bible. It is as broad a need as the breadth of unbelieving human thought. As Baucham surveys the field, he describes the urgent call for apologetics as follows: “Apologetics is necessary today because of issues such as biblical illiteracy, postmodern/post-Christian thinking, open opposition to biblical truth, and the growing presence of opposing religions.”¹⁸

Since the need is so broad, the call to apologetics is universal. Baucham struggles to match this apologetic to a specific audience, admitting that he needs to specify an intended readership for his book. Yet because his presuppositionalism is essentially the *whole faith* as a defense against the *whole of unbelief*, his target comprises the entire believing and unbelieving world in three parts. He writes,

Because apologetics is for everybody, this book is for everyone. But I realize that I cannot write specific applications for every Christian in every conceivable situation. As such, I have had to narrow my focus a bit . . . the first audience is the heathen. This is the person who is both ignorant of and antagonistic toward the gospel . . . the second audience is the churchgoer . . . a person who, whether converted or

¹⁶ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 22.

¹⁷ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 22-24.

¹⁸ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 24.

unconverted, is sitting under the regular preaching and teaching of the Word. . . . The final audience is the disciple . . . brand new to the things of God.¹⁹

The irony of “narrowing his focus” to believers or unbelievers in the gospel, either inside or outside the reach of the Word, reaching everyone from pagans to new believers to converted churchgoers—a “narrow focus” that pretty much includes everyone!—is perhaps striking. However humorous it may be, the incongruity is not indicative of a weakness of Baucham’s approach. Rather, it highlights the totalizing nature of his biblicist, presuppositional apologetic. Again, all biblical belief is the defense against all biblical unbelief.

A final element of Baucham’s presuppositionalism is his implicit recognition of antithesis, the fundamental thought divide between the regenerate believer and the unregenerate nonbeliever. Like *system*, *antithesis* is a term used in presuppositionalist apologetics which Baucham’s practical approach does not use. However, his “spiral of ungodly unbelief” is key to that approach and illustrates that antithesis functions powerfully in Baucham’s apologetics:

Romans 1:18 informs us about man’s spiritual condition in relation to the truth we are trying to proclaim. Here, Paul makes it clear that our hearers don’t have an information problem; they have a sin problem. Of course, ignorance factors into the equation. However, at a fundamental level, ignorance is not their issue. They “suppress the truth” in their unrighteousness. . . . This influences our strategy directly. If man’s problem is a lack of information, then our approach . . . must be information-heavy. . . . If, on the other hand, man’s primary problem is a sin problem, then information alone is not sufficient. The answer to sin is not information, but repentance. . . . What, then, is the greatest need of those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness? The answer, according to verses 16 and 17, is the faith!²⁰

The “sin problem” is what interferes with human understanding, and it divides knowledge into two spheres: what believers know, and what unbelievers falsely believe. Accordingly, Baucham describes the “spiral” in the following descending stages, based on Romans 1:18-32. Humanity starts by knowing God; in defiance of what they know they refuse

¹⁹ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 27.

²⁰ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 50-51.

God honor; they become fools; they succumb to idolatry; they indulge their lusts; they destroy the image of God they bear; and finally, they literally lose their minds.²¹ The locus of the spiral starts and ends in the mind, but its movement is moral, spiritual, from beginning to end.

The tactics of Baucham's apologetics are not devoted to convincing the unbeliever about the truth of any particular issue. Still less do they labor under the unbeliever's notions of what is true. Rather, expository apologetics brings the totality of the faith to bear against the totality of unbelief, leveraged at the moral point of contact between the two "life and world views."

This requirement is illustrated by Baucham's elaborated "response to the spiral," a "both-and" approach incorporating information as well as gospel conviction.²² Tactical measures include flatly rejecting claims to atheism; reminding agnostics of what they already "know" of God, truth, right and wrong, sin, judgment, and the need for a Savior; refusal to allow the antagonist the prerogatives of judge; and diligence to get past information to the gospel itself.²³ At this point, though Baucham has not again taken up again the word "presupposition," he is using biblical presuppositions in a broadside defensive attack on the presuppositions of the anti- or post-Christian thinker. They are challenged at the point of antithesis, from which the believer tries to pull the unbeliever out of the "spiral of ungodly unbelief."

²¹ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 50-56.

²² Baucham insists,
I want to convince people that the earth is not billions of years old *as* I point them to the Creator and Lawgiver whose image they bear and whose law they've broken. I want people to see the truth of theism *as* I point them to the one true God. I want them to know the historicity of Jesus' life *and* his resurrection, as well as the implications of both for life and eternity. In short, I want to win the person, not just the argument. And the only way I can accomplish that is the gospel. (Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 57)

²³ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 56-66.

In short, Baucham’s apologetic takes “the faith,” defined as biblical and historically Christian, as logically supreme, logically prior, and logically necessary to defense against any and all attacks upon it. That whole faith is the standard of logic and truth, by which the thought of both believers and unbelievers is judged. That standard is applied wholesale to the total mindset of the unbeliever, across the divide of antithesis, with the goal of arresting the moral “spiral” in which the unbelieving thinker is trapped. That goal cannot be reached by individual arguments answering individual objections with the merits of truth as judged by the objector; it can only be reached by deploying the fully biblical gospel *at* those objected points.

This is Baucham’s “presuppositionalism,” for which he gives Van Til passing credit and Frame a brief nod. Now the discussion turns to the question of whether, and how well, Van Til’s own beliefs bear out Baucham’s claim to his philosophy.

Van Til’s Presuppositionalist “Credo”

As of 1971, Cornelius Van Til had been professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary for forty years. A sort of *festschrift* in his honor began with his own essay, entitled “My Credo,” a nineteen-page summary of what he called his “main beliefs as I hold them today.”²⁴ His summary is a snapshot, incapable of doing justice to the subsequent decades of debate his apologetics launched. However, this particular snapshot is representative of his own affirmative apologetic, just as *The Christian System* is a snapshot representative of Alexander Campbell’s affirmative apologetic.

We can regard this as a seminal document in the definition of “presuppositionalism.” All nineteen pages start with the “self-attesting Christ of Scripture” and end in a challenge to “argue by presupposition” instead of “compromise” or “probability.” This is the essence of Van Til’s biblical apologetic in the Credo:

²⁴ E. R. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1971), 3-21.

“presuppositionalism” as Christ attesting Himself in his teachings, and in the apostles’ witness to him. This self-attestation of both Christ and the Word must be accepted as “presupposition” and shown to be superior to the competing “presuppositions” of unbelief.²⁵

[T]he Christian offers the self-attesting Christ to the world as the only foundation upon which a man must stand in order to give any “reasons” for believing anything at all. The whole notion of “giving reasons” is completely destroyed by any ontology other than the Christian one. The Christian claims that only after accepting the biblical scheme of things will any man be able to understand and account for his own rationality.²⁶

This singular, total “biblical scheme of things,” so understood, is logically prior to, supreme over, and necessary to defending against any “ontology other than the Christian one.” It sounds precisely like “the Christian world and life view” cited by Baucham. However, Van Til expands this in the essay to follow.

As a “general statement” of Van Til’s “main beliefs,” the whole Credo can be summarized in the main headings as follows. He begins with “the self-attesting Christ of Scripture,” who “Writes Me a Letter” calling for a “Christ-Centered Apologetic.” These add up to a “Total Picture” summarizing the entire Credo in outline form, in which traditional apologetics is rejected because of its constant “compromise” with unbelief and its appeals to “probability” instead of truth.²⁷ Thus, the Credo connects Van Til’s opening “self-attesting Christ of Scripture” with the logical priority, supremacy and necessity of the Christian view of life and the world cited by Baucham.

In “The Total Picture,” a form of antithesis is asserted in defiance of the “compromises” of traditional apologetics. “Compromise” is tempting because both Christianity and unbelief make claims to logic, reality, fact, and rationality. Compromise

²⁵ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 18.

²⁶ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 18.

²⁷ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 3-20.

fails, however, because both world and life views are based on utterly opposite (antithetical) “presuppositions” about those qualities.

Van Til’s alternative is a “Christ-centered apologetic” that appeals explicitly to *fallen* man, for Christianity *as a whole*, in an argument by “presupposition” that pits the assumptions and definitions of unbelief squarely against the assumptions and definitions of biblical Christian faith.²⁸ Here Van Til draws the preceding argument into the problem of antithesis, not mentioned in the Credo, yet evident in the clear dichotomy he draws between Christianity and unbelief.

The Credo culminates in a description of the goal of Van Til’s apologetics. To highlight Van Til’s choice of words, this argument is only “won” in the cooperation of specific extra-informational factors including the consciousness of sin and “alienat[ion] from God,” the “acceptance of the Christ of Scripture,” the “open[ing of] eyes” by the Holy Spirit” in the “presence of inescapably clear evidence,” and the “present[ation of] the message and evidence for the Christian position as clearly as possible.”²⁹ It is perhaps noteworthy that in the Credo, presuppositionalism succeeds in cooperation with, not in the avoidance or dismissal of, “clear evidence.”³⁰

Continuing Van Til’s verbiage, these points further amount to a “reminding process” pointing to what the opponent “‘already knows’ but seeks to suppress” in the hope that the “Holy Spirit . . . in sovereign grace may grant the non-Christian repentance so that he may know him who is life eternal.”³¹ These heading summaries appear to correctly underlie Baucham’s presuppositionalism, but a closer look confirms this. Following is a summary of each of the four sections of the Credo.

²⁸ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 19-21.

²⁹ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 21.

³⁰ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 21.

³¹ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 21.

The Self-Attesting Christ of Scripture

Van Til asserts, “The self-attesting Christ of Scripture has always been my starting point for everything I have said.”³² For Van Til, the Jesus of Scripture is the basis of understanding any fact, about the self or the world or anything in between. Jesus’ self-understanding, conveyed in the Bible, is the test of truth: truth is not a test to be used on Jesus by unbelievers. Van Til writes,

Christ has, by his word and by his Spirit, identified himself with us and thereby, at the same time, told us who and what we are. . . . He has sent his Spirit to dwell in my heart so that I might believe and therefore understand all things to be what he says they are. . . . I have learned something of what it means to make my every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, being converted anew every day to the realization that I understand no fact aright unless I see it in its proper relation to Christ as Creator-Redeemer of me and my world.³³

Van Til’s first illustration takes up the contest between Jesus and the Pharisees as an analogy for apologetics today. By all their collected wisdom, including knowledge of the Scripture, the Pharisees judged Jesus as a blasphemer; yet, such a position made them, in reality, blasphemers, since in fact Jesus was the Son of God. As Van Til explains,

Every fact in dispute between the Pharisees and Jesus involved the ultimate claim that Jesus was the Son of God, and, as such, the promised Messiah. Jesus told the Pharisees, in effect, that they had twisted beyond recognition the meaning of every word in the Old Testament. . . . It was natural, therefore, that they should think of Jesus as a blasphemer. Not that their view of blasphemy could have any meaning on their view of things. If Jesus’ claim . . . were true, then they, the Pharisees, were reactionaries, revolutionaries, apostates . . . intellectually, morally, and spiritually wrong in all they said and did. . . . As Christians we are not, of ourselves, better or wiser than were the Pharisees.³⁴

The self-attesting Christ of Scripture makes the Jesus of the Bible the basis for presuppositional argument, but the substance is the same as Baucham’s prior, supreme, and necessary reliance on the “inerrancy, infallibility, sufficiency, and authority of Scripture.”³⁵ Van Til connects Christ to the Bible in the section to follow.

³² Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 3.

³³ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 4-5.

³⁴ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 4.

³⁵ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 20.

“Christ Writes Me A Letter”

Van Til begins explaining the place of Scripture in his self-attesting apologetic in an oblique way, describing Scripture as a personal correspondence: “I have never met Christ in the flesh. No matter, he has written me a letter. Not he, himself. He chose helpers. By his Spirit, the Spirit of truth, these helpers wrote what he wanted me to know.”³⁶ In a theology lesson using Adam in the garden, Christ in the wilderness, Paul at the Areopagus, and Noah preaching to the crowds, Van Til describes the “letter” in each biblical case as God’s bald assertion of truth, overturning Satan’s effort to subject God to an alternate account of the world. But the “letter” was not finished until his father read it to Van Til himself:

This, then, is the message of the letter written to me and to the whole Church by Christ himself. Ever since I can remember it was of this letter of Christ which my father read to me and to the family. It was also this letter which I heard in church, spoken by the minister of Christ. Every minister of Christ in those days had a V.D.M. degree: *Verbum Dei Minister*.³⁷

Van Til continues his description of Christ’s “Letter” with a church history lesson to follow the theology lesson. The influence of this letter has succeeded or failed with the Protestant Reformation begun by Luther and continued by Calvin, since all other “Christian” groups have subjected the priority and supremacy of the Word of God under the reasoning of fallen humanity.³⁸ Van Til states,

How else, I thought, can anyone be a follower of the Reformation? Calvin and Luther: they expounded the Scriptures for the edification of the church of Christ. They rescued the Bible as the Word of God for the people of God from the apostate church of Rome. When they insisted on the necessity, authority, sufficiency, and the perspicuity of the Scriptures, they rejected in principle the entire Roman theological structure as it was largely based on the very Greek thought against which Paul so vigorously preached.³⁹

³⁶ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 5.

³⁷ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 8.

³⁸ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 8-10.

³⁹ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 8.

In the entire history of Van Til's "letter," non-Reformed defenses of Christianity have together failed at the same point: divine authority over all knowledge, established in and by the Scripture. In any effective defense of Christianity, God himself must be understood to have authority over all knowledge based on His Word. Van Til writes,

From these examples of Roman Catholic, Arminian-Wesleyan-Lutheran, and finally modern theology, it is clear . . . that none of these non-Reformed evangelical and modern theologies have a view of Scripture such that the Lord Christ speaks to man with absolute authority. The self-attesting Christ of Scripture is not absolutely central to these theologies. Just so, he will not be central in any apologetic form to defend them.⁴⁰

To summarize Van Til's Credo so far, Christianity is attested by Christ Himself in a letter conveyed by the biblical authors, from minister to minister down to today. Christ still attests himself, in and by every apologist who asserts the authority for Christ that he attested for himself, with all the authority Christ deployed to do it. God's Word, the Bible, is Christ's means of self-attestation, when asserted as such by ministers today.

"Toward a Christ-Centered Apologetic"

Van Til moves toward a conclusion of the prose section of the "Credo" with another brief church history lesson. Van Til references the Nicene, Chalcedonian, and Reformed creeds, as well as two church fathers, Augustine and Tertullian, to illustrate by turn the foundational efforts of previous generations, only partly successful, to allow Christ to attest Himself on His own terms in His Word. All other forms of Christianity have allowed speculation and human reasoning to stand over "the Letter from Christ" and judge it. Again, only the Calvinist Reformation has avoided this crucial error. Van Til states,

Calvin explicated the person of Christ solely in scriptural terms, i.e., his method is exegetical rather than speculative. As such his method is simple: who Christ is depends on Christ's self-identification. If Christ is who he says he is, then all speculation is excluded, for God can swear only by himself. To find out what man is and who God is, one can only go to Scripture. Faith in the self-attesting Christ of the Scriptures is the beginning, not the conclusion, of wisdom!⁴¹

⁴⁰ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 10.

⁴¹ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 15.

“The Total Picture”

Van Til closes the Credo with a summary in outline form. The outline consists of three broad points, which I summarize and paraphrase with important sub-points in sentence form, quoting Van Til’s terms in point C. In essence, Van Til’s Credo says as follows.

1. Traditional apologetics compromises everything important in and about the Word of God by allowing unregenerate reason to usurp God’s personhood, counsel, revelation, and grace.⁴²
2. This compromise ignores the disparity in presuppositions between truth and falsehood, and thus always misrepresents God at the outset by placing Him in an apparent struggle with fallen man over the criteria of nature, reality, logic, necessity, facthood, and reason.⁴³
3. Therefore, the self-attesting Christ of Scripture must replace traditional apologetics; biblically-attested *actual* common ground must replace illusory “common notions” of agreement; appeals to fallen and redeemable man must replace appeals to “autonomous,” “rational” man; the thought-world of biblical sin, judgment, regeneration, and salvation must replace the thought-world of mere debate; and, thus, “argument by presupposition” must replace traditional apologetics.⁴⁴

In sum, it is difficult to find daylight between Van Til’s “Credo” and *Expository Apologetics*.

Baucham insisted on the “inerrancy, infallibility, sufficiency, and authority” of the Bible and its gospel as the basis, source, and goal of all apologetics.⁴⁵ He refers to that approach as “presuppositional apologetics.”⁴⁶ He prefers this practical approach to any debates from, about, or within arenas of human knowledge, even if they seem to confirm some biblical truths.

⁴² Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 18-19.

⁴³ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 19-20.

⁴⁴ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 20-21.

⁴⁵ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 20.

⁴⁶ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 14.

Van Til's call to argue exclusively by "presupposition" calls for the replacement of any man-made criteria of defense with a fully exegetical, biblical argument for Christ's total claim, based directly *on* Christ's total claim, in his "letter," the Bible.

While Baucham's presuppositional philosophy centers on the Bible and references the apostles, Van Til's centers on the Christ of the Bible. Comparing the two, and given Baucham's claim to influence by Van Til, it is difficult to escape the impression that the differences between them are minor matters of emphasis, missional location, style, and perceived stature. Such congruence suggests that Baucham's presuppositionalism is a fair representative of the most readily applicable elements in presuppositional apologetics. A final comparison, however, will yield still more confidence. I now turn to an introductory glance at John Frame's analysis of Van Til's thought.

John Frame Qualifies Van Til's Presuppositionalism

At the time Frame published his deep and extensive analysis of Van Til's thought, there had been five successors of Van Til at Westminster Theological Seminary, of which Frame had been the fifth.⁴⁷ Frame's long immersion in both the movement and the ideas of Cornelius Van Til equipped him to discuss "presuppositionalism" from the broadest perspective and in fair detail.⁴⁸ As such, while Baucham perhaps favorably reflects key aspects of Van Til's biblicist thought, Frame manages to review it comprehensively. Therefore, it will be impossible to justly manage Frame's entire analysis of Van Til's "argument by presupposition." However, this thesis can do it some justice by summarizing, in the simplest terms, what I call Frame's "positive" and "negative" qualifications of Van Til as a presuppositionalist.

⁴⁷ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 390.

⁴⁸ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 8-14. Frame's introduction includes a description of the difficulty, and the necessity, of finding mere analysis of Van Til's thought, amid so many "sympathetic" reviewers on the one hand and "debunkers" on the other.

Negative Qualifiers

Frame believes that several senses of “presuppositional” do not fit Van Til’s thought at all. Many of these senses are based on misunderstandings of the term. Frame insists that a “supposition” held prior to reaching a conclusion, or temporally held before some other knowledge, is not, by itself, a presupposition in the Van Tilian sense. An “assumption” or “postulate—a belief chosen arbitrarily, with no rational basis” is also not, of itself, a presupposition in the Van Tilian sense.⁴⁹ When *only* these are meant, Van Tilian presuppositionalism is not specifically under discussion.

Frame cautions that Van Til’s use of “presupposition” derives from European philosophy but does not match its uses. Frame’s historical survey of *presupposition* describes a term that surfaced amid Idealism in Germany and Britain as part of ongoing discussions about empiricism (focused on “knowledge gained from experience”), rationalism (focused on “knowledge independent of experience”), and Kant’s proposed alternative, a “transcendental” method.⁵⁰ Frame places Van Til’s questions amid ongoing inquiry about “the preconditions of knowledge and rationality . . . granting that knowledge is possible. . . what must we *presuppose* to be true?” This historic philosophical discussion is part of the context of Van Til’s usage but different from it.⁵¹

Today, as well, just because an apologist is interested in the concept of presupposition and has concern for the preconditions of knowledge does not itself qualify the apologetic as presuppositional. Frame warns that *a priori* knowledge (knowledge “from before,” prior to experience) can be emphasized to the exclusion of knowledge gained from experience, and mistaken for Van Tilian presuppositionalism. In this sense,

⁴⁹ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 137-38.

⁵⁰ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 134.

⁵¹ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 134-35.

too, Van Til was not an “apriorist” since he freely admitted the importance of “empirical, factual study.”⁵²

A full study of the ways Frame takes issue with Van Til’s presuppositionalism would include the particulars of Frame’s disagreement with Van Til. In most of these points of disagreement, Frame suspects Van Til has not used enough rigor, clarity, or consistency in his biblicism.⁵³ However, in certain key respects, Van Til’s use of the term *presuppositional* is, in Frame’s view, consistent with the best of Van Til’s own ideas.

Positive Qualifiers

Based on his long experience, Frame has summarized the intent of Van Til in using the term *presuppositional* in a paragraph that’s worth quoting. This summary focuses on the “heart-commitment” of the believer:

Van Til uses the term *presupposition* to indicate the role that divine revelation ought to play in human thought. I do not believe that he ever defines the term. I have tried to define it for him as a “basic heart commitment.” For the Christian, that commitment is to God as he reveals himself in his Word. Non-Christians substitute something else—another god, themselves, pleasure, money, rationality, or whatever—as that to which they are ultimately committed and that which governs all of life, including thought. Our ultimate commitment plays an important role in our knowledge. It determines our ultimate criteria of truth and falsity, right and wrong. As long as we maintain our ultimate commitment, we cannot accept anything as true or right that conflicts with that commitment.⁵⁴

The language of “heart-commitment” is not Van Til’s own language, but it does not seem foreign to Baucham’s appropriation of Van Til.

⁵² Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 134-35

⁵³ Frame says of Van Til’s presuppositionalism, “some elements . . . are unquestionably biblical and foundational to Christian thought and life . . . other aspects . . . are not well-grounded scripturally and can be forgotten without loss.” Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 398. Frame “takes issue with [Van Til’s] illegitimate *application*” of certain “principles” and “sometimes confusing statements about the use of reason, logic, and evidence.” Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 398. There are important distinctions Van Til fails to make, e.g., “strategy” versus “orthodoxy.” Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 399.

⁵⁴ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 136.

Frame admits to another sense in which Van Til is consistent in his presuppositionalism. Not only must the believer's heart reflect ultimate commitment to the Bible, the Bible itself has ultimate authority, and to some degree priority, over all other knowledge.

Van Til may be called a presuppositionalist in another sense. Certainly he believed that God's revelation has absolute authority (and thus a certain priority) over all human thought. We have seen that his concept of analogical knowledge requires us to "think God's thoughts after him." We have seen that, in Van Til's view, revelation must serve as our ultimate criterion of truth in all areas of life.⁵⁵

Frame and Van Til's Antithesis

Frame's own description of antithesis was noted as the "vast gulf" between the thoughtworld of the believer and that of the unbeliever. Also noted earlier in this chapter, Baucham does not even use the word "antithesis," though his apologetics makes use of a clear divide between the unbeliever trapped in the "spiral" and the believer who hopes to pull him out. At this juncture it is important to note that Frame both (1) acknowledges Van Til's concept of antithesis, and (2) has serious reservations about it. In this way Frame may resonate with Baucham and, in interesting ways to be explored briefly next, with Campbell.

