

# THE FIREPLACE

“The place where Wisdom  
is transacted”





# APOLOGETICS SESSION THREE

# QUESTION OF METHODOLOGY

What is at stake?

1. Is there Such a Thing as truth or is truth relative?
2. What is the correct test for the truth by which one can judge truth or falsity of a given view?
3. What is the best method of responding to issues raised against Christianity?

# **MAIN CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO APOLOGETICS**

- 1. The Presuppositionalism of Cornelius Van Til**
- 2. Evidentialism of John Warwick Montgomery**
- 3. Systematic Consistency of Norman Geisler**
- 4. Reformed Epistemology (Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wostertooft)**
- 5. Defensive Strategy- Combination of Methods: Evidential, Consistency and Reliability of Scripture**

# **1. The Presuppositionalism of Cornelius Van Til**

**Others like Gordon Clark and Francis Schaeffer belong to this general group.**

# **Presuppositionalism:**

**Presupposition is a belief that one holds before proving it. Every one therefore holds a presupposition on what reality is. The Christian apologist should also state his presupposition as Scripture. What is true is what is in line with Scripture.**

## **Evaluation:**

**Van Til confuses apologetics with systematic theology which is directed to Christians who have an idea of what Scripture says.**

## **2. The Evidentialism of John W. Montgomery.**

**Evidentialism maintains that a belief is rational for a person only if that person has sufficient evidence or arguments or reasons for that belief.**



## **Antony Flew:**

**“If it is to be established that there is a God, then we have to have good grounds for believing that this is indeed so. Until or unless some such grounds are produced, we have literally no reason at all for believing; and in that situation the only reasonable posture must be that of either the negative atheist or the agnostic” (The Presumption of Atheism)**

## **Natural Theology: (*Thomas Aquinas-13<sup>th</sup> century*):**

**This is the attempt to demonstrate the rational acceptability of belief in God through the natural light of reason (without appeal to special revelation).**

### **Classical Natural theology:**

**Tries to attain this end with statements that all rational creatures are obliged to accept.**


# **The evidential objection to the belief in God:**

**Theism is not rational because there is not sufficient evidence for that belief.**

**1. It is irrational or unreasonable to believe in God in the absence of sufficient evidence.**

**AND**

**2. There is no evidence or at any rate not sufficient evidence for the proposition that God exists.**

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- a) His starting point is that one should not just accept Scripture as authoritative without any evidence for its authority**
  - b) His method emphasizes on: historical evidence.**

**1) Textual and historical principles show that the Gospels are trustworthy historical documents.**

**. Bibliographical Test: We can establish what was written by the original authors.**

**. Internal Test: There are clues within Scripture that would confirm truth.**

**. External Test: There are external evidences that attest to the truth of the gospels.**

**ii) Jesus claimed to be God and said he would prove by the resurrection.**

**iii) Establish the resurrection as a historical fact from the Gospels.**

**iv) Since Jesus is the son of God, everything he said as true is including the OT (Jn 17:17)**

**v) Therefore Christianity is true.**

## **Evaluation:**

**1) Resurrection is a debatable point**

**2) Jesus could be phoney**


**3) Not rigorous as evidential as he ought to be.**

**Historian C. B. McCullagh lists six tests which historians use in determining what is the best explanation for given historical facts in his book, “Justifying Historical Descriptions”. The hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead” passes all these tests:**




**The hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead” passes all these tests:**

**1. It has great explanatory scope: it explains why the tomb was found empty, why the disciples saw post-mortem appearances of Jesus, and why the Christian faith came into being.**



**2. It has great explanatory power: it explains why the body of Jesus was gone, why people repeatedly saw Jesus alive despite his earlier public execution, and so forth.**



**3. It is plausible: given the historical context of Jesus' own unparalleled life and claims, the resurrection serves as divine confirmation of those radical claims.**

**5. It is in accord with accepted beliefs. The hypothesis: “God raised Jesus from the dead” doesn’t in any way conflict with the accepted belief that people don’t rise naturally from the dead. The Christian accepts that belief as wholeheartedly as he accepts the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead.**

**6. It far outstrips any of its rival hypotheses in meeting conditions (1)-(5). Down through history various alternative explanations of the facts have been offered, for example, the conspiracy hypothesis, the apparent death hypothesis, the hallucination hypothesis, and so forth. Such hypotheses have been almost universally rejected by contemporary scholarship. None of these naturalistic hypotheses succeeds in meeting the conditions as well as the resurrection solution.**

### **3. Systematic Consistency: Norman Geisler**

**a) Background:**

**i) Establish a criterion by which one judges the truth or falsity of a given world view.**

**ii) Geisler's test of truth and falsity of a world view is:**

**. Whatever is unaffirmable because it is self-defeating is false (contradictory).**

**. Whatever is undeniable is true**

**iii) Test for truth according to Geisler is Systematic Consistency.**

## **b) The Method**

**i) Using the test of truth construct an argument for the existence of God which will be true.**

**ii) Pick the brand of theism that makes most sense of the facts using the criterion of systematic consistency.**

## **c) Evaluation:**

**i) His test of truth is too narrow -  
my experience in a judge of truth**

**ii) His argument for God's  
existence does not work -**

**(Cosmological - contingency)**

**iii) Not necessary to prove that  
this is a theistic world before one  
can have evidence for it.**



## **4. Reformed Epistemologists (Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wosterstooff).**

**Belief in God is properly basic to the theist, therefore the theist has a rational right to believe in God even if he cannot prove his existence.  
(Properly basic belief is a believe that one has but not on the basis of other beliefs and is justified in doing so).**

## **5. Defensive Strategy**

**a) In regard to criterion of truth, a combination of Geisler and evidential data should be used.**

**b) Best way to defend faith, evidential in a broad sense: Give evidence that shows that one is right and eliminate the other arguments.**


**.. Demonstrate reliability of Scripture**

**.. Go to the resurrection as soon as possible.**


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**3. It is plausible: given the historical context of Jesus' own unparalleled life and claims, the resurrection serves as divine confirmation of those radical claims.**



**4. It is not ad hoc or contrived: it requires only one additional hypothesis: that God exists. And even that needn't be an additional hypothesis if one already believes that God exists.**

**5. It is in accord with accepted beliefs. The hypothesis: “God raised Jesus from the dead” doesn’t in any way conflict with the accepted belief that people don’t rise naturally from the dead. The Christian accepts that belief as wholeheartedly as he accepts the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead.**



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As an aside, when asked, “You accept the historical Jesus?”, **Albert Einstein's** reply was “Unquestionably! No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.” Albert Einstein, from an interview with the *Saturday Evening Post*