Frame's acknowledgement of Van Til's strong concept of antithesis is both clear, and ambivalent. Frame writes,

Putting together what we have learned, I would suggest that the extreme antithetical formulations with which his thought is most commonly identified and for which it is most commonly criticized do not represent him at his best or at his most typical. . . . No doubt Van Til himself was fond of his more extreme antithetical formulations. To these he devoted his greatest eloquence, his greatest illustrative cleverness. . . . When we understand the antithesis in its full dimensions, we see more fully the legitimacy of the "great gulf" language in certain contexts. To be sure, there is a great gulf between Christianity and unbelief. . . . Is there also a great gulf between Reformed Christians and non-Reformed Christians, or between Van Tilian apologists and non-Van Tilian apologists? . . . Do Reformed believers really have "no fundamentals in common" with Arminian Christians? . . . In my view, statements like this are unwise and untrue if taken in their natural meaning. The issue of antithesis

⁵⁵ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 135.

is essentially an issue of the heart, and I am confident that Reformed believers are, in general, of one heart with their Arminian brothers and sisters. . . . The problem was this: Van Til sometimes forgot that his doctrine of antithesis was a doctrine about the human heart.⁵⁶

Even at this point, however, Frame's disquiet about Van Til's "great gulf" language in its more extreme expressions has less to do with the "gulf" (or "ungodly spiral of unbelief," or even "understanding distance") separating believer from unbeliever, but with a possible and serious inconsistency with its application. For one *bona fide* believer to treat another as if such antithesis exists between them is a serious misunderstanding of presuppositionalism's biblical foundations. This caution appears to align with both Baucham and Frame.

Conclusion: Basic Presuppositional Apologetics

While Frame's expert treatment of Van Til delves deeper into method and history than the scope of this thesis allows, the more accessible and digestible aspects of Van Til's presuppositionalism seem to be admitted as such by Frame. These aspects include a recognition of the Bible's totalizing claim on the heart commitment of the apologist, the fully authoritative claim of that commitment over all knowledge, and a basic (if careful) antithesis between the knowledge of the believer and the unbeliever. All three of these aspects are well within the "practical expression of presuppositional apologetics" offered by Voddie Baucham.⁵⁷ Further, these aspects agree with the simple affirmative apologetic offered in Van Til's "Credo." Now, chapter 5 turns back to Alexander Campbell for synthesis, to explain whether this "presuppositionalism" has any room for restorationist, biblicist apologetics.

⁵⁶ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 210-12.

⁵⁷ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 14.

CHAPTER 5

SYNTHESIS AND CRITIQUE

This thesis has taken up “expository apologetics” as a possible field of comparison between Campbellite and presuppositionalist apologetics. Both approaches appear to be defined by the assumption and acceptance of biblical truth as epistemologically total, prior, supreme, and necessary in matters of knowledge. After outlining introductory matters, I compared three affirmative apologetic manifestos of sorts: the introduction of Campbell’s *Christian System*, the biblical portion of Baucham’s *Expository Apologetics*, and Van Til’s *Credo*, with context provided by John Frame’s analysis of Van Til. This comparison led back to the question that opened the thesis: can Campbellites do expository apologetics? Before answering, a recap of the thesis so far begins with Voddie Baucham, whose title work *Expository Apologetics* raised the issue of radically-biblicist apologetics.

Baucham: Not Presuppositionalist, but Presuppositional

The book *Expository Apologetics* is not recognized in the debates between proponents and opponents of “presuppositionalism.” Baucham makes no claim, in so many words, to be a formal presuppositionalist, nor does he address philosophical and methodological matters that would enable him to press such a claim. The closest he comes is to refer to his own book as a “practical expression of presuppositional apologetics.” Thereafter, Baucham refers to “presuppositions” in a merely general sense, as (for example) the “contradictory” “philosophies of life that contradict Christianity.”¹ Nor, as

¹ Voddie L. Baucham, *Expository Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 21-22.

noted, does Baucham refer specifically to “antithesis,” a term used by Frame to refer to the most striking and controversial component of presuppositionalism.²

These cursory items lend credence to the succinct observation of Timothy Paul Jones: “Voddie Baucham’s not a presuppositionalist.”³ Certainly, Baucham’s book does not partake of the movement analysis sketched out by John Frame, nor does it play a part there.⁴ However, Baucham’s practical exposition of Cornelius Van Til’s biblical philosophy arguably presents separate elements that, taken together, parallel presuppositionalism proper.

To summarize from chapter 4, Baucham denies that any field of human knowledge offers the truth apologetics requires. Human knowledge is fatally hampered by a process of degradation that begins with the rejection of the knowledge of God and ends in mindlessness. Rather, what humans might truly know is wrapped up in their need for the totality of biblical faith. Thus, the purpose of apologetics is not information but rescue, pulling people supernaturally out of the “spiral of ungodly unbelief.”⁵ Apologetics must address the whole of human need with the whole of biblical truth, strategically targeting the points of conflict between those two systems as the gospel and the occasion demand.

In this conflict between sets of “presuppositions” (again, Baucham’s merely descriptive term), the Bible, taken as a self-interpreting totality, is deployed by Christians who accept it as true, fully authoritative, and dispositive of every issue that countervailing philosophies might raise. To use the terms of this thesis, the Bible functions practically

² John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995), 210-12.

³ Timothy Paul Jones made this observation over lunch at Founders’ Cafe, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Summer 2018.

⁴ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 8-14.

⁵ Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 50-51.

and explicitly as a logically prior, supreme, and necessary totality in the beginning, middle, and end of the gospel's defense. Further, this totality represents a functional divide between Christian and non-Christian, since the "spiral" separates the thought of believers from that of unbelievers. With this analysis, this thesis proceeded to compare Baucham's framework with Frame's sketch of Van Tilian "presuppositionalism" and, finally, with the elements of Van Til's own *Credo*, to better ground Baucham's radical biblicism.

Frame and Van Til: Presuppositional, Presuppositionalists

As a student and onetime successor of Cornelius Van Til, John Frame is a leading participant in the debates over presuppositionalism proper, and arguably one of its arbiters. I took note of Frame's disclaimers above. Amid these cautions, Frame avers that presuppositionalism is never defined by Van Til, but its elements are developed by Van Til into a method in which the Bible "has absolute authority (and thus a certain priority) over all human thought."⁶ This method in turn "determines our ultimate criteria of truth and falsity, right and wrong" and forbids apologists to "accept anything as true or right that conflicts with that commitment."⁷ Presuppositionalism, simply put, must "think God's thoughts after him."⁸

Further, while Frame is decidedly ambivalent about Van Til's overall use of antithesis, Frame agrees with the concept's biblical derivation and careful biblical application (e.g., as noted, antithesis proper divides the unregenerate from the regenerate,

⁶ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 135.

⁷ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 136.

⁸ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 135. It is worth noting that when defining "presuppositionalism" for himself, Frame treats it as part and parcel of the doctrine of the knowledge of God: "For a Christian, the content of Scripture must serve as his ultimate presupposition. . . . This doctrine is merely the outworking of the lordship of God in the arena of human thought. It merely applies the doctrine of scriptural infallibility to the realm of knowing." John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (Theology of Lordship)* (Philadelphia: P & R, 1987), 45.

not *necessarily* the erroneous from the correct).⁹ As noted, Frame has opined that where Van Til has not been at his best on antithesis, it is also where he has been least biblically astute.¹⁰ Frame affirms antithesis *per se*. Frame regards Van Til’s presuppositionalism as apologetic thinking in which the Bible as a whole has ultimacy, authority, and “a certain” priority—an ultimacy, authority, and priority that starkly divide its thought from that of the unbeliever.

Turning to Van Til himself, it deserves note that the *Credo* uses the word “presuppositionalist” even less than Voddie Baucham—that is, not at all. In his own manifesto, crafted for the purpose of scholarly public debate at the height of his career, the closest Van Til gets is to describe his method as “argument by presupposition.”¹¹ By this he means, as I summarized per his *Credo*, the entire counsel of the Word of God must be argued, as over against the compromises and partial measures of traditional apologetics. The Bible itself must be argued *as* the uncompromised criteria set for understanding nature, reality, logic, necessity, truth, falsehood, and reason.

In still another striking similarity to Baucham, the *Credo* is absent of the word “antithesis.” However, the *Credo* regards the totality of the Bible as marking the disparity between mere human criteria and content of knowledge, and God’s revealed criteria and content. That disparity cannot be overcome by human standards and thinking.

⁹ Frame asks, “Do Reformed believers really have ‘no fundamentals in common’ with Arminian Christians?” Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 212.

¹⁰ Frame feels free to adopt or reject elements of Van Til’s thought based on his judgment about their “scriptural grounding.” In the conclusion to his *Analysis* of Van Til, Frame includes this confession: “I have concluded that Van Til’s thought is not, after all, a seamless robe. There are some elements of it that are unquestionably biblical and fundamental to Christian thought and life. These constitute an indispensable basis for any future apologetic. Other aspects of Van Til’s system, however, are not well-grounded scripturally and can be forgotten without loss.” Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 398.

¹¹ E. R. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1971), 21.

To return to my own terms in this thesis, Van Til’s central concern is the priority, supremacy, and necessity of the totality of biblical counsel in the defense of the gospel. Any apologetic that is any less dependent on the whole revealed counsel of God, or dependent on it in any piecemeal way, is not properly a defense of the gospel. True apologetics, presuppositional apologetics, is comprehensively, logically, primarily, supremely, and necessarily biblicist.

On the accounting of all three apologists, the defense of the gospel must be specifically biblicist—explicitly, biblically grounded—before, during, throughout, and in concluding the argument. According to this summary, the elements of Baucham, Frame, and Van Til’s presuppositionalism all run parallel. The review now returns to the question at the end of chapter 3: Does the restorationism of Alexander Campbell parallel this practical presuppositionalism? To answer requires a brief exploration of at least one theological-apologetical shift that took place between the time of Campbell and Van Til.

Practical Presuppositionalism: Reformed Theology as Apologetic

As chapters 1 and 4 noted, Cornelius Van Til had laid the groundwork for today’s presuppositionalism before and during a forty-year career at Westminster Theological Seminary. He had undertaken to defend his Reformed faith with an affirmative theological defense he had variously called “the Reformed epistemology” of “regenerate consciousness (1925),”¹² “the biblical method of defending the Christian faith” which he “set forth in positive fashion” (1955),¹³ “the System of Christian Truth,” and “the

¹² Van Til, *Reformed Epistemology*, chap. 9, Kindle.

¹³ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1955), xv.

vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life” (noted later, in a 1976 publication).¹⁴

After Van Til, Greg Bahnsen may be regarded as a primary expositor of presuppositionalism as theology. Bahnsen’s larger work is an analytical anthology of his mentor’s thought (1998).¹⁵ Ten years later, his own distillation of presuppositional apologetics was published in a volume by that name.¹⁶ For Bahnsen, presuppositionalism is biblical theology asserted as apologetics, “exercised upon” the Bible as “infallible,” the “Word of Christ in Scripture,” “the Christian hope and biblical message,” “the truth of Scripture,” “the words of Scripture,” “God’s written revelation,” the “revelational epistemology and scriptural apologetic,” “God’s self-attesting revelation,” “the framework of Christian thought and apologetic,” “God’s special revelation,” “the infallible Word of God,” and various combinations and restatements of the above.¹⁷

According to Bahnsen, presuppositionalism is an affirmative theological, wholly biblical case, not merely a piecemeal, passive defense:

The apologetic task will consist, *not* of *externally verifying* the Christian [=revelational, biblical] presupposition but, of *applying* it by (1) bringing God’s truth and commands to bear upon the lives of unbelievers...pointing out that every fact of the world bears witness to God, and (2) doing an internal critique of the non-Christian’s system, calling down its idols, and pointing out the absolute necessity of Christian presuppositions if logic, factuality, history, science, and morality are to have any meaning at all...Part of the Christian’s reasoned defense of the faith will be an aggressive offense.¹⁸

¹⁴ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd ed., William Edgar, ed. (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 17.

¹⁵ Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998).

¹⁶ Bahnsen, Gregory L. *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*, ed. Joel McDurmon (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press and Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2008).

¹⁷ Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics*, 3-6.

¹⁸ Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics*, 7.

While theological, this affirmative defense is not simply fideist. It uses sanctified, *biblical* reasoning, facts and evidence to subvert the false claims of *unsanctified* reasoning, facts and evidence:

Since this self-attesting Word is what it claims to be, and thus the divinely given standard of truth and knowledge, we must not present the Christian faith as an unreasonable, voluntaristic, fideistic decision of the heart. We definitely have reasons for submitting to Christ—reasons which can be used to appeal to, and argue with, the unbeliever. Judged by this standard, all facts and logic must be used to support the truth of Christianity.¹⁹

Bahnsen's theological apologetic does not, in such terms, challenge the comparison proposed by this thesis. It is the technical philosophical work of a third Van Til expositor that highlights the march of philosophical history between Campbell's soft-rationalist biblicist theology and today's presuppositional theology-as-apologetics. That third interpreter of Van Til is R. J. Rushdoony (1916 – 2001).

Rushdoony's exposition of Van Til's thought was regarded by Van Til himself, as well as by Bahnsen and Frame, as a trustworthy and capable summary of biblical presuppositionalism.²⁰ Mirroring the explicit epistemological focus of Van Til, Rushdoony summarizes presuppositionalism under the title, "The Christian Philosophy of Knowledge." With care and precision, Rushdoony frames Van Til's biblicism as a response to one watershed in philosophy, the thought of Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804).

Presuppositionalism as Post-Kantian: Campbell and Van Til in Their Times

Presuppositionalism's theology-as-apologetic, especially on Rushdoony's account, raises a question for today's students of Campbell. Can a pre-Kantian theology be seen as indicative, even determinative, of an apologetic? In 1906, a professor of

¹⁹ Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics*, 13.

²⁰ R.J. Rushdoony, *By What Standard* (Vallecito, CA: Rush House Books), 1995, Kindle, referenced in Frame, *Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, 391, and Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 3.

apologetics cautioned his contemporary students about critiquing earlier, pre-Kantian reason in apologetics:

When... we read Christian thinkers of the past in their true context—their connexion, that is, with the intellectual conceptions of their own and not of our age—there can be no doubt of the sincerity and earnestness with which they appeal to reason. They assume the rationality of revelation; that nothing revealed can be irrational, and nothing irrational can be revealed; and they make the superior rationality of Christianity a test of its truth as against other religions. But that very rationality gave rise to questions in the course of the last century.²¹

Any dialogue between presuppositionalism and restorationism must be carried out across what might be termed the “Kant barrier” with respect to reason and revelation. So here, Campbell and Van Til are located respectively before and after this shift in apologetics.

Van Til, working after Kant’s “Copernican revolution,”²² had argued for a revelation-based epistemology a century and more after the ministry of Campbell. From that vantage, Kant had answered the problems of rationalism and empiricism by postulating a transcendental moral self.²³ Van Til’s core concession to Kant was that neither the empiricism of Locke and Hume nor the rationalism of Leibniz could sponsor truthful philosophical thought about God; however, Kant’s alternative had done no better, since autonomous man was still the predicate.²⁴ Van Til’s solution was revelational epistemology, with the biblical, triune God as the predicate.

²¹ J. R. Illingworth, *Reason and Revelation: An Essay in Christian Apology* (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1906), 23-24.

²² Samuel Enoch Stumpf and James Feiser, *Philosophy: History and Problems* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 277ff.

²³ See R.J. Rushdoony, *Van Til and the Limits of Reason* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2013), chap. 3, para. 67-68, Kindle. “Kant also assumed . . . a transcendental ego, which is the postulate of all knowledge. . . . Thus, while Kant attacked empiricism and rationalism, his basic attack was on the concept of the ontological trinity, the self-contained God.”

²⁴ Rushdoony, *Van Til and the Limits of Reason*, chap. 3, para 60, Kindle: “As a result of Descartes’ point of departure, two lines of thought developed in philosophy: empiricism and rationalism. Empiricism holds that the individual man is the standard of truth and holds to the ultimacy of the sense world. The universals are purely subjective. The climax of such thought was the skepticism of Hume, for whom no knowledge was possible. Rationalism sought to interpret reality in terms of certain a priori principles . . . in the human mind as ultimate. In Spinoza and Leibniz rationalism reached its climax. . . .

In Campbell's time, the early Enlightenment saw the inductive method of Bacon, the rationalism of DesCartes and the empiricism of Locke combine to challenge dogmatic tradition. Joining a widespread agreement with this soft rationalism (primarily Locke's corner of it), Campbell led a biblical restorationist movement using a "Common Sense hermeneutic" that "promised immunity from the accretions and distortions of ecclesiastical tradition and direct access to the 'plain facts' of the biblical revelation."²⁵ Evidence, rationally argued, was the order of the day. Like Van Til, however, Campbell treated revelation as a first principle.

Campbell: Pre-Kantian Revelation in the Owen Debate

As noted, Richard J. Cherok (2008) showed Campbell as a preeminent and primarily evidentialist defender of Christianity against its skeptics.²⁶ Evidentialism unquestionably pervaded Campbell's thought and his movement. J.W. McGarvey's work (1886), for example, is emblematic of Stone-Campbell approaches to apologetics, authenticating the truth of Christianity by establishing the authenticity and trustworthiness of the biblical documents.²⁷ This accords with the "moderately rationalistic" thoughtworld of Campbell. Demonstrating the historical, literary, and linguistic authenticity of biblical documents was understood to sponsor religious or spiritual trust, for people of "common sense."²⁸

Leibniz sought individuation on the basis of complete description and by reduction to mathematical formulae. Revelation was thus an impossibility."

²⁵ G. Richard Phillips, "Rationalism," in *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant, and D. Newell Williams, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 626.

²⁶ Richard J. Cherok, *Debating for God: Alexander Campbell's Challenge to Skepticism in Antebellum America* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2008).

²⁷ McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1974), 222-223.

²⁸ G. Richard Phillips, "Rationalism," in ESCM, 626.

However, Campbell's resemblance to pre-Kantian rationalists and empiricists has obscured the uniqueness of his argument for the Bible, as a total system of understanding, derivable neither from sense nor from reason but from and by revelation. This totalizing, biblicist argument is apparent even in the most celebrated example of Campbell's public evidentialism, the Owen debate.

While evidentialism was both the substance and flavor of Campbell's most direct public confrontation with radical, unbelieving skepticism, nearly half the debate resembled a pre-Kantian experiment in presuppositionalism. The second half featured evidences: Campbell's six two-hour speeches on the "historic" and "prophetic" "evidences" of Christianity, followed by a comparison of its "genius and tendency" with the proposed social system of his opponent.²⁹ The first half, however, never got around to evidences.

For nearly the first half of the debate's content, Campbell was at pains to defend the "system" of divine revelation, with all its particulars in the Bible, as simultaneously (a) beyond human invention and (b) basic to Christian "fact."³⁰ This days-long tension between arguing for revelation and arguing based on fact pervaded his preliminary argument during the Owen debate. Campbell regularly referenced empiricists Bacon and Locke and Hume to refute Owen's sweeping claim that religion was imaginary, quoting the empiricists to show that "imagination has no creative power,"³¹ that "all our original ideas are the result of sensation and reflection."³² Refusing to allow

²⁹ Richard J. Chero, *Debating for God: Alexander Campbell's Challenge to Skepticism in Antebellum America* (Abilene: Abilene University Press, 2008), 70. See also Owen Debate, 6390, Kindle.

³⁰ Robert Owen, *Debate on the Evidences of Christianity, Held Between R. Owen and A. Campbell*, ed. A. Campbell (Miami: HardPress, 2017), 1-6390, Kindle. It is not until this point that Campbell begins his intended discourse on evidences.

³¹ E.g. Owen *Debate*, 2848, Kindle.

³² Owen, *Debate*, 1173, Kindle.

either an empiricist or a rationalist underpinning for his revelation-based system, Campbell could thus he could argue, against Owen, that “Christianity is what it purports to be—a revelation from God.”³³

This argument about revelation, required by Owen’s repeated assertion that religions are uniformly a project and product of ignorance, was a long, dramatic, preliminary dispute that occupied nearly half the debate’s content. This long pre-debate over religious revelation itself highlights two generally unacknowledged features to Campbell’s thought. Note that both are on display in Campbell’s best-known public debate on “evidences.”

First, Campbell conceives of the faith he is publicly defending as a total, self-referential, self-attesting “system,” which he compares with the flawed systems of both schismatics and skeptics. Second, Campbell defends that system as being predicated on rational, religious ideas whose source is the revelation of God.³⁴ While his apologetic is appropriately rationalist in argument and presentation, its basis is in revelation:

Were I at liberty to choose a method co-extensive with the whole range of scepticism, it would be such as the following: 1. I would propose to present some philosophic arguments demonstrative of the truth of *revealed* religion. 2. I would attempt to illustrate and press upon my opponent the nature and weight of the historic evidence. 3. I would then endeavour to show, from the Christian religion itself, its certain *divine origin*. 4. And, in the last place, I would undertake to prove, from the actual condition of the world, and the prophetic annunciations, the absolute certainty that this religion *came from* the Creator of the world.³⁵

Theology, or Apologetics? Revelation-Based Reason

To recap, in post-Kantian apologetics, presuppositionalism deploys a biblical

³³ Owen *Debate*, 10505, Kindle.

³⁴ The term “system” occurs over three hundred times in the Owen debate, and each time it references the comparison and contrast between Christianity and Robert Owens’ competing set of social reforms based on his twelve laws.

³⁵ Robert Owen, *Debate on the Evidences of Christianity, Held between R. Owen and A. Campbell* [ed. by A. Campbell], 357-362, Kindle.

theology as gospel defense. Should Campbell's affirmative presentation of theology in *The Christian System* be treated like this? It is not always agreed that a theology can serve as an apologetic, a dispute central to the debate about presuppositionalism, which treats Christianity as a body of knowledge (Reformed theology) to be set forth in, and as, apologetics.³⁶ Presuppositionalism's use of biblical doctrine as apologetic philosophy has been challenged directly,³⁷ but it remains a fixture in apologetics. In the post-Kantian era of philosophy, presuppositionalism raised the question of whether, in the wake of radical critiques of human reason, revelation can sponsor an epistemology.

It is only in light of that watershed in apologetics that *The Christian System* takes on importance as apologetics. The *System*, read in light of post-Kantian distinctions, was Campbell's affirmative apologetic targeted what he saw as a gospel defeated by certain persistent, systematic aspects of *human* reasoning. Campbell's solution, already noted in Chapter 3, was direct, simple, and it permeated both his theology and his debates: sound reasoning begins with "the oracles of infallible wisdom."³⁸

As noted, chapter one of the *Christian System* builds on the preface in a very specific respect. God's intent to reveal moral truth made reason necessary, just as sense was necessary in nature:

³⁶ One anthology of apologetics features evidentialist John Warwick Montgomery introducing the history of apologetics. Montgomery treats Van Til as a temporary setback in the development of the field, not a professor of apologetics (as he was), but as a "theologian" whose Calvinistic efforts "blunted" the proper apologetics of the Princeton Reformers. See Sweiss and Meister, eds., *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 25. In contrast, most treatments of apologetics today devote considerable space to presuppositionalism proper.

³⁷ E.g. Craig's assertion that "for all his insights, Van Til was not a philosopher." See Steven B. Cowan, ed. *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 236, Kindle. For another example, note the dispute between Kelly James Clark and John Frame over whether the Bible can serve as an epistemology, esp. 350 and 370.

³⁸ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 2.

One God, one moral system, one Bible...Man belongs to the whole three . . . *sense* is his guide in nature, *faith* in religion, *reason* in both.³⁹

As noted above, Campbell posits “reason in both” nature and religion, but the *Bible over all*. Reason is merely natural reason until it apprehends its divine purpose, revelation.

The Bible is essentially revelation, since God purposed that reason apprehend it. This is an assertion of *biblical* philosophy, not natural philosophy: “

[W]hen God spoke to man in his own language, he spoke as one person converses with another—in the fair, stipulated and well-established meaning of the terms. This is essential to its character, as a revelation from God: *otherwise it would be no revelation*.⁴⁰

Revelation would not be revelation unless reason could apprehend it. Although reason is an unquestioned and ubiquitous utility, it is revelation that requires it:

The words and sentences of the Bible are to be translated, interpreted, and understood. . . . This is essential to its character as revelation.”⁴¹

Reason is philosophically necessary because revelation requires it. Therefore both doctrine and gospel defense require it. The ultimate ground of the apologetic, however, is philosophically biblical. Revelation deploys reason, not the other way around.

Campbell: Defense by Principles

Despite any biblicist, revelational epistemological parallels across Kant between Campbell and Van Til, an ineradicable set of barriers exists between them. Perhaps nothing could be more obvious in this discussion: Alexander Campbell was not a presuppositionalist. Just to write that sentence is a stark reminder that the thoughts of Campbell and Baucham exist in different universes. It is that very distance, however—historical, philosophical, theological—that highlights the parallels in their respective

³⁹ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 2-3.

⁴⁰ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 3, emphasis mine.

⁴¹ Campbell, *The Christian System*, 3.

apologetic thought. It seems remarkable that two apologists across such a divide should both take up radically, biblically theological thought as a basis for what can be known, said, and defended about truth.

Long before Cornelius Van Til defined biblical thought as somehow transcendental, resembling Kant's alternative to the polar errors of rationalism and empiricism,⁴² Campbell had argued that all truly comprehensible truth was revealed. Before the language of presupposition existed, Alexander Campbell labored to rescue the biblical gospel from human compromise by defending it on a set of radically biblical first "principles," accessible to reason only because they had been revealed by God.

This thesis noted Alexander Campbell's singular effort in writing *The Christian System*. At the height of his publishing career, he stepped back from theological polemics and set forth a defense of "the original gospel."⁴³ This defense depended upon the strict application of a set of "principles" he and his cohorts had spent years developing and practicing, by which the church's failed efforts could be redeemed from failed adherence to human knowledge and opinion: "all that we believe, or all that we know," "all creeds, commandments, traditions, and opinions of men."⁴⁴

The first "principles" upon which Campbell's affirmative apologetic depended were in fact the epistemic priority, primacy, and supremacy of the whole Bible over any alternative formulations of knowledge. He believed the defense of the gospel required a "thus saith the Lord, either in express terms or approved precedent, for every article of

⁴² This paraphrase represents Frame's brief summary of the origin of Van Til's "transcendental argument" idea. See Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 134-35.

⁴³ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System, in Reference to the Union of Christians: And a Restoration of Primitive Christianity, as Pled in the Current Reformation* (Bethany, VA: A. Campbell, 1840), xii.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *Christian System*, 11, xii, xv; xviii, xii.

faith and every item of religious practice.”⁴⁵

While the immediate impact of this biblicism was still polemic—his immediate targets were articles of faith and religious practice—yet his end goal was that “the gospel and its ordinances . . . be restored in all their primitive simplicity, excellency, and power, and the church itself shine . . . to the conviction and salvation of the world.”⁴⁶ “Restored” meant *gospel* success. Campbell’s “thus saith the Lord” principle was derived, developed, and maintained precisely for the defense of the gospel before the world.

As the key to the defense of the gospel, biblicism was necessarily the framework of accurate knowledge and sound reason. In Campbell’s *System*, as noted, the basis for all knowledge, in all of nature, of any value or import to humankind, could only be found among those “thus saiths.” Campbell described the Bible as the total and comprehensive test of all knowledge in the universe. No skeptic could pronounce unless and until he had taken full account of “the oracles of infallible wisdom or the inspirations of the Almighty.”⁴⁷

Campbell did not hesitate to refer to this framework as something revealed. The acceptance of these “thus saiths” was, precisely, the acceptance of revelation. Revelation was factual, God’s own ideas framed in God’s own words, so that human minds could accept them as “fact.” All biblical knowledge was “fact,” terrible, awful, supreme, divine, but nonetheless “fact.”⁴⁸ No item merely of human knowledge meets this test, nor does it serve as criterion. When rightly understood, revelation is the reasoning of God.

⁴⁵ Campbell, *Christian System*, 11.

⁴⁶ Campbell, *Christian System*, xii.

⁴⁷ Campbell, *Christian System*, 2.

⁴⁸ Campbell, *Christian System*, 6.

Nor is “fact” accessible as such to the infidel. The believer and unbeliever are separated by their willingness or unwillingness to accept this level of fact. Believing for salvation is passing this zone of separation into “the understanding distance”—a crossing no hardened, wavering, or backward-looking inquirer may cross.⁴⁹ Evidence of humility is required, evidence that amounts, practically, to evidence of regeneration. Campbell described belief of facts as available only to those who could “approach this [biblical] volume with the humility and docility of a child.”⁵⁰

That humility, then, was part and parcel of the belief in biblical “facts,” “truth,” and “testimony” that could lead to “that faith in Christ which is essential to salvation . . . not the belief of any doctrine . . . abstractly, but belief *in* Christ; trust or confidence in Him as a person.”⁵¹ The person who crossed this “understanding distance” would be the believer unto salvation. No one who did not cross that distance could become a believer.

To summarize so far, whether the immediate arena is the church or the world, it is the totality of the Bible that contains facts. A spiritual distance must be crossed for the understanding of those facts. Saving faith includes the proper acceptance of those facts. These biblicist principles are the framework and fabric of the gospel, and are necessary to its defense. So, Campbell’s dedication to argument by “express terms or approved precedent” from the Bible itself was an apologetic, not solely a theological commitment. His biblicism was no addendum to his gospel, no *didache* to his *kerygma*. “These principles . . . together constitute the original gospel.”⁵²

To return to the terms I have used, Campbell’s first “principles” call for an apologetic (a polemic first, but both directly and by extension an apologetic) that is

⁴⁹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 5-6.

⁵⁰ Campbell, *Christian System*, 5-6.

⁵¹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 6, 38.

⁵² Campbell, *Christian System*, xii.

radically biblicist. The logic of that apologetic requires acceptance of the totality of biblical thought and knowledge as prior, supreme, and necessary. Campbell's *System* sets forth that logic at the apologetic's onset and throughout the its progression.

Summarizing the Van Tilian Critique of Campbell

The insights of practical, presuppositional apologetics raise the question of whether Campbell deserves to be the target of Van Til's concerns. This thesis took up the *Credo* as a working centerpiece of the presuppositional critique of reason. Neither Baucham nor Frame critiqued reason as specifically as did Van Til; Frame took great care with Van Til's trenchant opposition to mere reason, handling Van Til's "extreme formulations" with as much reserve as zeal, as much caution as commitment. So, it is in the *Credo* one sees not only Van Til's central concern to fully subordinate human reason in the defense of the gospel, but just how far Van Til proposed to take this subordination. Thus, the *Credo* offers a point of contact for Campbell's use of reason. There are at least three careful points to be made.

First, Campbell appears to use reason in a way critiqued by the *Credo*. The *Credo*'s critique of reason applies to Campbell's apparent embrace of logic and reason in his style and content. For Van Til, the failure of traditional apologetics is the failure of human reason. In the *Credo*, for example, the Pharisees are exemplars of human reason; human thought is Pharasaic hypocrisy disguised as rationality. Such rationality is *never* humble seeking of the Savior. In Van Til's biblical examples throughout the *Credo*, reason is presented as categorically unregenerate. Not so in the *System*—Campbell's exegesis was deductive in format and style. Campbell's arguments formally accepted reason, used logic, and appealed to fact and evidence. As a traditional apologist in these respects, Campbell is thus open to critique from the *Credo*, which only directly addresses reason as unregenerate by definition.

Second, and in contrast, Campbell fails to fully fit the critique. Campbell never defended the free-standing, autonomous reason the *Credo* rejects. In the *System*, reason was defined—biblically, in Campbell’s view—as the functional medium, atmosphere, and arena for moral *and* material function, accessible by both a holy God and fallen, sinful man. God accessed it rightly; apart from God’s own revealed ideas, man never accessed it rightly. Campbell regarded human beings as inhabiting three overlapping arenas: material, intellectual, and spiritual, for which “sense is his guide in nature [material], faith his guide in religion [moral], and reason his guide in both [intellectual].”⁵³ That phrase “reason his guide in both” alerts the reader that Campbell was appealing to his common sense realism, described at length by Razor.⁵⁴ Discussion in the *System* assumed that reason is the way humans think, inquire, answer, and decide, whether poorly or well.

Thus, Campbell was not a philosophical rationalist somehow committed to the infallibility of human reason, as his critics have sometimes allowed him to be portrayed. His entire account of reason as usable by man depended upon the prior and total acceptance of *God’s* reason. Campbell regarded God’s Word as infallible, and only God’s Word. In Campbell’s functional anthropology, a man could be guided only erroneously by “sense” and “reason” in nature. Without total biblical “faith” as a guide in the essential moral universe, that man’s reasoning was fatally flawed. This observation leads to the final careful point to be made about Van Til’s challenge to Campbell.

Third, Campbell makes use of reason, but so does Van Til. Van Til also uses reason as a utility. This is easy to overlook because Van Til does not explicitly suspect or critique his own use of reason.⁵⁵ Van Til appears to assume his reasoning is sanctified

⁵³ Campbell, *Christian System*, 3.

⁵⁴ See Peter Jay Razor, “The Influence of Scottish Common-Sense Realism on Alexander Campbell’s View of the Nature of Scripture and Hermeneutics” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013).

⁵⁵ While Van Til does not critique his own use of reason, Campbell does so for himself.

and proceeds to demonstrate it, calling specifically for “argument by presupposition.” For Van Til, then, presuppositionalism *is* sanctified apologetic reasoning, but it is reasoning. Frame appears to recognize this point. Frame had been careful to remind that Van Til is not a reason-rejecting “apriorist” since Van Til believed in the importance of “empirical, factual study.”⁵⁶

Thus, Van Til wanted to correct faulty apologetic reasoning with sanctified apologetic reasoning—his own. This correction meant replacing *illusory* common ground with actual biblical common ground; replacing appeals to autonomous, rational man with appeals to *fallen* man; replacing mere debate with the assertion of biblically-defined sin, judgment, regeneration, and salvation. In short, Van Til called for better reasoning, *sanctified* reasoning, which for him meant reasoning biblically in the fullest sense, as the framework and fabric of sound apologetics.

If the three points are admitted, then it seems the restorationist and the presuppositionalist followed some crucial common patterns. Both assumed reason and critiqued it. Both rejected the reasoning of fallen man. Both expected to use, and to call for in others, fully regenerate reasoning in apologetics. Both defined fully regenerate reasoning as radically biblicist. Both conceived of their biblicist reasoning as an indivisible system. Both used reason as a utility. The principal difference between them is the extent to which reason was formally regarded as a negative theological category.

In light of this difference, a few specific parallels emerge:

Campbell requires absolute intellectual modesty: “How gracefully, then, sits unassuming modesty on all the reasonings of man! The true philosopher and the true Christian, therefore, delight always to appear in the unaffected costume of humility, candor, and docility.” Campbell, *Christian System*, 2. His own knowledge was subject to this modesty: “None of us . . . was then aware of what havoc that said principle, if faithfully applied, would make of our own views and practices.” Campbell, *Christian System*, 11. “We would, if we could . . . proclaim all that we know, and all that we believe . . . [instead] *we take the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible.*” Campbell, *Christian System*, xviii, emphasis original.

⁵⁶ Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 134-35.

1. Van Til targeted traditional apologetics compromised by human *reason*; Campbell targeted professions of the gospel compromised by human *opinion*.
2. Van Til called for argument by and for biblical *presuppositions*; Campbell called for contending with and for biblical *cardinal principles*.
3. Van Til was later noted for his use of a version of a *transcendental* argument; Campbell was later noted for his use of a *revealed-idea* argument.⁵⁷
4. Van Til's presuppositionalism recognizes the wholesale challenge of a "*vast gulf*" (for Baucham, a "*spiral*") between believer and unbeliever; Campbell's cardinal principles recognize the wholesale challenge of an "*encircling distance*" between believer and unbeliever.
5. Van Til's argument wins when the Holy Spirit "*open[s] eyes*" with an "inescapably clear" "message and evidence";⁵⁸ Campbell's argument wins when the "Voice of God is distinctly understood"⁵⁹ with a "*single eye*" for the "meaning of Bible facts . . . the true Biblical doctrine."⁶⁰
6. Van Til calls for actual biblical *common ground*, using his own reason as an assumed utility; Campbell calls for common acceptance of God's revealed ideas, specifying his use of reason as a utility.
7. Van Til maintains a stark recognition of *antithesis* mere human reasoning cannot overcome; Campbell recognizes a wide "*understanding distance*" mere opinion cannot cross.

Synthesis

A close look at the shared practical presuppositionalism of Baucham, Frame, and Van Til shows radical, totalizing, biblicist elements. Fields of knowledge assembled by fallen humanity, apart from the thought-world of the Bible, will always be deeply and fatally flawed. When those fields of knowledge offer standards and criteria, those standards and criteria must fail when used as a basis for apologetics. This failure is necessary because a perpetual, functional antithesis exists between the thought-world of the believer and that of the unbeliever. The antithesis, however it is conceived ("gulf" or "spiral"), must

⁵⁷ Cf. J. Caleb Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 149-50.

⁵⁸ Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 21.

⁵⁹ Campbell, *Christian System*, 5-6.

⁶⁰ Campbell, *Christian System*, 5.

be confronted, at whatever point of contact the situation demands, with the totality of biblical gospel. Apologetics must defend the gospel amid the entirety of its place in the biblical thought-world, specifically by thinking God's thoughts after Him.

The affirmative apologetic of Alexander Campbell in the *Christian System* requires similar, radical, totalizing, biblicist assumptions and method. Human knowledge is fatally flawed and incomplete without biblical faith to undergird and inform reason. No partial knowledge from nature can be used to pronounce upon God's total knowledge represented in revelation. Further, a distance of understanding separates those who stand outside revelation from those who stand upon it; a distance no hardened skeptic may cross. That distance must be confronted with the biblical gospel in full biblical context. Apologetics must contend for the biblical gospel, using cardinal biblical principles, requiring an express biblical command or an explicitly approved biblical precedent for the underlying argument.

In both apologetic systems, biblical thought is assumed as logically prior; biblical thought is asserted and maintained as authoritative; biblical thought is actively deployed as logically effective and necessary, at the beginning, middle, and end of the argument; and biblical thought is totalizing, requiring that Christianity answer the whole of unregenerate, fallen thought with the whole of the biblical gospel. Neither system is content with compromise, either by subjecting biblical truth to flawed criteria of fallen man or by defending wholesale attacks in a piecemeal fashion.

On this account, the *presuppositions* of Baucham and the *cardinal principles* of Campbell share significant territory. Such territory in turn suggests common ground for Reformed and Restorationist evangelicals in the arena of practical, presuppositional apologetics. That common ground may prove fertile for more study. In the meantime, that shared territory affords Campbell a sound critique from Baucham, Frame, and Van Til.

Critique

To engage Baucham's expository apologetics, Campbellites ought to, at least provisionally, embrace Van Til's critique of all prior apologetic systems. Such consideration means acknowledging a greater danger in the use of mere reason than Campbell, in his place and time, was prepared to acknowledge or recognize. As noted, Campbell assumed a role for "reason in both" natural and moral universes. This is acceptable on one level since reason is a utility in all apologetics, but not all apologetics qualify the use of reason with sufficient care. Correcting this oversight is a singular contribution of practical presuppositionalism.

Because Campbell did not specifically recognize a believer-unbeliever antithesis, an antithesis *with respect to reason itself*, he was prone to the error practical presuppositionalism would later highlight. Traditional apologetics relies too directly on reason alone. Such reliance cedes too much ground to the unbeliever. Believers and unbelievers do not reason in the same way, or toward the same ends. While Campbell appeared unaware of this danger—an innocence he may have shared with his generation—the harsh, argumentative, sometimes divisive polemics adopted by some of Campbell's heirs suggest that this very danger became manifest. Practical presuppositionalism exists to sound the alarm.

If reason is dangerous, then practical presuppositionalism prompts questions for the heirs of Alexander Campbell. Can one merely reason with an unbeliever, even if the reasoning is God's? Can "facts" convert, even if they are "Bible" facts—even "gospel" facts? Can a hardened skeptic be led to faith primarily through argument, even if the arguments are fully biblical and, thus, treated as God's arguments? The final chapter offers a provisional answer to these questions.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Any firm conclusion on the topics this thesis has taken up requires a scaffolding of disclaimers. In short, none of these four apologetics are the same. A solid comparison between restorationist and reformed biblicist apologetics depends on a working awareness of the differences between the four Christian apologists under study.

First, Alexander Campbell's thought cannot be equated with formal or practical presuppositionalism. As noted, theology proper divides Campbell from all Reformed doctrine. Campbell is known in his own movement and outside it as a doctrinal polemicist, dissenting in particular from certain distinctives of Reformed theology. Further, in contrast to today's presuppositionalism, Campbell's argumentation was strongly evidentialist. Finally, even as Campbell offered the beginnings of a "revealed-idea" argument for the existence of God, such elements never directly approached a transcendental argument, comparable to something properly presuppositionalist.

Second, presuppositionalism itself is complex. Even within the narrow scope chosen by the topic "expository apologetics," presuppositional elements used by the three Reformed apologists can only be compared, not equated. For example, while Baucham is an advocate and popularizer of some elements of presuppositionalism, it is not clear to what extent these elements formally constitute presuppositionalism as described by either Frame or Van Til. Frame himself is neither a full "movement" Van Tilian, nor is he in full agreement with Van Til's own body of work, as noted. Most important, Van Til's teachings themselves are extensive and complex. The long career of Cornelius Van Til cannot be adequately represented in a thesis of this scope, though introductory conclusions may be drawn from representative material like his *Credo*.

Stipulations like these are required so that the qualified comparisons available may offer accurate insights. Simplistic one-to-one equations present pitfalls that today's biblicist apologists must avoid. Accordingly, this thesis should not be read as an attempt to make Alexander Campbell a Reformed theologian, nor Baucham a formal presuppositionalist, nor Frame a pure Van Tilian. While all three practical presuppositional thinkers represent Reformed thought, none is a restorationist like Campbell.¹ All four men come from different times and places, with different animating projects.

The recognition of these distinctions and of the qualifications they require allow the proper parallels to emerge. While one danger is conflating these parallels, another danger is opposing them. The task of apologetics is both important and urgent to all "families" in Christ's church. Close affinities between apologetics "families" within that church ought not to be dismissed or rejected. The long debate over the exact boundaries of Van Til's apologetic led John Frame to offer a challenge that is worth quoting here.

I believe, therefore, that we can learn much that is good and valuable from Van Til without being slavish devotees. It is not necessary for the Van Tilian movement to maintain a movement mentality. Nor is it necessary to stand in stark antithesis against all our fellow Christians who have thus far not joined that movement. . . . Van Til has taught us that every fact of history testifies to the reality of the biblical God. But he has only begun to show us how this takes place. Our task is to further implement this vision, by showing how the presuppositions of Scripture reveal everything for what it truly is in relation to God. . . . My critical account of Van Til allows us to take a somewhat less apocalyptic view of methodological differences among apologists, so that we can indeed concentrate on fulfilling the Great Commission.²

Once such disclaimers are honored, and Frame's vision of Van Tilian apologetics is kept in view, some license may be taken to synthesize comparable biblicist

¹ As noted, Campbell preferred "Reformation" over "Restoration" when describing the movement he led. While both terms are in evidence among Campbellites today, the latter name took hold. See Robert O. Fife, "'Restoration,' Meanings of within the Movement," in *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 638.

² John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995), 400.

elements shared by the four apologists and their two sets of approaches. This thesis views them all as innovating along a similar trajectory. Specifically, the following points of comparison were developed from the preceding chapters:

1. All four apologists insisted upon a biblicist, systematic apologetic, taking the totality of biblical revelation as logically prior and logically supreme.
2. All four apologists agreed on the importance of using reason, evidence, and arguments as methodology in bringing this total, biblicist apologetic to bear.
3. All four apologists shared the goal of subverting or supplanting any and all alternative, man-made systems with this total, biblicist apologetic.
4. All four apologists expected to deploy this apologetic in the framing, method, and conclusion of their arguments.
5. All four apologists took up the challenge posed by the unregenerate heart, conceived that challenge in some metaphorical way, and required the apologetic to face it squarely on total, biblical terms.
6. The three practical presuppositional apologists dealt more or less directly with the danger reason itself poses to the defense of the gospel, while Campbell did not.

I proposed an evangelical, presuppositional, apologetics-based comparison of Campbell with Baucham and Van Til in hopes of critiquing Campbell's defense of the "original gospel." The subsequent argument pointed to at least five points of substantive agreement on practical presuppositionalism, with one significant disagreement in the area of antithesis. Campbellites are thus offered a field of contact with other evangelicals—practical, presuppositionalist reasoning—and a specific point of critique: the antithesis between believing and unbelieving thought.

The similarities are encouraging. Key elements of practical, presuppositional Reformed apologetics deeply parallel key elements of principled Restorationist apologetics. Two distinct evangelical apologetics systems share a commitment to prior, preeminent, and total biblical thought in the defense of the gospel. In apologetics, at least, *sola Scriptura* appears to have borne fraternal twin brothers: same parents, shared DNA, and historically separate, nonetheless, siblings. This family relationship is worth recognizing,

honoring, and developing, not least because of the insight one brother may offer the other in the use of biblical framework and thought in defense of the gospel.

The contrast between the systems is also encouraging, however. The difference between the two biblicist apologetics systems points to the transcendence of the biblical gospel both systems defend. Campbell's heirs can appreciate how the uniqueness, authority, and comprehensiveness of the gospel forbid either Baucham, Frame, or Van Til from any *formal* acceptance of reason, even as a utility. The practical presuppositionalists studied here used reason with registered caution and without formally honoring it as a category. Like theirs, any fully biblicist apologetic must specifically account for its use of reason, especially in light of the fallen, sinful nature of independent human knowledge.

The common ground requires the critique. While presuppositionalists can admit that the willingness to use reason is something they share with Campbellite restorationists, they do not recognize reason as a positive category in apologetics. Campbell did, and his heirs do. Campbell explicitly and formally accepted reason as a utility, common to both a holy God and sinful, unredeemed man. A practical presuppositionalist, therefore, must brace an heir of Alexander Campbell with questions like those asked in the conclusion of the previous chapter. Can a believer merely reason with an unbeliever, even if the reasoning is God's? Can "Bible facts" convert? Can a hardened skeptic be led to faith primarily through fully biblical arguments, on the theory that the arguments are God's ideas?

This thesis is poised to conclude, with Van Til and likely with Frame and Baucham, that the short answer is "no." Campbellites need to hear and consider this answer. To expect God's reasoning in the Bible, *as reasoning*, to overcome unbelief *as reasoning*, is to fail to defend the biblical gospel. The gospel must ultimately be defended, not simply by reasons, or in part, but by the gospel itself, in its full biblical context. To directly conflate reasoning, in any sense, with biblical thought is to fall under the soundly biblical critique of practical, presuppositional apologetics.

Can Campbellites, then, do “expository apologetics?” Can Christian Churches and Churches of Christ bring their evangelical identities and commitments to the defense of the gospel and participate in practical, presuppositional apologetics? Yes, so long as they recognize antithesis in the category of reason. Biblicist apologetics recognizes a fundamental divide between belief and unbelief that not even God’s reasoning, as reasoning, can overcome. Though God, believers, and unbelievers all employ the tools of reason, unbelievers do so falsely, and believers still do it erroneously. As a backstop against these liabilities, biblicist apologetics must handle the gospel as ultimately transcending reason. In such biblicist gospel defense, the power of the gospel is not in its reasoning, but in its assertion, often in defiance of reason.

Campbell’s heirs should take note, and be warned of the dangers of adopting unbiblical or antibiblical presuppositions buried in the formal acceptance and use of human reason. Antithesis exists, and it makes reason less a door to be passed than a barrier to be broken. Though there are elements of explanation and persuasion in the gospel, the essence of the gospel is assertion, not explanation; proclamation, not persuasion. Such is the core critique expository apologetics offers Alexander Campbell.

APPENDIX A
STUDY PARTICIPANT COVER LETTER

Jason M. Murray
30 Harrodsburg Rd
Mackville, KY 40040
January 21, 2019

To: The Eldershops, Willisburg / Mackville Christian Church

Attn: Chairman

Dear Brothers,

You are receiving this letter because of a study I'm planning as part of my schoolwork at Southern Seminary. As the chairman has already let you know, I am interested in gathering, organizing and analyzing the thoughts of a solid, biblical eldership with regard to a single verse in the New Testament, I Peter 3:15.

That verse instructs Christians to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have" (NIV). Additionally, the "answer" we are to give has the character of a "defense" (ESV).

I have asked the chairman for the opportunity to sit down with you and interview you as a group about this verse, and specifically about the topic of making a "defense" of the faith. It is important to me as a student as well as a preacher to discover your thoughts, perspectives, attitudes, and approaches to this topic. This will be turned in as part of my coursework for the doctor of educational ministry degree at SBTS.

For an hour of your time, I will ask opening questions on this topic, listen to your answers, and ask follow-up questions designed to help me further understand. With your permission, I will temporarily make a primary and backup audio recording of the meeting so that I can transcribe the conversation, at which point the recordings will be destroyed. No names will be recorded: you will remain anonymous in both the recording and the transcription.

As a followup, I will ask for as many of you as are willing to volunteer for one further interview one on one, for the purpose of adding individual depth and perspective to the

report. Just as in the group meeting, no names will be recorded in the interview or its report.

The results will be available to you as soon as the study is finalized.

Thank you one and all for your kind willingness to assist me in this work!

Yours in the Gospel,

Brother Jason Murray

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol Project: Defense of the Gospel in Christian Churches

Dates and times of interviews

Sunday, January 27, 2019, 4:30 p.m. (Willisburg Christian Church)

Thursday, January 31, 2019, 7:00 p.m. (Mackville Christian Church)

Place: Willisburg and Mackville Christian Churches

Interviewer: Jason Murray

Interviewees: Willisburg Christian Church Eldership (Six Elders), Mackville Christian Church Eldership (Two Elders)

Position of Interviewee: congregational elder

This is a case study for the purpose of discovering, organizing, analyzing, and reporting the initial thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and approaches of Christian Church elders about being “prepared to give a defense/answer” and a “reason” for the Christian hope.

Primary questions:

1. What are the top ten questions, objections, or issues from non-Christians that you would say require a Christian to be ready to answer? Some possible prompts as needed—interviewer may elaborate with examples from personal experience
 - a. From skeptical individuals
 - b. From sympathetic or “seeking” individuals
 - c. From hostile individuals
 - d. From hurting or grieving individuals
 - e. From the marketplace
 - f. From the media
 - g. From academia
 - h. From society
 - i. From government
2. For each, how are you, yourself, inclined to answer?
3. How do you believe the preaching of the gospel should answer?
4. How do you believe the teaching of sound doctrine should answer?

[Interviewer will return to prior questions or advance to further ones as needed.]

Probing questions:

1. For each objection, are you more inclined to use one or the other of (a) a directly biblical argument or (b) a common sense argument?
2. If so, why would you choose this for certain cases?
3. If so, how would you do this?
4. What other points should be made in this discussion?
5. What questions would you ask if you were interviewing on this topic?

Thank you for your participation! Your answers will be kept anonymous and your individual identity kept confidential.

APPENDIX C

WILLISBURG INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Length: 1 hour 7 minutes

Legend:

I=Interviewer

E=Eldership anonymous representative, same elder representative speaking again

E', E'' =next Eldership representative speaking as differentiated from immediately prior speaker
(This is a 'floating' taxonomy that resets third elder no matter which elder is speaking.)

Bold font: objection or defense

Highlight: **Reformed**

Fideist

Evidentialist

Classical

Brackets: { } = revelation

() = experience

[] = reason

I: So just to reiterate, I do I have you fellows' permission to record this meeting, you guys? Thank you very much. All right. Well, really, this is very simple. The purpose of my project is to make a discovery and write up the description of how the gospel is defended by a group of elders in the Christian churches. The verse I had you read is where Peter reminds Christians to "always be ready to give an answer to those that ask you to give a reason for the hope that is within you." And I might have mashed up a couple of versions in there. NIV and ESV.

I: That word when he says "give an answer" is the word for which we get our English word "apology." It's the Greek word "apologia," which was where we get "apologetics." Apologetics is my subject. What I'm interested in, is this verse assumes that the gospel will come under attack. And really, it's asking Christians to be ready to answer those attacks. That doesn't mean you have to answer them in a pugnacious way, in a you know, in a combative way, but it does mean to be ready to answer. Be ready to defend.

I: So I've got a couple of questions that I can, I can unpack that. But really, my main primary question is, what would you guys if you just start talking about it, if you start with what you think is the top objection or issue that people bring against the gospel to sort of attack it? And then how would you how do you, or how have you, or how would you answer that, that specific attack? So I'd like to hear each one of you guys speak to that. And you can start small and popcorn and around the room and then get bigger and bigger. But what I'd like to see is just a discussion about this.

I: And from my vantage point, we live in an age now where any elder who teaches, any elder who preaches, when you're talking to someone in my generation or younger, the gospel has already been under attack in their mind, it's been under attack on in the media and under attack somewhere in the schools, somewhere in life, they have already learned that they shouldn't believe Christianity because X, Y or Z. So to me this question is, its basic, and that doesn't mean I expect everybody to have done research on it. But I'm very interested in what you also initial thoughts are, and then as you unpack it. So let me just start with how what do you think the top 10 objections are? And how would you or have you? Or do you prefer to answer those, and then you can work that into how do you think preaching of the gospel should answer? How do you think teaching a sound doctrine should answer?

I: And then once we get into that, the only probing question I'll ask is, I'm very interested in whether you're more inclined to use common sense truth to defend the gospel or whether you're inclined to specifically make biblical arguments. And both of those can be found in the Bible. Both of those are biblical approaches by my lights. But I mean, I'd like to find out what you all think on that. And so however, you want to go around.

E: I've got some thoughts to start with, and, and you just kind of reiterate some of the you said, when we do make give a reason for our hope, even the last part of that that Scripture says, always be ready to give an answer, but (**do this with gentleness and respect. So I think that's utmost**) and whatever. And however, we respond, I guess the two things that come to mind and you said maybe the top 10 questions, but two things that come to my mind are that I've heard in conversation is number one, that the **Bible is ancient history. It was written so many years ago. It's not applicable today.** So no matter what the Gospel says, it's an old book that is nice to read, nice stories, and it's not applicable today. The other thing, **it's not culturally relevant to what our culture says is what's right** and, to use a worn out term, it's not politically correct. Of course, in no way do I believe that. We aren't trying to defend the political correctness or whether or not it's culturally relevant, because **if we do that, then the gospel will continually change.** And in the Gospel, the Bible was written, for our edification and to give us a guideline to live by. And if those rules continually change, then what is truth? Then there is no absolute truth. And I believe those { **absolute truths that are in the Bible that we must follow if we have the hope of eternal life, then, they're just absolutely true. That's where we have to be as Christians, that we have to believe and uphold those absolute truths** } or our (**faith is not only weak, it's useless.**) So maybe that'll start the conversation of just how I feel about what are the arguments that the gospel, that the Bible, it's not relevant.

E': I would like to add to that another argument, if you will, and they will elaborate as time permits. I have a little story I'll share with you later on. And again, if time permits me about 30 years ago, I guess I was, you know, young whippersnapper, if you will, and I had an acquaintance, a couple of acquaintances, and one was a Christian young man, and the other was a professed atheist. And my Christian friend and I we were probably above average in our knowledge of the Scripture. We were raised in Christian homes and attended church. But the atheist, professed atheist, he was a bright intelligent young man. He is a chemist, I mean very bright and intelligent; and he knew the scripture, just chose not to believe; and his argument was **the scriptures weren't authentic because they were not documented.** Now at the time I didn't realize what he was trying to say, and I now understand where he was coming from so our approach and talking with him (and again I'll share later just kind of throwing out fuel for our conversation) we just tried to (**non-combatively combat his argument**) if you will, and but I thought that was an interesting approach from his viewpoint.

I: Yes, very much so.

E'': So it seems to me that in our time, especially in the last decade or so, a new thing has arisen, that if scripture was true, **if you were right, then you would be all inclusive of whatever people think and however they believe; and that, to me is in the face of Christianity everywhere.** If you really talking about loving and merciful God I mean, you've gotta be mistaken, because otherwise, **why would you teach against the way I live?** So like Christianity. Like John said, **we're pressed not to have a true real truth,** you know.

E: Or **why does that loving and merciful God allow some of these things to happen to me?**

I: Yes.

E: Yet another thing that might be adding fuel to the fire of making it more difficult to maybe help talk to others about it, because of the fact that even we have some, you know, **some denominations that are accepting in to their congregation as leaders and preachers and everything, those that the Word**

actually speaks about is now being sinful, and, and that they will not enter heaven and the condition that they're in. So when you've got, religious denominations accepting those in, then how, how do you go back and talk against it? And in some cases, **some denominations are placing folks in the pulpit that live lifestyles that explicitly are forbidden in Scripture.**

E': And goes farther than just embracing it.

E: Right.

E'': Yeah, I think I come to the point where people want to make the script for their ideas and their way of living in that way. You don't have to change, you can just, you can do whatever you want to. And the culture will accept that, we all know that. I mean, in our short lifetime it's changed, but { **this [points to a Bible] hasn't changed.** } is not going to, and so you know, if I would I am to give a reason about hope for someone or, or even a witness, basically the same thing, **I gotta go back to this. This right here.** }

I: Yeah, back to the Scripture.

E'': { **Right, this is our textbook right here. This is everything we need to know, about God, Jesus Christ, salvation, and how to live our Christian lives, is right here in this book. But this is not going to change.** } We can, we can twist it around and spin it around. But that's not going to change this. And one Scripture I go to is right here, is II Timothy 3:16, where it says "All scripture is God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

I: That's pretty clear.

E'': But you can say you don't believe that, for several different reasons but { **this doesn't change.** }

E: I witnessed to people before, and working on trying to get them come to church with me, and tell me which picture, and I've been told. And it almost knocked me off my feet, but I was told that they believe in a powerful being, but **they don't believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. They just think he was, he was a prophet or leader** and course I went a step farther, I said, what we believe in this. { **This is where we get our faith.** } We want to be we want to see **Jesus Christ. And that's what we live for.**

I: **You're pointing to God's word.**

E: **Yes, we believe everything is in here. And we are warned against adding anything, or taking anything away from it. This is God-breathed.** } And I want to know some more maybe we'll get into later, (*but John, James, and Peter, they were eyewitness to Jesus Christ, like who was with him at the Transfiguration when they wrote this, and they was with the man,*) and we believe this, so how can we not believe the Scriptures. A and trying to get someone else to believe this is the hard part. I mean, you've heard issues around the table. And I gave a big one.

E': I've also heard some that will say that, that the gospels, you know, **the five accounts don't align**. But I think was debate and have a conversation the other night we were talking about, I don't remember what subject, but the alignment of the Gospels, and (*if all of us in this room went out and witness in event that we would write it from our own perspective...*) My background is, has been in government, in agriculture. And so I would probably see things from a completely different perspective than Jason say, you because you've been trained in the ministry, you would, so you would see it differently. And you would write from a different viewpoint. And so I've heard that argument many times. That, you know, the Gospels don't align, they don't, they should all fall and tell the same story time exactly alike. And to me, that's ludicrous because you would not get five people together, that saw the same event that are going to write it exactly the same. So that's another argument that I've heard that I felt like it has to be defended. I think that was easily defensible.

E: [Names an elder], but the core of what you're thinking of is a sight they saw, they read today, and they really they read it would read it from different perspectives than someone but the **{ core is always that Jesus is God. }**

E'': Jason, I know we're kind of bouncing around by the way.

I: Y'all are doing great. If you can just keep this ball rolling, that's perfect. (Laughter)

E: Well, I'll just say, you know, to me and I have been accused, to be honest with you, of thinking rather simplistically at times, my wife and as well as others. But anyway, in defense of the gospel, based on the verse we've been given to look at, everything begins with that first sentence, in my mind: "but in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord." Okay. And then to go a step further. (**It's really those words, four words, but in your hearts.**) Accepting Christ as your Savior, and deciding to live for Him as best you can, is a personal decision, whether or not you've discovered Christ through self-revelation, or whether a man of God has led you to Christ, (**it's still your decision.**) No one can bring you to the Lord. You have to choose to accept Christ. { **And when you do you choose whether or not to believe everything that comes along with Christ.** } Okay, yeah, it would be really easy for us if everything in here was cut and dry, and everything aligned perfectly. Man, it could be simple to explain.

I: Some topical tabs in the Bible, you know, maybe an organizational format, right?

E: (**But if everything lined up perfectly for us, then would we demonstrate the faith that we're called to have?**) [Amens all around] I don't think so.

I: That's a very important point. If you don't mind fellows, let me interject in here. This brings up from an apologetics standpoint, the guys that write about it, this brings up the issue of what role do people's concept play in their believing attacks on the Bible instead of the Bible, versus what role does their heart play? Their concepts versus their heart? There're really, you could almost say, there are two camps. One says, You've got to focus on the concepts and fix the concepts to pave the way for their heart to decide. The other says, You've got to win their heart. And they will then, you know, like the train cars of a train, the concepts will follow. From my vantage point, and I've only been doing, you know, my role in this about 30 years. But I've seen both, and I've seen combinations of both, and I've seen it switch back and forth in the same individual, as far as do they need their concepts dealt with? Or do they have some heart issue that is more, let's say, maybe more emotional? Example. My brother is an atheist. He has come to that in his, you know, in his maybe early middle years, even though he was immersed into Christ as a young man. Well, if you ask him, he's upset at God, he's mad at God. All these things have happened, all these things aren't going right. And I mean, they have been terrible, no doubt about it. But he's throwing out what he's learned based on all these concepts, that to him refute the Bible, but as his brother, I know that the concepts aren't what's eating him. Y'all know what I mean? If I just throw that in the mix. I'm trying to get your answers on both the concepts and the heart issues. And you've answered those both great. So if you don't mind keeping on rolling with those. And I'll just add in one issue that you all haven't mentioned very much yet is origins. How did the earth in the world and the people come about? Have you ever noticed anyone attacking little gospel or the Bible over that issue?

E: So from a creation or evolution standpoint?

I: And everything related to that.

E: Yes, it's interesting that you bring that up and that we have discussed on our Wednesday night Bible study. We started in Genesis and been some wonderful discussion and just were not very far with chapter four. Chapter Five. Yeah, well, yeah, we maybe looked at the flood, which then take too long when you're going in Genesis. But in the time period that we're, I think that's what's been the most revealing to me is, what is the time period of those first few chapters of Scripture, it could have been over a million years. We don't know God's timetable. And things could have changed, you know. How long did Adam and Eve walk with God before they ever partook of the forbidden fruit, you know? And the Bible says, Scripture says, that they walked with God, and in the in the cool of the evening. And so, you know, all the concepts that

come from that, yeah, God enjoyed the cool of the evening, I mean, Adam and Eve did too, and they did not know they weren't clothed, and then you start getting into the sin, what has sin done to us, not only from a standpoint of separatin' us from God, but just revealing to us in a, in a physical and a much deeper way, our nakedness. So go back to what you were saying, with heart or concept, I guess I'm more of a person { **that someone's heart has to be, has to be right, has to be in a position of wanting to know.** } I mean, to me, { **concepts, come later,** } but if your heart is not open, if you're not, you know, "in your heart set apart Christ," and goes to me, that is basically that you can learn all the concepts that you want, you can but if your heart is not...if your heart is not...

E: ...Let me give an example this morning, we were talking in our Sunday school, and I have a group of young adults have in there, some are married, some not, and there was a discussion this morning about how our brains mature and change as they grow and then this come from a couple people that had training as teachers and how a child's brain. And that generally through high school and college years the person's side psyche is at the point where that's when they're most questioning. This person had gotten past those years and they had said much more peace with themselves, and their position, and their standing with God now, because (**they have gotten to the point that they're so comfortable that they know God's in their heart and so all those questions they had**) about where is the flood, right, did God actually flood, actually in those questions like that, that can be so technical, and we get so hung up on, (**that have lost the importance for this person, because they understand that that Eternity is going to be so much more than we can even describe.**) Eternity because we have no basis to describe it. So in the same way, their heart felt much more comfortable, much more at ease, because now they feel like they've gotten through that questioning of concepts, and they just have this peace within them. { **That God is who He says He is, that He will do what he says He will do,** } and that He is this person and (**that He loves me.**)

I: That's fantastic.

E: So to me, it's not a that's not a matter of a question.(**It's a matter of somebody's heart, has to be open and willing, and then all this other will be revealed.**) That's just my opinion.

E': I agree 100 percent with you, [names elder], I believe all of us, a person has to be ({ **prepared by the Spirit, to accept the Lord, and accept the message of the gospel.** })

I: And obviously, if you believe this, which I don't disagree with this, then that affects how you think you're going to go about answering so even if someone's still bringing up concepts but in our minds, we're thinking about the heart we're like all right, but wait a second where's where's your heart at my friend...that that can complicate it when you have that awareness but yet in like, in all likelihood, you're going to be more effective, right? Am I understanding?

E': Well, I think about the sermon on the mount. Jesus knew what he was talking about when he said, don't cast your pearls before swine. **And I believe yet today, there are people who will scoff at the gospel and they're waiting for an opportunity just to laugh at you and trample what you have to say underfoot.** And I believe those are the folks that (**we're supposed to walk away from leave for a period of time and let the Lord work on them.**)

E'': In other words, you're saying they are the people that would deal with concept, instead of the heart.

E'(**Yeah, their heart's not ready.**)

E: (**I believe the same.**) I believe what [names elder] is saying that it is the heart thing, that it's heart first, and then other the other issues will come, but (**if the heart is not there, you leave the concepts for later?**)

E'': Yes, that's right.(**Wait, it's a continuing thing, because the concepts whatever, and there's so many of them scripture so you'd be dealing with that infinitely.** Alright, so you get through creation and you've dealt with that concept and that person? Well, okay, then what about the flood? And then what about

something else, all right? How is earth populated if they're only eight people on the ark, **and then we have endless issues.**)

I: Yes. We've mentioned them here. Well, then, what about the historicity of the New Testament? Yeah, what about this? What about documentation of the, of the Bible?

E'': Yes. Deal with concepts? If a person's heart is... If that's not the first thing you deal with... (**That's what brings them to God because all this other will be revealed.**) I mean it talks about in the { **scripture that that we start on the milk of the word and we go to the meat.** }

E: Christianity, in my mind, is one of the only, one of the few things there was in life in which ({ **you pass the test first and then start studying. We passed the test up front and then it's a lifetime of learning.** }) [Laughter and agreement]

I: The hard part is at the beginning.

E': That's a good analogy!

E'': And it's challenging to people. We spoke on that a little bit in Sunday School this morning: **it's challenging to people who have been Christians and devoted to study for years to be able, Satan tempts us not to (deal right with those who are just babes in Christ and they keep spilling the milk! And turning that cup over, you know, like a little child, you know, and they become a Christian but now, they always in a learning process. It's a child, and Satan uses that as a challenge for older Christians to become impatient with younger ones. [Agreement] And we forget that we were there at one time too, right, learning working our way through these concepts that you were talking about.)**

E: One part of this verse that you gave us, really, like if you're talking to someone and they're going through all these different things that we've mentioned here, wonder, well where was the garden, and, where is it now, and all these questions, (**you give them the best answer that you can but if their heart's not in this you're fighting a losing battle, but it also says do this when you when you don't, do this with gentleness and respect. Don't ever turn somebody away that you haven't changed**) maybe to bring back to Christ. That's a good that's a good point. I really agree.

I: Do you do you fellas think that that people in the world have an issue with whether they feel respected by defenders of the gospel? And I mean, in other words, do you think that this is a live issue today in dealing with people who have really believed the attacks instead of believing the gospel, they're wondering if a Christians going to do their thing with gentleness and respect. I have often been misconstrued. Sometimes people will expect me to be disrespectful just because I'm a preacher or they'll take things that I say as if I'm really being harder than I am. But no matter what, even if they're reading me wrong, it's like John was saying a minute ago. I've got to be, it's got to be so clear how much I respect the person and how much I am gentle willing to be gentle with gentleness and respect.

E': I believe the shared with you earlier that acquaintance I had years ago, about a professed atheist. I truly believe that that **he thought my other friend and I looked at him and a little different light because he was an atheist, but I also felt a little threatened that he just discounted the scriptures.** You know, so kind of a two way street there I think. We always remained friends, had really big conversations but yeah I think he probably thought we looked a little disrespectful.

I: A couple of you fellows have been a little quieter. I want to even it up if I can so on the transcription.

E: I feel like I dominated a little.

I: Yeah, no, no, I wouldn't even say that, just so on the recording and the transcription it evens out a little bit. No one alone no one know your name, but I want to hear from participants one and three. [Laughter] Have we missed any of the sort of kinds of attacks that you all have heard of? Are there some that we haven't mentioned yet that you think you see out there? I listed attacks from hostile individuals or people

who are grieving. Sometimes when people are in grief, you know they're flailing and they're attacking, not because they are hateful, because they're hurting. I put from the government, I put from the media, it seems to me like you're covered a lot of the ones I think are mainly main attacks, but you might have remembered a couple more.

E: I think a lot of times...**Grieving...They feel like they've been attacked by something or someone you know** and already said **why would God allow this to happen to me.** I think a lot of times, including maybe a lot of us Christians too, { **maybe we don't understand our place with God. You know if you go back to Job. God answered him, "Where were you when things began?"** }

I: God didn't get down into jobs weeds with him, did he? Just took the conversation back.

E: You know, a lot of time the person is just, I don't know they're looking for an answer... And some people you know, 'Give me a sign!' [Agreement] There again, we're bringing up all these different attacks, like we be putting ourselves, trying to ourselves on the same level with God. We're not altogether anyways even close to that. Created in his image but, but not on an equal basis. One of the things like we've been studying on Wednesday night about the other person talking about all the millions and billions of stars and planets, and so much never even been discovered about man yet, and then back on God, God created every bit of that just spoke into being...we spent billions of dollars developing equipment to go out there and look at that and try to get them trying to get an understanding of what this one, or this planet and that planet even looks like...but he created that. So I think it is when it comes down to believe it or, or nonbelieving, I think it goes back to something you said a while ago. { **Are we to accept Christ or do we want him to accept us. And that's putting this on the same level there. You know, why don't you do this or why don't you do that.** } (**I think you got to have the Spirit workin' in you, if you're if you're willing to sit down and read this, and want to if you want to believe, and you're seeking something out, God will reveal it to you. Not right away, not right now but He will. If you'll seek today you'll find.**)

E': I think he made you made a good point (not to cut you off [names elder])...you made a good point there earlier when you said that sometimes **we may have to defend the gospel even to Christians and ironically I think that's true.** Sharing example with you real quick...Our minister told me a few months ago we have a lady here in our church and worship with us and her father passed away, battled cancer for a while and passed away and now her mother's been diagnosed and potentially terminal. And she started struggling and she asked our minister. "Why pray? Why you can pray, I pray every day, and God took him, now my mom said 'Why,'" and (**she really struggled and you know we may not have all the answers...**)

I: I notice you're not saying what right perfect answer he gave! [Laughter]

E': Do ministers have perfect answers?

I: Not this one! Not this one! [Laughter]

E': You know in Isaiah, "The heavens are above the earth so God's knowledge is above ours" [paraphrasing here] but we cannot know God's ways, and, but when you're dealing with a hurting or grieving individual **they're looking for answers right now.** (**We don't always have that. It's where faith again comes into play.**) I was only comment a little bit more on something called be sort of brought up and I think you even mentioned, { **you know, creation and God began, you know, actually spoke it in place.** } And at one time it seemed like there was a real thing ever, a fervor to go and prove or disprove the Bible, **disapprove what happens in archaeology. All of that. They were bent on disproving, [and the more they tried to disprove the more it came out, to prove itself.]** To the point I think it's cooled off, it seems like you don't hear it as much anymore, but more they dug to find things to disprove it you know the more it came to reality that yes, this Word, this Word follows... You go back and it's gonna, it's going to prove itself. [**Creation speaks when you know we're silent, creation itself sometimes speaks.**] (**You go digging, it's gonna spit out something that's gonna give you an answer**) or it's going to give you a piece of puzzle that's, you know, mysterious to us but it's truth. Just a couple other

little things (cuz i don't know if i participant number one or not)... [Laughter]...but now that you got me started you're gonna be saying, "I'm hearing too much from participant number one..." [More laughter]

E': ...it does bring you back something I read...it's been a while now...NASA...when they were doing all the space travels and then doing the different things, I just remember, different things where they said they had some real bad calculations, and things weren't coming out right, and they finally somebody that actually was in the Bible and and everything they brought up the fact that you know there when they were figuring for trajectories...and **different timings and stuff like that. It wasn't coming together. They went to the Bible. That person said, you got to remember Hezekiah's time. What did what did, he asked that God do to show him a sign...a shadow going forward is no problem, but maybe go back, seven steps. And that figured out to be a problem.** There was another time or two where maybe there was a battle going on, trying to recollect it now and the sun set still for so long. **Well, [when they took all those things into consideration, that's exactly why their figures weren't coming out right.] And that was in the NASA space, you know, thing, so all of these things come back. Well, it's where { they got that information from God's Word. }**

E: The problem that I've seen, and again, I don't want to dominate here, but the one thing I've seen in from the media, not necessarily from the media, but our whole society because of technology. We're so into soundbites, just little nuggets and the media has kind of started that. And now with hashtags and Twitter and texting and, and, the abbreviation of everything, you know, **people want the gospel broken down into those little soundbytes. And it, in my mind, it doesn't lend itself ... { it goes back to what with [names elder] that it's a whole... }**

I: And all these other pieces interpret all the other pieces. They all have to have to fit together.

E': { **Context.** }

E: So when people start believing and we're trying to do that, trying to believe and hear those those little one sentence or the soundbytes, then I think it can be misleading and then sometimes leads to us having to defend a certain statement or a certain (again I use the word) sound byte. And that's that's not what to me, not what the gospel was meant, that is, the Bible, was not meant to be taken. And you know we've all heard ministers say about **using a verse or part of verse out of context**, and sound bites land that, lend to that so easily, so that's another problem that I see in our society today is just wanting a little nugget of information and no more. Let's move on to something else.

E'': I've heard someone mentioned might have a sound bite type thing, but they were just taking part of our scripture and using it to their day said, Well, God, right in God's Word? It says eat, drink and be merry. I said, Yes and the next word is the words of a fool! [Laughter] But they didn't read that part. **They heard 'at they wanted and that's the part that was going to suit.**

E: **You can treat, you can read the Bible like buffet. And handpick only those items that you want.** And you justify 'bout any lifestyle you choose.

I: Fellows, I had a plan to have this discussion going for an hour. So we're, we've got 20 more minutes. So if I can interject here. This is fantastic. Probably from the vantage point of the thesis work I'm doing, the most important question about the method of defending. We offer a method. This isn't disagreeing with any of the biblical foundations of it. But the main issue that's debated about method is do we defend the gospel with a starting assumption that the whole Bible is true and we use that total biblical truth; use that mentality in every sort of foray or sally into a conversation where the gospel being attacked; or, do we sort of start with the unbelievers' idea of truth and argue it, you know, argue the pieces of the Bible's truth on their terms and try to, you know, try to win for truth that way. In other words, there's a total, wholistic Bible approach or there as a piecemeal, truth by truth according to common sense approach, and that's kind of what my question, men, is. Are you more inclined to use a common sense argument or are you more inclined to try and tackle a person's heart starting from the whole assumption that the whole Bible is true? Now what it seems to me like I'm hearing from you all is that we know that no matter what the concept is, or (if we're going back to the earlier part of the conversation) whatever excuse the person is using, we know

that (a) it's their heart that's at issue and (b) whatever specific issue they're at, it's the Bible is going to answer it as part of the whole thing the Bible wants to answer.

I: So, you all just say more about whether you think that defending the gospel is based on common sense truth my truth, or whether it's more starting by assuming the whole truth of the Bible and then bring as full and understanding of the whole as you can each time. Does that question make sense? I mean, it's a little bit complex to explain, but I tried to break it down so you can kind of push on one side or the other.

E: I may make a comment to that end and then, of course, you guys can jump in. [**But I think it's critical that that you meet a person where they are**. We have two great examples of all time and the Apostle Paul, Jesus Christ Himself, you know. Didn't matter where they were, they were who they were talking to, you know, Jesus could debate with the Pharisees in the temple or he could talk to the woman at the well. You have to meet a person where they are and **get an idea of their understanding, I think, before you can move forward.**])

E': I mean, I'm inclined to take the Bible as a whole as fact is the word of God and read earlier but understanding are some of these things symbolic or not, and all leg goes into great detail some of the statements and days ever made, but...I believe that if it (now this is not maybe defending the gospel, but a position, but I believe) that if an individual is trying to to convert someone to the Lord that heart has got to (**start with the heart and and there's no point in debating all the little things in Scripture.**) { **There's a basic things the basics and to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and we course we kind of covered this earlier but that's *factual*. That's, that's true and and if...if... I think to me it'd be a mistake to agree with anyone in any way, because.... I believe that this is inspired Word of God but that that part is not true. Yeah. How can I teach truth if if the Word of God is not true?** }

I: If I understand you, right, it's a mistake to agree for even provisionally even for a moment...

E': That's it.

I: ...just for the sake of argument...

E': That's right.

I: ... you need to hold on to the truth of all of it at least in your own stance, right...

E': Right.

I: If I'm understanding you.

E': Right. And I don't, I don't remember right but there's a statement to what do you bring a person *to* their salvation to, as to what it's going to amount to...

E'': You will win 'em *to* what you win 'em *with*.

E': Right. Right. { **So if you don't win them with the truth, they are not going to get to the truth.** }
Yes, thank you.

E'': It was what I had written that day. I remember it was it Garland that said, **if, if you bring people to church for watermelon suppers, and hot dogs, then that's what religion is going to be, it's going to be watermelon suppers and hot dogs.**

I: You'll have to buy a lot of watermelon!

E': So what you win 'em *to* is what you win 'em *with*. I don't know if you agree with that, or...but that's the way I see it.

I: I appreciate that! I'm not here to agree or disagree, but that's exactly what I'm trying to ask. So I appreciate that.

E: I don't use a lot of time picking it apart, you know, but there's all kinds of debatable questions got brought up. You can spend a lot of time on this version, of that verse, but what do you do when you actually win someone to Christ? If we ever get to the point of doing that, by taking that method... I don't know, I don't think so. { **You get across to a person that we believe everything that's in this Bible. We don't just believe part of it and discard part of it, we believe it all. Get that understanding first, and then you can go to the different references and address whatever type of question they have.** }

E': We believe it all. I agree with what's just been said. But getting back to maybe question that that we can answer in a roundabout way. If you're dealing with a new convert, like I say, we believe every word and this is real, true. (**But you may have to get out the Old Testament, come to the New Testament and introduce them to Jesus Christ, first. Start it simple.** But all of it's true. I don't leave out any of it.)

E'': The most (**important part of the Bible is the plan of salvation, just believing the basic plan of salvation. All the other... again, I repeat what I said earlier, is for edification,**) and learning, and understanding who God is, understanding God's will, if like Garland said, if you try to debate and explain every little nuance of that, before someone becomes a Christian, it's a never ending process.

I: Don't ever get there.

E'': You'll never get there. So just understanding the basic plan of salvation, and then their heart is pricked, and they want to know. When they get to the point where they want to dig in and know, then...! Being before someone who's teaching, whether it be a preacher, or if another Christian, then they're taking in information. But if you're going to debate each and every controversial thing, it would never be never ending.

E: I think David alluded to that earlier, about the casting your pearls, as Jesus said, among swine. { **I think to start out with the debate thing,** and what scripture was true, and what this is, or what that is, **it's all starting from the wrong end.** }

E': Yeah, and we cannot... we talked about this already, but **we can't profess to understand scripture completely.**

E'': Right.

E': Quite honestly guys, if I'm listening to a preacher, or a professor in the classroom, and he claims to have all the answers, I'm gonna look at him with both eyes a little skeptical, you know! We're told we can't understand the mystery of God.

I: So this whole deal about saying we're going to approach a defense of the Bible, a defense of Christianity with a whole a commitment to the whole Bible from the outset... that doesn't mean we're saying that we think we *understand* every detail. [Agreement around the room] So I'm just putting that in there for clarification.

E: That's where you want somebody to arrive at, eventually get there...

[Around the room] Wait... when do you get there?? [Laughter around the room]

E': ...[Laughter] It's something to work toward, something to work for, something to have to work in your life. You may never accomplish. We work for this.

E'': I have to think that the analogy, you know, infants you know, **you start 'em on milk, and that's where you want to start somebody that is interested, you want to give them the milk.** If they if they take to the milk, they're going to work in there, they're going to get eager.

E: To me that's the beauty of the Bible. How you can take the same passage and it's just like—back to your analogy, I mean, what do our teachers in our church teach to the ones that are two and three years old, the dates, the flood, and Noah and the ark, Jesus going to the cross, they teach it in a simplistic manner. But those of us who have studied at all of our lives, I mean, you can and you can study it, and put that away, and maybe two or three years ago back to it. It has a completely different... it just keeps adding on... it's the beauty of the Scripture. { You can understand it from a very simplistic standpoint, but the more you study it takes on more and more meaning and I think it...it just builds on itself. So that it like some books you read: it is what it is. It never changes. It doesn't adapt as you mature. And as your mind betters, and so you read it one time, you put it aside, you're done with it. The Bible, you're never done with it } because it keeps it keeps—

E': [(It keeps speaking.)]

E: It just keeps giving, and keeps speaking to you at every level of maturity. It speaks differently.

I: It's interesting that everybody has said the Bible doesn't change. But then we're also admitting that because we change...

E: *We understand it.*

I: ...We change, we grow in *awareness* of what was there all along. So there is a dynamic there...

E'': Id'nt that part of the sanctification process?

I: I think it is. That's right. And tying that back into the defense of the gospel: we're sort of aware of this, but the person who is still kind of hung up on these attacks, you know, we assume they're kind of looking in on this from the outside...but to me...well, a lot of this that this really goes beyond today's interview. But the fact that y'all are shepherds of the flock. Apologetics is a pastoral process. I mean, it is a pastoral process because you're walking somebody through what could be a lifetime of objections or questions or issues that are all for them tied around their hearts, and without having a relationship with them, how are you going to keep circling back to, to keep chipping away...So now I'm starting to preach but... [Laughter] but what would you all say about the pastoral part of this, about the shepherding part? Because an elder... I mean, that's why you're defending the gospel. Because of the sheep, right? It's because of the people.

[Ten full seconds of silence]

E: Yeah, they, of course, are our primary responsibility. Spiritual health and welfare of the church, of the sheep.

I: I might think of it as: these people attacking the gospel are wolves, and they're attacking your people. That's what they're doing. That's a “don't mess with my flock.”

[Eleven seconds of silence]

E': I this is good...exactly like...you kind of threw me there, but then again, back to my previous part of the last part, (**we do everything with gentleness and respect.**) If you don't, and y'all said this, (**if we don't meet people where they are**) ...and I don't mean to change the script, but if you go in you know, you've heard about people that beat up people with the Bible, never get a win them to anything! So I don't say that you go out and go with a crowd and start drinking, begin with that crowd so you can start tasting the gospel, but you understand 'em. It's a basic understanding of where they come from and what brought them to the point that they are, and then...how do you start interjecting? (**Sometimes it's just a life, it's a way you live. It's people seeing that even when other people would be grieving, you're rejoicing,** because and I don't want to draw a personal analogy, but you know how I felt when my mother died. I mean, it was... I was sad, I didn't want to lose, but it was a joy, was rejoicing, and I know everybody in here's lost family members, and we rejoice because you know that they've gone to their eternal home, but

other people don't understand that. And so people watch that. So, sometimes... sometimes **we defend the gospel not by words we say, but but how we act and react.**)

I: By who we are. Yeah. Yes, how we act. Thank you.

E: I think, about winning a person to Christ, I think first of all, you need to stick to the basics of the plan of salvation. Because, once they become a Christian, then they can go back and search these other things that we don't understand. But as long as they're outside ...like the sheep. If they're in the pen, you know, they've got the advantage of working with other Christians; but (**if they're astray, out there in the field and pretty much on their own, they're going to be attacked from all different sides, you know.**)

I: Yes.

E': (**They're vulnerable.**)

E: (**I think we should, personally, be interested in person's soul, and that's where we have to show respect.**)

I: The gentleness. Yes, yes.

E'': There are people... A while ago you alluded to us as overseers. Shepherds. **There are attacks from inside.** There are people who for one reason or another attempted to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, but the heart wa'n't there. It wasn't a finished product. And now, through the selfishness that they have along with them, and they think they can be a child God and still be selfish...they are the ones that will hurt, will attack the flock, from within, and other words, if you kind of picture a group or a herd of sheep, we have to be wary of one who goes off to the side, because they're easy prey. The wolf can get to them. Satan can get them easily. **But unbelievers actually put on the appearance of a Christian, in sheep's clothing, and get amongst the flock to create disunity.** Now that is... it's a very difficult situation for leadership of church to deal with, because **while trying to eradicate or eliminate this attack from within, sometimes it's like you would find yourself trying to kill a wolf, and most passive sheep...Some sheep gonna be hurt.**

I: That's right. Collateral...they call it... they call it collateral damage. [Around the room] Collateral damage.

E'': That's right. And that's something that has to be dealt with. (**I don't know how you would say it, very cautiously. Very gently. Very prayerful.**) This attack that comes from within can be devastating to the body of believers.

I: That's right, and we know we're now in a generation where... I mean, I think you all might attest to this: how many of those that have been hurt somewhere in the church? Their objections to the gospel, these sort of attacks on the gospel that they chime in with are really... they got hurt in a church as part of some of the fallout of these very things that there's no avoiding an elder doing. I mean you have to, in some way or another, you have to do this, but people are getting hurt, and you wish they wouldn't have, and you wish it wouldn't have gone that way. But ...so to me all of this ties back, but you all are... it's almost like you are elders, you've been together a while, you're kind of... sometimes it seems like y'all read each other's minds. (**But it's a...this is a life thing, and it's my life as a defense of the gospel.**)

E: **Oh, man. Yes.** [Around the room] **Yes.**)

I: My walk with Jesus, with the Lord Jesus, is the defense of the gospel. And this is all part of that. Is that something that you all would more or less agree with?

[Around the room]: Yes.

E': Yeah, I agree with it fully. **And I'll even add to it.** I don't see where it's going to get easier. And to go along with that, they hit it on the head. I know we're focusing on verse 15 here, Jason and you know, we are prepared to speak, and we do it with gentleness and respect. But if you look on down, verse 16, we do so, **so we can keep a clear conscience, and those who speak maliciously against us, might be ashamed.** We have to be aware, as Bill talked about, you know, protecting the flock, we've got to be aware that **people are going to speak maliciously against us.** Having said that, I do not think we're called to stand idly by and never resist those malicious attacks. You know we have responsibility, and there are different levels of defense, if you will, you know, some, **I know in the early church never took up arms, and you know Jesus even told Peter, "Put that sword away," you know. Having said that, we must defend the gospel.**

E: Whenever this body of elders has had to go through such an unpleasant, you know, couple times where we had to defend from, as Philip said, from within and we've actually had to deal with that. And you talk about unpleasant, uncomfortable, because you've got a brother and sister in Christ, brother or sister or both, that you worship with... And you know their lifestyle and what they're doing is not what our truth is, and so when you confront them there's usually two reactions. They either will change... and realize that they're wrong (and again you do it with gentleness and respect) or, there is almost a retribution. There is anger and unfortunately you know we tend to...

E': Other people, other Christians, will be hurt. Their faith will be tested in this process, because a lot of... so much of the time they don't see the situation from a perspective as the leaders, leadership does. [All around: That's right.] They don't see the damage it might do in a hurry.

E'': I think sometimes it's hard for us to go... you know it says in the Scriptures that sometimes, if it gets bad, that you have to put the brother out, in the hopes that that they will understand, and realize their sin and will want to come back as a part of the body. I think our society teaches us and tells us, well, that if you put them out, then they're gone forever. And so that makes it even harder for sometimes. I think when you put somebody out because of the, from the scriptural basis, **you feel like that maybe you dissociated them from, from Christ, and from salvation.**

E: You know { (Scripture actually tells us to do that because we love them, and that they might be saved, that they may come back.) }

I: Well, and the only the only New Testament example we have of someone being put out, in First Corinthians, it looks an awful lot like by Second Corinthians that person has been repentant and broken and they're being instructed to bring him back. So some of that is debated. But this sort of brings up (and I'll kind of close us with this, and ask you all just as kind of a closing, for closing remarks)... it sounds like a big issue here is that apologetics is not just defending an argument or a belief. There are lives at stake. There are relationships at stake. There are eternal souls at stake. So that is all wrapped up through all of this. I'm hearing that from you all? Or is that something that you all would affirm? And let me just ask. Was there any points that you feel like should be made that haven't been made, or any (when I have to interview I just ask this) any questions you would have asked?

E': before we close or before you turn your recorder off. I like to share with you... We don't have to do it now, just, I'd like to share with you my story that ended with the acquaintance I had a few years ago.

I: I'd love to have it on the tape, if you don't care, if you can keep it anonymous.

E': It doesn't bother me. Absolutely. I shared with you earlier that had an acquaintance some 30 years ago that was a professed atheist, another gentleman was Christian brother. We talked before this meeting again tonight on an unrelated topic about how sometimes acquaintances will come into our lives, and spend some time, and then they drift on there will be seen or heard from again, and this young man was would fall into that category for me. I would see this gentleman once every week or two, and my friend knew him better than I, so my friend told me that he was a professed atheist. And so we from that point forward decided that as civil as we could be, and respectful and genuine as we could be, that we would talk shop with him at every opportunity. And as I said earlier, { my friend and I, we had probably an above average

knowledge of Scripture. Didn't have all the answers, of course, but...we knew what we believed. And we stood firm on that belief. } And I told you how he felt in his reasoning, you know, why he believed the things he believed, but we would have good conversations. And like I said, this gentleman knew the Scripture. **He was a learned man, young man, and he knew Scripture, and just chose not to believe,** put his faith in 'em. And so one of the last encounters that I had with this young man, and this is how it played out. He asked me, we were talking, talking faith. And he asked me, he said, **“What if, someday, when you get ready to lay down and draw your last breath, what if you found out that all this stuff you have believed is not true?”** And I guess the ([**Holy Spirit was working in me, because without missing a beat, I got up to walk away. And I looked at 'im as loving as I could. And I said, “But what if it is?”** And I walked away. **And sometimes we have to let the Lord deal with people.**])

[Ten full seconds of silence]

I: Amen. Fantastic. ...I've got an hour and six and a half minutes. Fellows, I'm going to stop the tape, the transcription and just thank you, and remind you that this is a confidential and private interview. I'm going to transcribe it, destroy the recording, and the conversation will go into the study without any names. Now Willisburg Christian Church will be named, the eldership, because I'm studying two Christian churches, but if that's okay with you then I'll proceed with this data. Please accept my sincere thanks and appreciation.

APPENDIX D

WILLISBURG INTERVIEW FINDINGS: FORTY (40) NUMBERED OBJECTIONS WITH CODED RESPONSES

1. Before noting any objections, the first elder volunteered the need for any defense to “do this with gentleness and respect” and said “I think that’s utmost.” I marked this as the **first fideist** defense because it demands a certain experience for the objector.
2. “The Bible is ancient history,” Therefore, it’s “not applicable today” and “not culturally relevant.” Attempts to make it so lead to a gospel that will “continually change,” which leads to a faith that is “not only weak, but useless.” The first argument used in defense was the assertion, repeated twice, that the Bible is, and has, “absolute truths” that must be upheld. I marked this as a **first Reformed defense**. The second argument was implied in the framing of the second objection: assertion of “absolute truth” supports a strong and useful faith. I marked this point of pragmatism as a **second fideist defense**.
3. “The Scriptures weren’t authentic because they weren’t documented.” Framing it this way showed a recognition of an evidentialist defense, though one wasn’t offered, so I didn’t code it. The initial defense was simply an attempt to “noncombatively combat his argument.” I marked this appeal to offering an experience to the objector as the **third fideist defense** by the group.
4. “If you were right, you would be inclusive” and “not teach against the way I live.” A defense was implied by restating the objection, “We’re pressed not to have a true real truth.” I marked this implied point as a **second Reformed defense**, differentiating it from a classical (“true”) defense because of my judgment that Campbellites never say “true” without meaning “biblically specified.”
5. “Why does that loving and merciful God allow some of these things to happen to me?” No defense was offered.
6. “Denominations” accepting “leaders and preachers” who practice lifestyles that “the Word actually speaks about as now being sinful.” A defense was implied in the restatement that these are “explicitly forbidden in Scripture.” This implied defense was marked as a **third Reformed defense**.
7. Another elder restated this objection as “people want to make the script for their ideas and their way of living.” The defense offered was “I gotta go back to this. This right here” (the interviewer verbalized his indicating a Bible). “This is our textbook right here” with “everything we need to know about God, Jesus Christ, Salvation, and how to live our Christian lives, is right here in this book” that is “not going to change.” I marked this as a **fourth Reformed defense**, and provisionally counted a **first classical defense** because of the Campbellite quasi-rationalist nuance in the label “textbook.”
8. “They don’t believe in the virgin birth” and “just think he was a prophet or leader.” Two defenses were offered. First, “This” [a Bible] “is where we get our faith” in “Jesus Christ. And that’s what we live for... We believe everything that’s in here. We’re warned against adding or taking anything away from it. This is God-breathed.” This was marked as a **fifth Reformed defense**. The second

defense was “John, James, Peter, they were eyewitnesses...they was with the man.” I coded this as a **first evidentialist defense**, though it wasn’t elaborated by this elder.

9. “The five accounts don’t align.” Knowing the elder’s education and professional attainments, I assumed he meant the four gospels and Acts. The defense offered was “If all of us in this room went out and witnessed an event...we would write it from our own perspective.” Because of its use of the historic witness of the apostles, I coded this as a **second evidentialist defense**.
10. Another elder added a defense to this objection, saying that “the core” of what the gospel writers saw was “always that Jesus is God.” Because this observation moved straight from the concept of witness to Jesus to a central claim of all of Scripture, Christ’s divinity, this was coded as a **sixth Reformed defense**.¹
11. At this point an elder offered a general set of defenses to all the objections heard so far. First, “it’s really in those four words, ‘but in your hearts’” (referring to I Peter 3:15). “It’s still your decision.” The appeal to individual choice can be categorized as both an appeal to reason, and as a challenge to offer an experience of freedom and respect to an objector. I double-coded this as a **second classical defense** and a **fourth fideist defense**. Immediately he followed, “And when you do, you choose whether or not to believe everything that comes with Christ,” referring to the totality of Scripture, thus closely following the classic and fideist remarks with a **seventh Reformed defense**.
12. This elder offered a joke about needing a Bible that was a little better organized and “simple to explain,” but added this, which I counted as an apologetic theme. “But if everything lined up perfectly for us, then would we demonstrate the faith that we’re called to have?...I don’t think so.” The “amens” all around the room signified their resonance with this point, so I coded it as a **fifth fideist defense**, a challenge to present to the objector the experience of a faith-filled apologist.
13. Another elder followed this with a freestanding defense. “Someone’s heart has to be right, has to be in a position of wanting to know. ...Concepts come later.” He offered the example of Christians he was mentoring who have “gotten so comfortable that they know God’s in their heart and so all those questions they had...have lost their importance for this person...because they understand” the importance of eternity. I marked this existentialist assessment as a **sixth fideist defense**. Then it was followed up with this statement: “They have this peace within them that God is Who He says He is, that He will do what He says He will do.” Because no Campbellite can make such assertions about God without the totality of Biblical revelation in mind, I marked this as an **eighth Reformed defense**.
14. Still another elder offered this statement. “A person has to be prepared by the Spirit to accept the Lord, and accept the message of the Gospel.” This is arguably both fideist and Reformed, so I marked it as a **seventh fideist theme** and a **ninth Reformed theme**.
15. “There are people who will scoff at the gospel.” Though this is not an express objection used to attack the gospel, but a description by an apologist about the state of an objector to the gospel, I enumerated it as an objection. The defense offered was “we’re supposed to walk away for a period of time and let the Lord work on them” because “their heart’s not ready.” Because this offers the

¹ This is a core move for Cornelius Van Til, who, at the height of his career in his 1971 *Credo* wrote at length about the “self-attesting Christ of the Scriptures.” Van Til’s Reformed arguments centered around the entirety of the Bible read from the standpoint of Jesus’ own claims to divinity. See E.R. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1971), 18.

objector an experience of being entrusted to God by the apologist, I classed it as an **eighth fideist defense**.

16. To this defense, an elder added another. “If the heart’s not there, you leave the concepts for later.” Because he referred to any and all apologetics concepts, I counted this a **ninth fideist theme**.
17. An elder continued this theme, adding, “There’s so many of them Scriptures you’d be dealing with that” [concepts] “indefinitely.” His defense was “If the person’s heart is not the first thing you deal with...that’s what brings them to God because all this other will be revealed.” I marked this a **tenth fideist theme**. He immediately followed with biblical doctrine, however. “It talks about in the Scripture that we start on the milk of the word and go on to the meat.” This is tough to classify as apologetics, but I coded the appeal to Scripture as a **tenth Reformed argument**, though its regard for the maturity level of the objector prompted me to double-mark it as a **third classical defense**.
18. Describing the nature of Christian faith, an elder added that in Christianity, “you pass the test first...and then it’s a lifetime of studying.” Everyone resonated strongly with this statement. The “test” is conversion to a total Biblical faith, and the “studying” targets the Bible. I coded this as an **eleventh Reformed defense**.
19. “Satan tempts us not to deal right with those who are just babes in Christ...we forget that we were there at one time, too...learning, working our way through these concepts.” This is hard to classify as an apologetics objection, and marks a turn in the conversation toward pastoral concerns. However, to the extent that the elders are unaware of the nuances the project is using, and given the discussion is still self-consciously about the defense of the gospel, I counted it as a fideist sort of objection, and noted it. An implicit defense may be inferred, a determination to offer the objector a patient apologist. I coded it as an **eleventh fideist defense**.
20. The next elder answered the objection in any case with an allusion again to I Peter 3:15. “Do it with gentleness and respect...Don’t ever turn somebody away that you haven’t changed.” This offers a certain kind of pastoral experience to the objector, and so I coded it as an **twelfth fideist defense**.
21. Prompted by the interviewer, an elder offered this objection. “Grieving...they feel like they’ve been attacked by something or someone...and why would God allow this do happen to me?” The defense offered was “Maybe we don’t understand our place with God. You know, when you go back to Job, God answered him, ‘Where were you when things began?’” He continued, “Are we to accept Christ, or do we want Him to accept us?” I coded this as a stoutly **Reformed argument, twelfth** so far. He added that “if you’re willing to sit down and read this” [the Bible] “God will reveal it to you” because “you got to have the Spirit working in you.” This, also, I marked as a **Reformed theme, the thirteenth** in this interview.
22. Quoting a struggling church member, the elder offered this objection. “‘Why pray?’ She really struggled.” His immediate defense (again, framed in the pastoral turn of the discussion) was this. “You know we may not have all the answers.” Some humor followed, and the elder returned to the point. “They’re looking for answers right now. We don’t always have that. It’s where faith comes into play.” I categorized it as the **thirteenth fideist defense**.
23. Chiming in, an elder took the lack of answers as itself an objection, and offered several defenses. “We don’t always have that...It’s where faith again comes into play.” **Fourteenth fideist**. “Creation and God began, you know, actually spoke it in place...Creation speaks when...we’re silent, creation itself sometimes speaks...” This is a **fourth classical defense**, which he followed with an objection from evidences. “There was a real fervor to prove or disprove the Bible” with “what happens in archaeology.” To this he offered the **third evidentialist theme** of the discussion: “The more they

tried to disprove it, the more it came out to prove itself.”² The final point he emphasized was the **fourteenth Reformed defense**: “They got that information from God’s Word.”

24. “People want the Gospel broken down into little soundbytes... using a verse or part of a verse out of context.” Other elders added that people “hear what they wanted and that’s the part that’s going to suit,” and “You can read the Bible like a buffet and only handpick those items that you want.” “The argument offered was “it goes back to what [another elder said] that it’s a whole.” Another elder added the clarifying term, “Context.” This was the **fifteenth Reformed defense**.
25. As the interviewer prompted the discussion to move toward a close [at the 40-minute mark], this freestanding defense was offered. “It’s critical that you meet a person where they are...get an idea of their understanding, I think, before you can move forward.” Because of the double appeal to (a) offering an objector a certain kind of experience and (b) tailoring the reasoning to the state or location of the objector, I marked this as both the **fifth classical** and the **fifteenth fideist** response.
26. Another freestanding defense was offered in three parts. First was a reminder that the apologist has “got to start with the heart,” coded as the **sixteenth fideist answer**, followed by an assertion that “the basics” of “accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior” are “factual,” marked as the **sixth classical theme** because of its appeal to bare fact. Finally, however, he insisted that “it’d be a mistake to agree with anyone” in objecting to any part of the Bible, even for the sake of argument (the interviewer asked for clarification on this point). “How can I teach truth if the [whole] Word of God is not true?” This was marked as the **sixteenth Reformed answer**.
27. An apologetics strategy was offered, in a sense, with this statement: “If you don’t win them *with* the truth, they are not going to get to the truth.” Put another way by the same elder, “You win them *to* what you won them *with*.” In Campbellite context, this usually surfaces as “what you win them with, you win them to.” It is generally a challenge to frontload gospel conversations and relationships with a deeply and comprehensively biblical thought process, instead of “winning” them with something smaller or cheaper. I coded this the **seventeenth Reformed defense**.
28. Another standing defense was stated. “You get across to a person that we believe everything that’s in this Bible. We don’t just believe part of it and discard part of it, we believe it all”: the **eighteenth Reformed theme**.
29. An elder cautioned that though this is true, “you may have to get out of the Old Testament, come to the New Testament and introduce them to Christ, first. Start simple.” Because the word “simple” touches on the reasoning capacity of the objector, I coded the cautionary note as the **seventh classical defense**.
30. Another apologetic point: “The most important part of the Bible...is believing the basic plan of salvation. All the other...is for edification.” Because this caution offers the objector the prioritized experience of salvation, and of the postponement of edification, I marked it as the **seventeenth fideist answer**.
31. Apologetics point: “I think to start out with the debate thing...it’s all starting from the wrong end.” As a warning to steer clear of argument, whether logical, biblical, or evidential, this drew a mark as the **eighteenth fideist defense**.

² The elder offered an account of how NASA scientists found a discrepancy in geologic/cosmic calendar data, which could only be accounted for by the miracles of the sun standing still at Joshua’s battle at Ajalon and Hezekiah’s shadow moving the wrong way. Since I am classifying apologetics themes, not evaluating their strength, I simply note the argument’s type.

32. An elder wanted to make a new point about the Bible. “The more you study it, it takes on more and more meaning, and I think it...builds on itself. It doesn’t adapt as you mature,” but, “your mind betters.” “You’re never done with it because it keeps—” Another elder supplied, “Speaking.” This existential aspect of the Bible I coded as the **nineteenth of both Reformed and fideist markers**.
33. An apologetics point again: “We do everything with gentleness and respect” and “meet people where they we are.” Apart from any note about reason or logic or learning, the second offers an experience of appropriateness to the objector, and the first does the same, so these are the **twentieth and twenty-first fideist theme markers**.
34. “Sometimes it’s just a life, it’s the way you live...We defend the gospel not by words we say, but...how we act and react.” As an offer of a certain personal experience for the objector with an apologist, this counts as the **twenty-second fideist answer**.
35. An existential objection: “If they’re astray out there...” The interviewer supplied, “They’re vulnerable.” The elder continued, “I think we should, personally, be interested in a person’s soul, and that’s where we have to show respect.” Offering an experience to the objector marked this as the **twenty-third fideist response**.
36. An existential objection: “There are attacks from the inside...Unbelievers actually put on the appearance of a Christian, in sheep’s clothing, and get amongst the flock to create disunity...you would find yourself trying to kill a wolf...some sheep gonna be hurt.” The elder answered this by challenging us to offer the objector a careful pastor: “That’s something that has to be dealt with...very cautiously. Very gently. Very prayerful.” I coded the **twenty-fourth fideist response**.
37. The interviewer supplied, as a matter of wrapping up the interview, a summary of the pastoral bent of the elders’ apologetic. “This is a life thing, and it’s my life as a defense of the gospel.” The agreement around the room was heartfelt, audible, palpable; “Oh, man. Yes. Yes.” Their resonance with this statement counts it as the **twenty-fifth fideist answer**, thought it was supplied by the interviewer first.
38. “People are going to speak maliciously against us.” This elder defended this attack by refusing to “take up arms,” yet, “having said that, we must defend the gospel.” “I do not think we’re called to stand idly by and never resist those malicious attacks.” I left this uncoded (though it remains in bold print) because it amounts to a restatement of the *general* call to apologetics in I Peter 3:15.
39. An elder moved from “malicious attacks” into pastoral dilemmas requiring church discipline. Another elder pinpointed an objection this creates against the gospel. “Our society teaches...that, well, if you put them out, they’re gone, forever...maybe you dissociated them from Christ, and from salvation.” A third elder answered this objection with an answer that embodies both Reformed and existential concerns. “Scripture actually tells us to do that [church discipline] because we love them, and that they might be saved, that they might come back.” In Campbellite context, this offers an experience to the disciplined objector, but that experience only makes sense in a fully Biblical framework. I coded it as the **twentieth reformed answer** and the **twenty-sixth fideist one**.
40. The elder who opened the interview with his unfinished account of the atheist friend wanted to close it with how it ended. The objection was not only his friend’s notion of “undocumented” Scriptural accounts, but the combination of his biblical knowledge with his wholesale refusal to accept any of it as true. The elder’s defense embodied three apologetics. “We had an above-average knowledge of Scripture...we knew what we believed. And we stood firm on that belief.” I coded the **twenty-first reformed response**. The friend asked, “What if someday, when you... draw your last breath...you find out that all that stuff you believed is not true?” The elder’s answer came because “I guess the Holy Spirit was working in me...And I looked at him as loving as I could...” This marked it as the **twenty-seventh fideist response**, offering a certain kind of pastoral experience to the objector. The

elder's final answer was a question: "But what if it is?" This perhaps unconscious reflection of Pascal's wager I coded as the **eighth classical defense**.

APPENDIX E
MACKVILLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Length: 1 hour 1 minute

Legend:

I=Interviewer
E=Eldership anonymous representative, same elder representative speaking again
E' =next Eldership representative speaking as differentiated from immediately prior speaker

Bold font: objection or defense
Highlight: Reformed **Fideist** *Evidentialist* Classical
Brackets: {} = revelation () = experience [] = reason

I: Alright, so just to, to reiterate. This is a study of the defense of the gospel by an eldership in the Christian churches...Mackville Christian Church. So, gentlemen, thank you for doing this with me. And once again, I do have your permission to record this conversation?

E, E': Yes.

I: Thank you very much. Well, as I said in the letter...

I: You know, it's all right. As long as this is... as long as that's setting here it'll be able to hear us well enough. ...So what I have... the way I thought about it was like this: that the defense of the gospel... The first thing that I read says that "we should always set apart, as Christians, always set apart in our hearts Christ as Lord, and be ready to give an answer for, give a reason for the hope that is in us." The Christian hope. To anyone that asked us to answer that. And one translation says it's the "defense." So it's my belief that we live in a generation now where the first time somebody hears the gospel, whether they're a child, teenager, young person, middle age, or on... We live in a time now where the first time they hear the gospel, they've already heard attacks on the gospel.

I: They've grown up with attacks on the gospel. So every sermon, or every conversation, or every Sunday school, Bible school lesson has to not only tell the gospel, but it has to defend in some way against the attacks people have heard. So what I would like to ask you, gentlemen is: the question is two parts. One. What do you think the top attacks are on the gospel or on Christian faith today, and you can think in terms of the top three, or the top five, or the top ten. Part two is how would you how do you tend to respond to that attack. What is your thought process on how you respond to it; and then actually let me add a third part.

I: The third part is I've noticed that people tend to either defend the gospel with common sense, you know, with just truth. According to what's commonly understood; arguments; or, they tend to defend the gospel with strictly biblical arguments. Usually it's combination of the two. But sometimes people will lean one end or the other. So I'm interested in finding out, if we have time, how you gentlemen lean on defending it with common sense or more defending it with biblical material, so I'll let one of y'all start if you have an initial thought on what the top attacks are on the gospel.

E: Well. I'll start it, you asked, now, do we believe it's sufficient to do it with common sense. Or, biblical. **I think you have to use common sense and intertwine it with the gospel. You got you got... it's different types of people that you talk to**, and it's some people... you can talk to them one way with common biblical knowledge, then is others that it's hard to talk to 'em in either way. I've talked to people, or tried to talk to people, that will not listen. Anything else you want me to add to that?

I: Well, to kind of reflect back on what you're saying: I know that sometimes couching something biblically will turn certain people off, if they're if they've had a bad experience, if they have certain kinds of issues that they've had, maybe putting something in biblical terminology will aggravate them more, and you have to more angle toward common sense. I don't know if that's what you were getting at.

E: Well, I think the first the first thing in my book for when I go out here to talk to someone, when I go there, to wherever it's at, one on one, I start off the conversation. Maybe if he's a farmer, how's your crops doing, how are your cows doing? And, and leading, and then lead in the Scripture. **[I see how will, he will receive it, then you know whether to ease it off or whether to go ahead.]** Does that make sense?

I: It sure does. And that's a little bit talking about just how we approach people with the gospel. If we can hone in specifically. So what are the kinds of ways that the gospel gets attacked? We talked about this a little bit the other night, Wednesday night, when I first was asking you guys to do this. Remember you guys actually said some of the things that you think are ways that our world... You could ask whether our media does it, you could ask our courts do it, or our schools do it, or how the colleges, universities do that... maybe it's just how Satan affects people so that then they begin to attack the gospel. What do you think the main attacks are on Christian faith today?

E': You want him to just go on and do everything?

I: No, you both got to talk.

E': Oh, I didn't realize. I thought maybe it was him first.

I: I apologize. No, I want to hear as much from you both as I can.

E': I don't know, as far as attacks go, you know, **I think Satan, o' course he's behind all the attacks that are, and he makes everything so delectable**, and Jesus tells us to be in the world but not of the world, but at the same time, you just look at the situation where you're stuck like Adam and Eve, then how did Satan approach Eve? He told her that if she would eat the fruit, she would be as smart she wouldn't die, that she would be as smart as God was. And that's why he approached her, and **that was, in that particular case, that was her weakness**. Now somebody else as time goes on, they might not have that weakness. So as far as the world. How do they attacked us, we have those all people are a cult. Then, there's a situation to where will they call themselves Christians, but I saw someone so doing something so and so, either in a liquor store or prostitution, or that guy called his self 'Christian,' but he loves money more than he loves life. Yeah, that's kind of what you're looking for?

I: A Christian behaving in a way that basically refutes the gospel.

E': Right.

I: Yeah.

E: The devil has the easy way to get into it.

E': Each one of us are different with what we do. He [names other elder] and myself are different in our approach. Each one of us, as far as, as far as how he would come to us.

E: Yeah.

E': And what he would make pleasurable or delectable. And when he came to Christ, look what he did with Christ. What'd he say, I forget now exactly. One was jump off, the other turn the stone to bread. It was because he had been fasting. He had been fasting for 40 days, and so he came from that approach, go ahead and do this and make it into bread. The other two. I can't remember what they were right off hand, but the other was he took him up on the temple, wasn't it, and let's see you jump. Wasn't it.

I: Yeah. Let's see if God will rescue you.

E': Yeah. And see, that was the temptation part of it. You know, we're not supposed to put God on trial all the time.

I: Yeah.

E': I mean, there are cases where we might have asked a question, that kind of thing, but not to do it in that way.

I: That's interesting. If you put it in that way, the way you put that, if we're picturing the attacks on the gospel as coming from Satan, which they are, and you use the Lord Jesus as an example of that, which he is, it's interesting that it's true, a lot of the attacks on the gospel are not strictly full frontal attacks on the facts of the gospel. They're attacks on us, to stop us from believing it, usually by hitting us where, like you, like you said, where it's something that we find delectable, something that we find—I guess by that you meant something that we really want, or something that is kind of an itch for us, or a temptation for us.

E': Well, you remember in the book of Job, when he talks about God, got together with all angels and here comes Satan bopping along, and he said Satan... Satan, where you been? He said, I'm going to and fro throughout the earth looking for somebody to devour. Now that's his occupation.

I: Mm hm.

E': He does that every day somewhere with somebody.

E: That's when God was meetin' with his angels and he came in...

E': So see when he does that, then that tells you right there... —and he has, and he's got lots of helpers. He has lots of helpers, who are in there to do those things, to take things, and manipulate them, or twist, and it's kind of like, it's a funny thing, kind of like fake news, it's like fake news. Twisted as to however the reporter or however the receiver is, as to have can be done, and, and it tends to, for some reason or another, it tends to stick more... If people who are non-Christian do it, it's really not a problem; if people who are Christians do it, it's multiplied, magnified many times over. Oh, he's a Christian, lookit there.

E: And what you're saying that he is a man that's already... Satan already has 'im.

E': Okay.

E: He doesn't have to work on 'im.

E': Okay, in a way, you're probably right, probably right.

E: And I think Satan works harder on a Christian. That the more, the harder and more work a Christian does for God, the more and harder Satan is going to work to try to lead 'im astray. But this is my, this is my saying: Satan only has a power that I give him on me.

E': Well, here's kind of condensing. Sunday mornings: Where's Satan at? He's in church, and he doesn't have to go anywhere else. Those other people not there.

E: Yeah.

I: He's got a lockdown out there.

E': Yeah. He's got a lock on it out there. So they're at church, aren't they, where he's at, on Sunday mornings. And we've had more upset over the color of the carpet, or of something the janitor didn't do, or somebody didn't like this, or that, or the other, and Satan is right there. He's just manipulatin' this, doing what he loves to do, yes, to do those things too.

I: Yes. So can I, if I can get a question back in here. This does fit into the category. **This is basically taking the approach that really is the devil is attacking the gospel, and he's doing it through, through attacks on unbelievers, and even within the church.**

E: **Absolutely.**

I: But how would you. So then how does defending the gospel look? Christians are called and defend the gospel. If follow through that thought process, the way that y'all are tackling this, I the way I would think, is we have to be credible. We have....we have to be obedient enough to Christ, that there's no reproach on us. Right? Is that... so I'm not trying to put words in your mouth.

E: I understand what you're saying.

I: So what you say...what is the defense of the gospel when attacked. What do you think the defense of the gospel is supposed to be?

E: **But when you say defense of the gospel. You saying a mouthful.**

I: Yes.

E: **(It is. That's a whole lot. To go up against. And that's where I think elders are required more so than the average church member.)** I think, you know.

E': Because of our knowledge...

E: **(Well, because of your knowledge, but because of who you are)** ... And, and who is Satan going to work on in a church the most?

E':Most he's probably going to work on leadership down.

E: He's gonna work on YOU.

E': I guess I've been thinking about it all day. **I guess my approach would be to, is, authority**, and I think I've told you this other night as far as the authority. You know, there are books that are out there that are written, there's thousands and thousands and thousands of books over the times that have been written, but we know, or at least I know I feel like, { **I went to the most credible source that I could, the one it says, In the beginning God, and then he started right there.** } And when we look at that, as far as us, when you're talking about the Gospels. When we look at in the beginning and all of those books that are right there that tell us, all the Old Testament books, and it gives us basically, basically ([**it's a world history.**])

I: Mm hm.

E': And it comes down through, and we...we know, sometimes we miss those things. Lay people would. Ministers pick it up. Maybe probably more than anything, teachers pick those things up, as we come down through, as it talks about Christ, the branch. Christ is coming. Emmanuel, God with us.

I: The prophecies that started early on.

E': All the prophecies. They began to start even in Genesis, as they come on down, and we do that for roughly 4000 years that we see all of those different prophecies that come down through, and then when we get down where, Isaiah talks about and just basically says right out, there's going to be your Savior, who's born. And so when we get, that sets all of the stage for the gospels to come. So we're taking it to Christ. That's why we do, we take it through the gospel to Christ. Those are, I feel like, and there's probably, there's could probably be conflict. (***I think the four gospels are probably the most important books that we have in our Bible,***) and then there's lots of others that are right there. Just a smidgen away, which according to where you are in your life, with what you're doing, that could be just as important as the gospels.

I: But it does sort of revolve around the whole Bible. All the...from...In the beginning, God created and then it all, it's...leading up... it's bottle necking in Christ...

E': It's all about Christ.

I: And then, and then it branches out, once we start to learn what to do with Christ, and what that means.

E': We've got 'im. He's here, through the gospels. We've got, he's teaching us, he's teaching, the teaching of the apostle for these, (***he's teaching the disciples, and he's, we get it from four different viewpoints,***) which is wonderful, and they differ a little bit each one in his own way, but then they're so alike in their own way.

I: You know, one of the other ways, one of the attacks comes from right there. I've heard people say, Well, how come the four are different? **How come the four gospels don't agree? They'll try to find a wedge there.**

E: Yeah...yeah.

I: Maybe you've heard that before.

E': Three of us sit down and we...we found out, **we did something out here, we would all have three different ideas, wouldn't we?** And we were all for looking at the same exact same thing, but it just, it's that way. { **But when you do that, or when we see that, then we see that God foretold...You know, God knew that it wasn't going to work, to start with, from the beginning when he says in the beginning.** } Let us make man. He said, Let us make man. There's somebody else there with it. It's not me, I mean, not just God, it's "us" and we know the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And then there's a separation, as Christ come for us, and the Holy Spirit is a wonderful thing that we get, as far as when we're baptized. We have a part of God within us. When people say that you don't have to be baptized to go to heaven: I'm not gonna argue with them, but I'm going to tell him this: when Jesus said, I want you to go and I want you to be baptized, and when he said that, that was the reasoning behind it. We gained the gift of the Holy Spirit through baptism.

I: Yeah, that's pretty clear from Acts chapter two.

E': Right, so there's not, there's not any, there's no argument or anything about that.

I: Well, it sounds like... you're... so to wrap up what you're saying and pull it back. It is a fair answer. Somebody asks, what is the what are the attacks on the gospel, and what, how do we answer? **The Bible is the answer.**

E: { **That's what I was saying.** }

E': { **The most important book. If there was, if there were no other books that were ever written...** }

I: ...And you know it's a mouthful but but you've already helped us to filter out because the Bible is the answer. But the Bible is the answer because it's the book about Christ. It's the book that goes from the beginning of creation, and that you alluded to it, but... but God already knew it wasn't going to work, and he already was prophesying Christ, right there in Genesis three, he was already saying you will bite his heel, he will crush your head, but you will bite his heel, and so we know that that's apparently, from what the apostles taught, it was always God's plan. It was always going this way, of justification by faith, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, sanctification walking with Christ...

E': So see...if you...those things that you're saying...

I: ...but you got to bring the whole thing...

E': ...so when we bring that, there, the absolute authority is God.

I: Yeah. It's His Word.

E: { (**Absolute authority. Because it's His Word, he records the history, man, it was by the finger of man, but it was by the mind and the words of God,**) } as He is, all of those books are written for us to know. and as, and those things, as he does, and he tells us, then when we get to the end of it, when our, when we get into the gospels, at the end of the Old Testament and get into the Gospels when Christ comes, we knew he has to come. That's horrible that he has to die in the way that he did, but at the same time, God requires whether we like it or not, and { **this could probably be one of the biggest arguments in the world right now, but God requires a blood sacrifice.** }

I: Yes.

E': When we think about our United States right here. We talked about it. I guarantee you 90% plus would be against killing anybody for anything, but he requires it...

E: Not anything, but it's okay to kill babies.

E': Yeah. Yeah, we got that today from conception, they call it from conception to dilation, is what happened. He talked about doing that, and I agree with him. And I thought my goodness. But anyway. That's...

I: The Virginia Governor was saying that, was talking about the baby being born and then then deciding whether or not to let it live.

E: Yeah. When it's handicapped.

I: Yeah, but so, so again this is good, this is fantastic. By the way, this is exactly what I'm, what I'm looking for. So, so the Bible as the whole word of God. This speaks God's authority. He, God. God is the one who has the authority to answer this, it is by God's authority. We can only defend the gospel on the basis of the authority of God, which is only to be found in the Word of God. And then going back to what [names an elder] was saying, we do have to think about where the persons at, as far as what part of it will, what part of it do they need to be connected with, right? ...depending on where they're at, or or what they understand but but we have to bring all of our knowledge of the whole Bible to bear because all of it fits, right? It, it's all interlocking.

E': And that, and that's what I was talking about a while ago. We don't read and study the Bible enough. Now. When I say that...[names other elder] taught for how many years?

E: I don't know.

E': 45, 50 years now, me, I taught, 25 or six or seven years, and I catch myself on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights, when I go back through and I'm telling the story about something happening when somebody was king, and the Assyrians came in, and the northern kingdom, and I'm quoting, and I say, "Where'd I get that from? I don't remember." I know he does the same thing! I remember exactly. but I don't remember what book I was in, but I know exactly how it was recorded, and I know that's what happens when whenever you read it, { **you study it enough, it just, the Spirit, Holy Spirit just brings it to me.** } And sometimes you would say, My goodness. How does he know all that stuff, and it's because, from studying and studying and reading...

I: It's kind of compacted down in there.

E': I mean, and it's coming back. And so when it comes out that way to me, and I look at it. { **Then I realize that it is absolute, absolute truth. There's nothing else out there that's absolute truth, except God's Word, it's absolute truth.** } It says everything else can be tore up, abused, blown up, withered, fall away.

I: God's Word will never pass away.

E': God's Word will never, never passed away. My Word will never pass away.

I: Yeah.

E: But you... you answered exactly what he's asked, to answer it simply, for me. How do I defend the gospel. That's your question, how to defend the gospel. And I think the first thing to say is just what he been talking about. { **We've got, I've got to know something about the Scripture.** }

I: Mm hm.

E: **I don't know enough. You gotta know it.** }

E': You gotta know. But [names elder], But when you say that, you know us, you and I had studied for years and years and years. And if we live, if you live another 87 years, and I lived another 67 years, we still wouldn't know everything that was there.

E: No, absolutely.

E': We have, we would, we would be really be getting on with program, but we still wouldn't know.

E: But I think we are each required to know to know all we can, and answer why we defend the gospel.

E': You know, King Solomon said there's nothing new under the sun. So all the things that we got going on...today, I read today. I took about three hours at lunch time... I took a long lunch today, and I did a lot of reading and studying back on just some things, and some, some, some commentaries, that kind of thing, but you know, { **with all the study and everything that we do, ...if a person's heart is not receptive...We can talk to we are blue in the face, and we can't have them.** } If... They have to be receptive in some way, and that's when it talks about the conviction of the Holy Spirit, to a person's... they have to... [names elder] has done the same thing. We've called before, we've went out and calling on people together. We don't call much anymore. You know, I would be afraid to go to somebody's house now that I wasn't 100% for sure of, even in Mackville, I might get a 45 back in my face if I went and knocked on somebody's door. Now 25 years ago, we never thought about that. We never thought a thing about that.

I: Things have changed

E': Things have changed, in a wrong way but... but the same old sins... just like I say it, nothing new under the sun. The same old things that are still happening today, just like they were in that time, and we hear Christians say, "Oh, my, how bad we are and can't get much worse." That's what people been saying ever since the Apostle Paul, when he said, when he talked about, he should be really, because he's coming any. Day.

I: If it's okay, let me let me give some examples of what I think attacks are and let you guys comment on because these general answers are really good. So I'm interested in where you would go on a couple specifics. So I'll use an example of a, of a, gentleman I know, and he's a relative of mine, you've actually heard me mentioned him from the pulpit, but on the tape I won't say who he is, but he, he is, in his mind he, he is not a Christian anymore. The reason he's not a Christian is he's got about three, about three main objections. One is what you've already mentioned: Christians have hurt him by disobeying the Lord. Two. He just can't handle the Old Testament; he reads in the Old Testament about the, you know, about the slaughter the Canaanites, or, or God punishing certain people, and it just seems to him like it's not a God of love. And then when you combine that with the, the third thing which is he has, he has watched people that really are solid Christians that he thinks are true believers. He's watched them suffer, and he can't understand how God will let that happen. So. But between, between the failures of Christians, and the sufferings of true Christians, and then that Old Testament, he'll tell you today. He's an atheist. So it's like, then, going back to what you said earlier about the devil. The devil has convinced him of those things. So now he's instead of believing the gospel. He's believed the attacks on the gospel. That's why this topic is, is interesting to me, of defending the gospel. Because when he wants to talk to me (and we don't talk that much anymore) but he used to want to talk about these attacks. He used to want to talk about the Old Testament and...but there... but people have other things like that, you know, God says homosexuality is an abomination. You're talking about God's authority to say that in the Bible. Well, there's an increasing number in the world today that, that is, there, they attack God at that point and they say... well, what do they say? We know what they say. They say, "Well, that's not right because people are born that way," or, or...Let's talk about the age of the Earth a minute. Some people say, "Well, you want to talk about Genesis, one and two, and God created the heavens and the earth. Well, he says he did it in seven days, but I know my science." So again, that then becomes an attack on God's truth.

I: So, let me put it this way. Are there specific attacks that you think have worked to convince people that the Bible isn't true, that you that you think have worked better, and what... how could Christians do a better job at specifically answering those, in addition to the things you've already mentioned.

[Silence a few seconds]

I: So like on the, on the Canaanites thing and the Old Testament. I tried to explain to Nathan look the Old Testament world was a different world. I mean, it was that was a whole different time. So how, so to judge it by today that's... there... That's a mistake. So maybe...

E': You know, when God gave Moses all of the law, the things that he said we're going to happen that-a-way, and you know people couldn't do it. People couldn't do it. I mean, if they buckled down, they could have, but people couldn't do it.

I: Over and over, they didn't, did they?

E': Consistently.

E: They didn't have the willpower.

E': They didn't have the willpower.) And you know God called them. He said...

I: Yeah, there was the golden calf, and there was the manna and the quail...

E': He told 'em, they were a stiff necked people and he told them, he said, I tell you to be holy, because I'm holy.

I: But they wouldn't.

E': They wouldn't. And they didn't do it for 4000 some odd years until Christ came.

I: So it still comes back down to the hard hearts, doesn't it, as what we're talking about...

E': When Christ came it was a whole different dispensation, and when they asked him, they asked Christ, "Well, which...which of the commandments are the most important?" "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." And then as we read through the Gospels and we see, What did Christ do? He did those very things, didn't he? He forgave. He healed. He did all of those things, and then when he left and he told them to do those very things? Didn't he? To go into the world, baptizing, to, I don't remember exactly the exact words he used...

I: Obey. "Teach 'em to obey everything I've commanded" which is those two things.

E': So when you look at it, and I've been thinking a whole lot about it over the last 10, 15 years...when you look at... if we're going to go, and we're going to spend eternity. I don't know how big eternity is, it's further than my little mind can comprehend. But before that, I'm going to live up with God in his heaven, then we have to love him, and we have to desire to obey Him. If not, how we goin' get along with Him? Because he tells us, when he's talking about the New Jerusalem coming down, out of heaven, and there will be no sin, and he talks about no crying, you know, all the things that will be that will not be there. How are we going to stay, and live there, because we don't abide by the rules?

E: That'll be no problem. Satan's not going to be there.

E': Yeah, yeah. That's what I'm saying. But I guess that's what I was getting' at, [names elder], we have to start while we're here to make those things work right.

E: Well...

I: Well, it's one of the reasons unbelievers won't be happy there, because none of it will fit. None of it will make sense, they won't want it.

E': Right. So here, **if you have an excuse, like the, I believe it was the movie is God's Not Dead**, God is Alive, God's Not Dead... I forget now, was about the college teacher...

I: God's Not Dead.

E': God's Not Dead, I believe is what it was. And the man got 'im, I think he'd gotten hit by a car or something or another and there he laid in the middle of the street, and the minister went over, and got him, got him up in his arms, and he asked him, he said, { (**"Do you believe in Jesus?" ...which he had not the whole time. And he said, "Yes, I believe, I do believe in Jesus" and he said, "Good, you're answering the right answers for me, because," he said, "just in the next few minutes you're going to meet him."**)

E': Because he knew he was going to die. Yeah. So when you look at that situation and we all don't have the opportunity to do it. But when we're laying on our deathbed in some hospital somewhere, and we're not a baptized believer in Christ...And when you look at it, are you going to be worried about how do you get those cows put in like I should have? Well, the car didn't get up the hill in the snow. **You have two options you're gonna believe about.** Where'm I going to be at? And what's going to happen to my family? ...because people don't forget their families. What's gonna happen to my family? **And you better make for sure that you're then, at that time, where somebody can ask you, "Do you believe in Jesus?" "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and my personal savior."** That's where we

have to be at, and then we can be in that place with Christ. If not, that's what he did on the cross, you know, **he told him, the guy, he said, "Today, you're going to be in paradise with me." He only told one of 'em that.**

I: Not the other one.

E': The other one didn't get opportunity because **your heart was not in the right place.** } Yeah, and that's what happens with our world.

I: But you're bringing this back to the heart, that hard heart.

E': The heart's not in the right place. And we have that. { **We have it, we have that with the same sex marriage people. They, they don't want to change their heart. We have that with the gays and lesbians. They don't want to change their heart. We have that with the people who love their money more than they love their family and love their God, all of those things. See, and they they tend to interrupt the relationship with God.** } And the only way we can do it..and that's what Christ says when he talks about it... he said, "No man comes to the Father except through me. Except through me." And our world right now...[names elder] we was talking about it in Sunday school 100 times anyway, most people out there in the world believe there is a God, but they don't even have a clue who Christ is.

E: Oh yeah, it's a lot of people.

E': **He might he might be the God of the sun, or the moon, or something like that. Maybe there's a God but they don't have a clue who Christ is.** The importance of Christ.

E: Yes, a lot of people in that situation.

E': Yeah, I mean, lots and lots of people in that situation. And the world. I don't know how we were able to I love to listen to David Jeremiah and Chuck Swindoll and Dr Dobson (I think he's retired now) but those are my three guys that I really go to on it, and I don't know how they got radio shows and TV shows and then they're on the internet now, you can get on anywhere and you can pick those things up. **But how do you make the rest of the world that are non-Christians, how do you make them understand the { importance of those wonderful words that come from God word? }**

[Silence]

E': And it's just like we say when we're talking about when you go out there. If the heart. If the Holy Spirit is not able to get into the heart and make it receptive. It's a stiff necked people id'n' it? Too stiff-necked people who have no desire until that time, if they're fortunate enough to have somebody come to 'em on their deathbed. and you know like we just talked about Sunday [names elder] he said, "You know, he says it states in the Bible, they're going to be people who get there with the smell of smoke on 'em."

[Laughter all around]

E': That's what you said! We talked about it Sunday. That's gonna be those people that's got smoke on 'em. All of a sudden they're going to realize hey man, this is it. My number has been punched. This is it. I've got the opportunity. Whether I know anything else or not. I know that Jesus loves me and I love him now. Might not loved 'im all these years I've been here but buddy, I'm loving 'im now.

I: Gave them gave them that last 10 minutes!

E': You know, workers in the field!

I: The ones that came late got the same reward the ones that came early.

E': Just about five minutes before the time for the for the master to come in to do it, they got the same pay!

I: the early ones didn't like it.

E': No, they didn't like it at all. We probably won't! and you know we've talked about this to how blessed and how fortunate we are that we were raised by a good Christian mom and dad and Christian family, you just look at all of [names elder]'s family, all the girls and sons and sons-in-law and everything, are all worshipping Christian people who do that, and we're the same way with our gang. This... they're all ...they're all...how blessed we are. And the male of the family has let the family down over the years. They can say whatever they want.

E: Absolutely.

E': The male of the family has let the family down, because the children do what the dad does, and the mom does what the dad does, as long as they are doing the good things for Christ. That's what they're doing, if they're doing the right things, and if the dad is shooting drugs, and the mom is wild as a billy-goat...

I: Yeah.

E': You can bet that the children...that doesn't mean they don't have a chance somewhere or another down the line to come to Christ, but more than likely they're going to be heading in the wrong direction.

I: You know, we keep... we keep...I notice that you two gentlemen...the answer on defending the gospel keeps going in a main direction, which is talking about the heart; talking about the importance of... Well, the first thing we said was, this is a spiritual battle; the devil's the one attacking the gospel, and he's using it. He's attacking it by attacking us, by attacking us at the point of our temptation, and then we're talking about God's authority, is how we defend the gospel, but we defend it with the whole word of God, even as it points to Christ. It's still, it's the whole Bible that explains who Christ is, because people don't have the first idea who he is. The Bible is how they learn, and then the hard heart is really what gets in the way of that. So I'm trying to recap what we've said, and then the, the last thing we were just talking about [names elder] was, was the fact that this hard heart is everywhere in the world, and... and people have... without the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and without the heart breaking, the opportunity is going to pass them by.

I: So what, what we really keep talking about is, is not the gospel itself, and not the defense of the gospel. We're talking about, about what the Holy Spirit does; and we're talking about the role of the, the condition of the heart. And these are things that... So my question sets it up as if there's something we can do about the defense of the gospel, but it sounds like what we're really talking about is the heart is the biggest factor in it and the other biggest factor in it is the Holy Spirit and the the thing that is the defense of the gospel is bringing the word to bear, but the heart and the Holy Spirit are what have to come into play. Otherwise, we could defend it all day long. We can we can bring the Bible and bring it like a club, bring it like a like a blunt instrument. But what we really face in the world today like with [names the relative who's turned from Christianity]. We have a heart problem, a big heart problem. And that's where all the attacks come from. If you look at it and he is a good example of that. Why is he... why is he attacking the gospel. Well, because his heart's hard. It's hard, and any one of these little piecemeal things I try to answer for him, they're not going to amount to much, because his heart is... unless it somehow punches through and breaks that heart...

E: That's the Holy Spirit.

I:...but the Holy Spirit has to do that. That's right. Is there anything you want to add to that, or hone in on?

E': Every day, and I know you're probably done it too, that we go out every day, and of course [names elder] can't work like you used to, but (**everywhere that we go we basically wear Christ 'crosst here. 'crosst here. [gestures to heart]. A Christian man. That has to do with the things that we do, with the dealings that we do, with the words that we say...** sometimes we get our sales from groups and we've done it, [names elder] and myself. I hate to tell you the same thing, we've been in groups of people that

there was a lot of non-Christians there, but that doesn't mean that we're supposed to be a non-Christian. It means we're supposed to be a Christian while we're in that whole deal, **so we can't jump up and say, "Oh my goodness, you got to be a Christian man. If you don't, you're not goin' to heaven."** What's that do to 'im? Well, **that makes him mad and turns 'im off, dud'n it? Turns 'im off.** But **whenever he watches us, and he sees us, and how we act, and the things that we do,**) and even while ago you were talking about the things that happen. { **You just look at Job, Job, for instance, again, another case, you take out what happened to him and we know what it was. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.** You runnin' out of time?

I: We're good.

E': And so that was Job's whole attitude. God gave it to me. And so therefore I'm happy to have it; and if he takes it back, it belongs to him. Now that should be our attitude with what we do, everything we do it with, because God made it all, everything that we see, or touch, and knowin' things that I can't even see out there in the atmosphere. **God made all of those things. So therefore he is the absolute authority, the creator, the maker of all things. So he owns the details,** as he owns the cattle on a thousand hills, I forget how the song goes (it's a camp song)...but anyway...So, therefore, if we... if we don't turn our hearts around, to make it work in the right way, then we will never ever know. So **it doesn't make any difference. If the heart is not receptive to it, it won't work.** }

E: That's... that goes back...I think, as an individual... You have to work... { **you have to study the Scripture and the more you study the more you learn, the more you understand, the greater the Holy Spirit is to you.** } You know, I mean me, I know he's part... Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit, the way I read the Scripture and understand the Scripture, the Holy Spirit is what really leads and guides their lives. You know, I think...

I: That's what we're talking about tonight with the defense of the gospel, the Holy Spirit.

E: I thought about that and we are...

I: The Holy Spirit's the key to the whole thing from beginning to end, because it's hearts, we're dealing with right? I mean, I can't convict anybody, no matter how much truth I tell, right? I mean, is that part of what we're talking about?

E: Well...

I: The Holy Spirit has to be the, the one who decides what to say and when to say it. And then we listen to him, right?

E: It's just like he was talking about. He can be up teaching and som'n just come to you. Where is that coming from? It's the Holy Spirit.

I: Hmm.

[Silence]

E': As it appears to me, he sometimes very hard, or technical, I don't know the right word for it, but when it really comes down to it, there's nothing... Jesus says, letting your burden on me and I will, might get, I don't remember the exact words, but I will make your burden easy, your yoke light, you know where I'm talkin' bout.

I: Yes.

E': So, { **when we take our hearts and we put our hearts in Jesus hand, we, we, we have a whole different perspective, priorities are forgotten then, the priorities of money, power, of pride, of**

whatever, whatever it is that's your priority, and all of a sudden, then Christ becomes the main focus and then you're looking at a situation where, how can I help others. What can I do.

I: Because what you're talking about, [names elder], is it seems like that's how Paul flipped. That's what popped into my head as soon as you were talking about priorities are no more. The money and those things. If you look at how Paul was before the Lord knocked him down on the Damascus Road, he was, he was just absolutely, thought he was pleasing God, but put that aside. He was absolutely obsessed with what he thought the priorities were.

E: Absolutely.

I: ...and then one second later, after he said, you know, "Lord, who are you?" and he said, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you're persecuting," he got up, and, soon as he started to get direction about going and seein' Ananias, and it was...he was a different... it was a completely different heart.

E: Yeah.

E': Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And, why do you kick against the goads? I ask my Sunday school class every time. What's a goad? Most people don't know what's a goad. What is it, it was ox. That's what they use, and it had stickers on it, and a chain on it, and they'd take that instead of whippin' they'd hit 'em right in the flank, and that's a goad, and that's what he was doing to Christ. He was hittin', **Christ was the goad, why persecutest thou me, and when all of a sudden, when he realized... it's... it's a shame that we don't have today..that we don't have that particular situations that people... I mean, Paul through direct revelation got dropped on his knees, made him blind, and it says, For the next 14 years Paul was trying to catch up for all the things he'd done, and I'm sure in that 14 years time, Christ, or God, came to 'im. Christ came to, the Holy Spirit came to 'im, fell upon 'im to reveal all of those wonderful things, to him, just look. }**

I: I mean, he wrote half the New Testament.

E': Half the New Testament. He did absolutely stuff today that we look at, that we couldn't even think about doing those things. Being run off, being shipwrecked, being stoned, and coming back into the city, being run off from the places as he was, and he shook himself off and went to the next place. How can we do all of those things? A and and all along the way he just...

E: (**Paul never did think he was ever good enough.**

E': **Yeah. He really didn't.**

E: **He recognized what had happened. Then when he when Christ came to him and he was willing to go and do what Christ had for him to do, but he never did think he was good enough.**

E': **He just consistently just wanted to do better, do more, do better, do more. Teaching this, doing that.)**

I: He said, "Not that I have already accomplished all this but I press on toward the mark."

E: Yep.

I: Since you...we're talking about Paul, and then we brought him up, because you talked about how the priorities change, when the, when the heart changes just everything that was important before just drops. And so now, but then Paul, if you think about Paul defending the gospel. How did he defend the g... because he did. You can think about ways that he defended the gospel. But as I think about it, the gospel seemed to get attacked within the church, just like you all were talking about earlier, this is, the devil isn't, on Sunday mornings, the Devil's at church. Well, apparently the devil was at all of Paul's churches, which is why we got all those letters. So how did he defend the gospel?

E: I think one of the ways he defended, when he would leave, when he would leave, then **{ the devil would come into this church, then he would write back trying to explain to 'em that you need to get back to the gospel. Get back doing what the gospel said, and he and he would tell 'em, he would tell 'em, "What I have told you is the gospel." And I don't know how... }**

I: That's different with each church...

E': Wouldn't...you know,{ **you have the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is to be in heaven with God, and with Christ, and to be there for however long eternity is...**

E: I can tell you how long it is.

E': How long is it? ...and what do I have to do to get there.

E: Well, you know what, you have to do get there.

E': But I'm saying that, that it's looking at it, from, from just a Christian, and then trying to help somebody to understand this is your goal.

I: Yeah.

E': **This is your goal. It's not an earthly goal. It's not how much money you accumulate.**

I: **Defending the gospel is getting them focused on that, just getting them focused on that, and nothing else.**

E': **Right, because I mean, whether people realize it or not, you're going to die. I mean, you're going to die, whatever it is that you got,** you can already see it. You see, aunt or uncle or grandpa. They've all gone and what they had when they didn't. Nothing was still here actually doesn't it's all still right here. So what you have to make for sure that you take with you. You're a certain, in a way, or in a manner that's going to extend if you like life or if you like these things, then you have to take Christ, you have to take God or the gospel with you in order to attain eternal life, don't you? Eternal life. How you do those things.

I: It's believing the gospel. Yeah, with Paul with, like, with the Galatians, the gospel came under attack to the Galatians through the law or the Old Testament law, Paul said, this is the gospel, now. Don't get distracted by something else that's not the gospel. With the Corinthians, it was all kinds of sins that got them all tangled up and Paul said, Now hold on. This is the gospel. What you're saying, he got them focused on that one thing, no matter what it was. ...You were about to say something.

E: No, I was just listening to you.

I: We're at about the five more minutes mark, so I was...At the end of it, I was just asking just on the topic of being ready to answer anybody who, who asks you to defend the gospel, or asks you to give a reason or defense of the gospel. What have we not said, or what have we, if, if you were to ask somebody about it. What would you ask, or is there any points that we should make in the five minutes we have left.

E': Well, for me, is and there comes cases when we can, or we can't talk to somebody about it, but it has to do with just like a situation of a deathbed deal, is to say, look, I love you. God has instilled in me when (**I changed my heart with the things I did when I was younger and that's, and that's that's true for me. I was not the best guy that ever was when I was younger. Nobody knows it 'cause I'm from Lexington, but when God got a hold of me and change my heart.**) He gave me those those things, and I want you as a non-believers or non-Christian, I want you to have those things, I want you to have all the gifts that I know positively, absolutely, that God is going to give me. **{ Because the only two people that I know that haven't died are Enoch and Elijah. Now everybody else has died, even Christ, went to the cross,**

Christ died for three days and then came back, we don't know of anybody else, and on the cross, he told that that one guy you goin' be in paradise with me today. So that means there's something on the other side that we can't see }. So, so that I guess if I want...that's what you're asking, in't it, is, How can I help somebody...if their heart...

I: How do you boil it down.

E': (**We pray, we pray that the Holy Spirit will come to whoever,**) whatever the case is, and to work on their hearts, to work on their hearts, to make 'em receptive. Then for us to be able to say, [**"Hey buddy, I know how you do it. I found it. I know how it's done.**] I know how it's done. Come on with me, come to church, or come to us as elders, or come to us as deacons."

I: Come hear the gospel.

E': Come hear the gospel. Come hear this minister that we got. [Laughter]

I: We do have a minister! [Laughter]

E: I want to go back and say what I have experienced. Called one person in particular. I talked to him for years and years and years and... **all I could ever get him. I'm not good enough. I'm not good enough** and { **I've tried to explain to him. You don't have to. It's not the goodness part of it. It's accepted. It's acceptance. And I'd go back and try to explain to him. He didn't know anything about Scripture,** and I tried to explain to him about Christ on earth, 'bout Christ, given his life. That when Peter was preaching, and to the crowd there at Pentecost, and they was asking, saying, what must we do to receive Christ, and he told 'em, Acts 2:38 (I won't go through it, for all you know it) and, and that, that's a way I go 'bout it, but I think for you to be able to do that, and **you, you, you got to be prepared. You got to study. You got to know what's in the word.** }

I: Yes sir.

E': I forget... I memorized it about two months ago. { **"Study to show yourself to be approved...a workman"...what is it?** }

E / I [together] **"workman who needs not to be ashamed."** }

E: There you go.

I: But correctly handles the word of truth, or rightly dividing the word of truth, right?

E': And that's what we're to be. All Christians. It dud'n't make any difference if we're elders or deacons or what we are, but that's what we need to be. We need to be a workman.

I: There's no defense of the gospel without rightly dividing the word of truth. and it's work. It is work. ...Fellows, anything else? You've, you've gone around the, around the bend, around the world pretty good with it. Anything else you want to add?

E': I'm really an Old Testament guy. Our whole Sunday school class, they'll tell you I'm an Old Testament guy. But I really enjoyed... I've taught New Testament, a couple of times, but this is about my first time we started in Acts, didn't we? We started in Acts, we left the gospels out because I think you're all's class or somebody was doing the gospels.

E: I've taught through the whole New Testament.

I: I don't think you can really get the New Testament right unless you really know your Old Testament well.

E: You gotta know something about it.

E': Exactly. But yeah, we're at, we're at Second Peter now, so that we're getting pretty close. So when I get there and we're gon' go right on through revelation, is that what y'all wan' do? [asking the elder]

E: I don't know. It don't matter to me.

E': I've taught Revelation four or five times. I'm like that. You know, [indicates a prior preacher] wouldn't teach on Revelation.

I: You talked about that.

E': When he talked about this with us, on the Millenium, he never tell us what.

I: Yeah, that's a good Amillennial though. He won't tell you what, he'll just stay quiet. [Laughter]

E: We had an older man here. Several years ago, a preacher, and he told us he would not he would not teach Revelation. [Laughter]

I: Well, let me get the tape wrapped up here, guys. I just want to thank you again, remind you that this was a confidential and anonymous interview; your names won't go on this, and it won't be, the, the conversation will go into the study, and it will be presented as part of the study, but no other way, and this recording will be destroyed after the transcriptions done, and the transcription will go into the study. So, thank you both very much. And I'm going to stop the tape.

APPENDIX F

MACKVILLE INTERVIEW FINDINGS TWENTY-FOUR (24) OBJECTIONS WITH CODED RESPONSES

1. “I think you got to use common sense and intertwine it with the gospel...it’s different types of people that you talk to...I see how will he receive it, then you know whether to ease it off or whether to go ahead.” I coded this as a straightforward appeal to reason and coded it as **the first classical argument**.
2. “I think Satan...is behind all the attacks that are, and he makes everything so delectable...how did Satan approach Eve? ...in that particular case, that was her weakness.” This mention of Satan as the source of offenses against the gospel drove much of the rest of the interview. It arose because the interviewer deviated from the protocol by mentioning “Satan” as part of a long list of quarters from which the gospel is attacked. This objection topic was discussed for a while. No apologetics insight was advanced. Finally the interviewer summarized the discussion: “This is basically taking the approach that [it] really is the devil attacking the gospel, and he’s doing it through...attacks [by] unbelievers, and even within the church.” The elder agreed with the summary: “Absolutely.”
3. “When you say ‘defense of the gospel’...you saying a mouthful...that’s a whole lot to go up against. And that’s where I think elders are required more so than the average church member. ...Because of your knowledge, but because of who you are.” To the extent this can be coded as an apologetics response, it seems to offer a wise elder to the objector. I marked it as the **first fideistic theme**.
4. “I guess my approach would be...authority. ...I went to the most credible source that I could, the one that says, ‘In the beginning God,’ and then He started right there.” I labeled this as the **first biblical, Reformed argument**. The elder went on to add another component, describing the credibility of the Bible from the Old Testament to the Gospels, “It’s a world history.” In that statement, the elder was echoing two parallel ways of augmenting a biblical defense, asserting its universality and its historicity. I double-coded it as the **second classical argument** and the **first evidentialist one**.
5. “I think the four gospels are probably the most important books that we have in our bible.” Apart from any specific doctrinal reference, this stood out as a nod to the witness to the real Jesus Christ. I marked it as the **second evidentialist note**.
6. “He’s teaching the disciples, and...we get it from four different viewpoints.” In the same vein, I coded this as the **third evidentialist note**.
7. Echoing an objection to differences in the gospels, one elder said, “We [three] did something out here, we would all three have different ideas, wouldn’t we?” He answered his objection: “But...when we see that, then we see that God foretold...from the beginning, when He says ‘In the beginning.’...” Including further commentary, this emerged as a biblical commentary on various topics, whose common thread was the authority of the Bible. I grouped it as a **second Reformed argument**.
8. The interviewer summarized, “The Bible IS the answer.” One elder agreed, “That’s what I was saying.” The other added, “The most important book...if there were no other books that were ever

- written.” He went on, “Absolute authority. Because it’s His Word. He records the history. ...It was by the finger of man, but it was by the mind and the words of God.” This is a **third Reformed defense** with a **fourth evidentialist note** nested in it, the reference to history.
9. After a brief, wide-ranging discussion, an elder asserted, “This could probably be one of the biggest arguments in the world, but God requires a blood sacrifice.” This led to a couple of more topics, but as a standalone statement summarizing several key, complex biblical doctrines, I coded it as a **fourth Reformed defense**.
 10. “You study it just enough...the Holy Spirit just brings it to me...then I realize that it’s absolute, absolute truth. There’s nothing else out there that’s absolute truth, except God’s Word. It’s absolute truth.” I double-coded this, first as a **fifth Reformed theme**, and second, because of the repetition of the phrase “absolute truth,” a **third classical defense** as well.
 11. “We’ve got to know something about the Scripture. ...I don’t know enough. You gotta know it.” I marked this challenge as a **sixth Reformed theme**.
 12. The second elder agreed, “You gotta know.” But he went on to take note of the limits of an elder’s knowledge, even of the Bible, and cautioned, “With all of the study and everything we do...if a person’s heart is not receptive, we can talk til we are blue in the face, and we can’t have them.” As a warning against mere biblical information, apart from a prepared heart, this was coded as the **seventh Reformed defense**.
 13. Significant theological discussion over a wide range of topics led eventually to “the excuses” people make to disbelieve the Gospel. As an answer to these, the elder was reminded of the evangelistic encounter in a celebrated Christian movie. “I believe it was the movie...God’s Not Dead.” The elder recapped the story of the atheist professor who was dying in the street and was approached by the minister. The elder related the man’s acceptance of the gospel in his dying moments, and capped a longer discussion with a comparison to the thief on the cross. “The other one didn’t get the opportunity because [his] heart was not in the right place.” As a refutation of all possible worldly arguments with the whole gospel, I marked this as the **eighth Reformed theme**.
 14. The elder commented further on hard hearts: “We have it...with the same-sex marriage people...the gays and lesbians...the people who love their money more than they love their family and love their God...they don’t want to change their heart.” In context, this appeal against entrenched opposition to the gospel is a point of wholesale biblical defense. I grouped it as the **ninth Reformed marker**.
 15. This same elder expressed an objection, as well as an argument, in the biblical way he framed the question. “How do you make the rest of the world that are non-Christians...understand the importance of those wonderful words that come from God’s Word?” The question seemed rhetorical, its answer self-evident (“we keep telling them”). I counted it the **tenth Reformed defense**.
 16. The interviewer tried to call attention to the strong thread focusing on the heart throughout the whole interview. This led to this affirmative defense from an elder. “Everywhere we go we basically wear Christ...this has to do with...the dealings that we do, the words that we say.” He mentioned objectionable behavior by Christians that might “turn” someone “off,” but not if he’s watching a true Christian and “sees us, and how we act.” This offering of an unobjectionable apologist for the objector to experience, I coded as the **first fideist defense** offered by this group.
 17. The same elder quickly turned to the Biblical account of Job as an exemplar. “You just look at Job...The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh...God made all things. So therefore He is the absolute authority...owns the details...therefore, if we don’t turn our hearts around...it won’t work.” I coded this as the **eleventh Reformed argument**.

18. The other elder spoke up. “You have to study the Scripture and the more you study, the more you understand, the greater the Holy Spirit is to you.” This led to a few exchanges about the role of the Holy Spirit in speaking God’s Word. In context with the rest of the discussion, it seemed to belong with the **Reformed themes, the twelfth mention**.
19. “So when we take our hearts... and... put them in Jesus’ hand, we... have a whole different perspective, priorities are forgotten then... and all of a sudden, then Christ becomes the main focus.” The interviewer cited Paul as exemplar of this. The elder concurred with more discussion. This biblical character study I marked as a **thirteenth Reformed theme**.
20. The first elder spoke up, reflecting on Paul’s humility. “Paul never did think he was ever good enough.” Amid agreement, the other added, “He just consistently wanted to do better, do more...” This seemed to be an impulse to offer the objector a humble apologist. I coded it as the **second fideist defense**.
21. At this point the interviewer asked about how Paul defended the gospel. This same elder immediately described how “when [Paul] would leave, the devil would come into this church, then he [Paul] would write back trying to explain... the... need to get back to the gospel.” This sweeping reference to Paul’s whole epistolary body was categorized as a **fourteenth Reformed theme**.
22. The other elder took his cue from the mention of the gospel to remind us of “the ultimate goal... to be in heaven with God.” The only earthly day that really matters til then is your day of death: “Whether people realize it or not, they’re going to die.” Amid a long discussion about this inevitability, he gave a testimony about how God had changed his heart from when he was a younger man, then returned to a warning that everybody in the Bible but Enoch and Elijah has died, even the Lord Jesus, and “there’s something on the other side that we can’t see.” This extended argument I marked as the **third fideist theme** nested inside the **fifteenth Reformed theme**.
23. The interviewer asked the elders to boil down the discussion. The elder appealed to both prayer and reason: “We pray... that the Holy Spirit will come to whoever... to work on their hearts... then for us to be able to say, ‘Hey buddy, I know how to do it, I found it. I know how it’s done.’” The appeal to follow a personal example and the expectation that the Holy Spirit will work independently of the apologist’s words I categorized as both **fourth and fifth fideist defenses**.
24. The elder who opened the discussion now concluded it by relating a person he used to witness with for years. “All I could ever get [out of] him [was] ‘I’m not good enough.’ I tried to explain it to him... It’s not the goodness part. It’s accepted. It’s acceptance.... He didn’t know anything about Scripture... I tried to explain to him ‘bout Christ on earth.” After more discussion, he concluded with advice to the apologist. “You... you got to be prepared. You got to study. You got to know what’s in the Word.” The other elder reminded us of a biblical quote which all three of us joined in repeating. “Study to show yourselves approved... a workman... who needs not to be ashamed.” This effectively closed the whole interview on a comprehensively biblical note, so I coded the concluding theme as the **sixteenth Reformed defense**.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bahnsen, Greg. *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1998.
- Baker, William R. *Evangelicalism and the Stone Campbell Movement*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006.
- Baucham, Voddie. *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Boa, Kenneth, and Robert M. Bowman. *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity: An Apologetics Handbook*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001.
- Boring, Eugene M. *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples' Biblical Interpretation in North America: Where We've Been—Where We Are—Where Do We Go from Here?* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1997.
- Bogard, Ben M. *Campbellism Exposed: One Hundred One Reasons for Not Being a Campbellite*. Texarkana, TX/AR: Bogard Press, 1970.
- Campbell, Alexander. *The Christian System, in Reference to the Union of Christians: and a Restoration of Primitive Christianity, as Pled in the Current Reformation*. Bethany, VA: A. Campbell, 1840.
- Cherok, Richard J., Robert Owen, and Samuel Underhill. *Debating for God: Alexander Campbell's Challenge to Skepticism in Antebellum America*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2008.
- Clanton, J. Caleb. *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013.
- Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008.
- Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Washington, D.C.: Sage Press, 2013.
- Cowan, Steven B. *Five Views on Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. Kindle.
- DeWalt, Christopher Don. *A Diverse People: How the Leaders of the Restoration Movement View Their Own History and Principles*. Cincinnati: Cincinnati Bible Seminary, 1995.
- Edgar, William, and K. Scott Oliphint. *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A*

Primary Source Reader. Vol. 2. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.

- Foster, Douglas A., Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant, and D. Newell Williams, eds. *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ*. Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Frame, John M. *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*. 2nd ed. Edited by Joseph E. Torres. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015.
- _____. *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995.
- _____. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (Theology of Lordship)*. Philadelphia: P & R, 1987.
- Free, Preston William. "Calvinism and the Early Restoration Movement Leaders." Ph.D. diss., Cincinnati Christian University, 2007.
- Garrett, Leroy. *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches*. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1981.
- Geehan, E. R. *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1971.
- Humble, William J. *Campbell and Controversy: The Story of Alexander Campbell's Great Debates with Catholicism, Presbyterianism, and Skepticism*. Rosemead, CA: Old Paths Book Club, 1952.
- Illingsworth, J.R. *Reason and Revelation: An Essay in Christian Apology*. London: McMillan and Co., Ltd., 1906.
- Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: McMillan Publishing Co., 1943.
- McGarvey, J. W. *Evidences of Christianity*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1974.
- Morley, Brian K. *Mapping Apologetics*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015.
- Owen, Robert. *Debate on the Evidences of Christianity, Held Between R. Owen and A. Campbell*. Ed. A. Campbell. Miami: HardPress, 2017. Kindle.
- Pearcey, Nancy. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity From Its Cultural Captivity*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004.
- Rasor, Peter Jay. "The Influence of Scottish Common-Sense Realism on Alexander Campbell's View of the Nature of Scripture and Hermeneutics." Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013.
- Rushdoony, R.J. *By What Standard? An Analysis of the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til*. Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1995. Kindle.
- _____. *Van Til and the Limits of Reason*. Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon / Ross House Books, 2013. Kindle.
- Smith, Benjamin Lyon, and Alexander Campbell. *The Millennial Harbinger Abridged*.

Rosemead, CA: Old Paths Publishing, 1965.

Stumpf, Samuel Enoch, and James Feiser, *Philosophy: History and Problems*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.

Sweiss, Khaldoun, and Chad V. Meister. *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Van Til, Cornelius. *The Defense of the Faith*. Philadelphia: P & R, 1955.

_____. *Christian Apologetics*. William Edgar, ed. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003.

_____. *Reformed Epistemology*. Westminster Theological Seminary Archives, 1925.
Kindle.

ABSTRACT

CAMPBELL AND “EXPOSITORY APOLOGETICS”: PRESUPPOSITIONALISM CRITIQUES CAMPBELL’S “ORIGINAL GOSPEL”

Jason Matthew Murray, D.Ed.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Theodore J. Cabal

Presuppositional apologetics has emerged in the last century as a singular yet complex answer to modern and postmodern attacks on the gospel. For Campbellite Christians who hold to evangelical confession and identity, the biblical confessions and commitments inherent to presuppositional apologetics represent both an opportunity and a challenge. Campbellites and other evangelicals have available common ground in practical presuppositionalism, but practical presuppositionalism also challenges Campbellites who may take up its philosophy and method of apologetics. This thesis offers an introductory exploration of the common ground and the challenge.

The practical presuppositionalism explored here is derived from Voddie Baucham’s *Expository Apologetics*, framed against Cornelius Van Til’s *My Credo*, with definition and context provided by John Frame’s *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of his Thought*. Elements of this practical presuppositionalism are identified, qualified, placed in parallel, and synthesized. The synthesis is then held up for comparison and contrast with relevant elements of the introduction to Alexander Campbell’s *Christian System*. The result is both an affirmation and a critique of the restorationist apologetic of Campbell. Presuppositionalism affirms Campbell’s commitment to the totality, priority, supremacy, and necessity of biblical thought, but challenges Campbell on his use of reason as an unqualified utility.

VITA

Jason Matthew Murray

EDUCATIONAL

B.A., Hope International University, 1992
M.Div., Emmanuel Christian Seminary, 2006
Th.M., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017

ACADEMIC

Adjunct Faculty, John Brown University, 2007
Adjunct Faculty, Louisville Bible College, 2019-

MINISTERIAL

Associate Preacher, Deer Creek Christian Church, Blackwell, Oklahoma,
1987-1988
Minister, Lytle Creek Community Church, Scotland, California, 1991-1992
Minister, Bell Gardens Christian Church, Bell Gardens, California, 1992-1995
Minister, Keenerville Christian Church, Hot Springs, North Carolina, 1995-
1999
Youth Minister, First Christian Church, Anaheim, California, 2000-2003
Minister, First Christian Church, Siloam Springs, Arkansas, 2004-2009
Evangelist, Draper Park Christian Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2009-
2013
Worship Director, Community Christian Church, Moore, Oklahoma, 2014-
2015
Associate Preacher, Village Church of Christ, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,
2015
Minister, Mackville Christian Church, Mackville, Kentucky, 2016-