



What Is Apologetics? (Part Two)

Script References

Introduction

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Welcome to The Apologist by the Cántaro Institute, a podcast for the advancement of the Christian philosophy of life. Your host is Christian thinker and Institute Director, Steven R. Martins. This episode is brought to you by Biblios Clothing Company. For apparel and accessories that spark gospel conversations, visit www.bibliosclothing.com.

What Is Apologetics?

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Greetings from the Cántaro Institute. In our last podcast, we had opened with the question, What is Apologetics? We looked at 1 Peter, chapter 3, verse 15, from which we derived the term "Apologetics", and we finished with a defining quote by the late theologian Cornelius Van Til. Here again is that quote from Van Til's book *Christian Apologetics*, published by PNR Publishing. I quote, "Apologetics

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is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life." There's a lot to unpack there, so let's just take this one step at a time. Apologetics is a multifaceted discipline. It has many aspects that, for the untrained believer, can make it appear daunting or even intimidating. But with adequate instruction, coupled with a faith

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firmly rooted in Scripture, the believer can be furnished with a powerful and effective Gospel witness. Now there is no need to reinvent the wheel, so I'd like to bring to our attention what the theologian John M. Frame writes in regard to the three aspects of Christian apologetics. In his book *Apologetics*, from which we can see Van Til's influence, in fact if you weren't

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aware Frame was a student of Van Til while at Westminster Theological Seminary, Frame lists these aspects of the apologetic discipline as apologetics as proof, apologetics as defense, and apologetics as offense. Again, I'll restate that. The first aspect of the apologetic discipline is apologetics as proof. The second, apologetics as defense. And the third, apologetics as offense.

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In regard to the first aspect, apologetics as proof, the discipline of apologetics is to be understood as presenting a rational basis for the Christian faith, or to put it differently, more succinctly, presenting the Christian religious worldview as the only rational worldview. What do I mean by a religious worldview?

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Well firstly, a worldview can be defined as, according to the late Greg L. Bahnsen, another student of Van Til, a network of quote, pre-suppositions regarding reality or metaphysics, knowing or

epistemology, and conduct or ethics, in terms of which every element of human experience is related and interpreted. To put it more simply.

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a system of beliefs, a set of presuppositions concerning reality, ethics, and knowledge. And this worldview is inherently religious because man is inherently religious. Man in his living and thinking has a supra-rational faith. That might be a new term for you. A supra-rational faith. That is to say, a faith that transcends the rational in some ultimate

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that lies at the root of his worldview. Know that supra-rational is not equivalent to irrational. A person's worldview, and everyone has a worldview, could then be considered the structure of his or her presuppositions. Think of this as the structural aspect. And his or her religion could then be considered the direction of his or her presuppositions.

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Think of this as the directional aspect, in that some object, the ultimate that lies at the root of or behind the worldview, is worshipped. This reality is evident in the plethora of religions and philosophies, in terms of organized thought systems, that have existed throughout human history.

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Apologetics involves proving the truthfulness of the Christian religious worldview by demonstrating the impossibility and thus futility of the contrary. That is what Van Til meant by the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life. Christianity is true, in other words, because of the impossibility of the contrary. I'll say that again. Christianity is true

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because of the impossibility of the contrary. If we happen to ask ourselves where we see this in the Bible, we could look to the prophet Isaiah who illustrates the futility of worshipping a graven image that was recently shaped from a tree that one had cut down. You can read that in Isaiah chapter 44, verses 12 to 20. Paul also does this as part of his speech at the Areopagus in Acts chapter 17.

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We'll explore this a bit more when we dive into apologetic methodology. As for the second aspect of the apologetic discipline, that being apologetics as defense, this is to be understood as answering the objections of unbelief. Consider for example Paul's words to the Philippians, "I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment

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and in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel", Philippians 1, verse 7. What Paul means by confirmation is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life, but what he means by defense is the giving of answers to objections. Having come from an anti-intellectual bubble myself, in terms of my spiritual upbringing in the Pentecostal church community,

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and I should note that I'm not a Pentecostal today, but rather a Reformed Baptist. That's a story for another day. I have heard it said that objections are to be altogether ignored or rebuked. That is not, however, what we see in Scripture. On numerous occasions Paul answered his objectors. Even objections that he had anticipated might arise amongst those whom he ministered to. It could be said that he was always ready.

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As for the third aspect of the apologetic discipline, that being apologetics as offense, this is to be understood as attacking the foolishness of unbelieving thought. What do I mean by that? I do not mean mockery or ridicule. This would contravene Peter's instruction to respond with gentleness and reverence. I mean, rather, attacking the antithetical

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presuppositional pillars. For what purpose? Firstly, for the glory of God, and secondly, so that all men may be left without excuse before God. We are, in other words, to stop their mouths from running, to shut them up, to make it clear that their denial of the biblical God is not due to a lack of knowledge, for we all possess the *sensus divinitatus* as per Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and

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according to Paul's writing in Romans 1, verse 18, but rather because of their sinful rebelling against their Creator and sovereign. As Paul aptly writes in 2 Corinthians 10, verse 5, "we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ." How to best understand what Paul writes? Here Bahnsen is helpful.

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Bahnsen in his book *Always Ready*, writes, and I quote, "Believers have the advantage of the best reasoning in philosophy because Christ is the source of all knowledge, all knowledge, not simply religious matters or sentiment. Any alleged wisdom which follows the traditions of men and elementary principles of the world, rather than Christ, is to be rejected as dangerous and deceitful. We are not to obscure the glory and veracity of God

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by answering unbelievers with appeals to blind faith or thoughtless commitment. We are to cast down reasonings in every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, realizing all along that we cannot do so unless we ourselves bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." If I might put it another way, as it concerns intellectual discourse, as it concerns the apologetic discipline,

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we shoot ourselves in the foot when we depend on man's fallen wisdom, whether it be imparted from the ancient Greeks, or the spiritual gurus of the ages, or the enlightened philosophers, or the evolutionary naturalists and secularists of the present, etc. We must strive to be distinctly Christian in our thinking, distinctly biblical, with Christ as the source of all knowledge,

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as our ultimate starting point in our thinking. We cannot destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God when we are borrowing from those very same arguments and lofty opinions. What we end up doing is playing right into the unbeliever's hands. We need to be distinctly Christian in our thinking. Now that is a matter worth exploring, and I keep saying

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this and that for another time, and I have to say the same about this as well, but I will also add that the Cántaro Institute has two books coming out this year on this very matter, one written by Josué Reichow and another that I wrote myself titled *Towards a Christian Understanding*. You might do well to begin with mine first before you take a stab at Reichow, since it will provide you with an introductory base. For now, it suffices to say that

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the believer's allegiance to Christ must be made manifest in our thinking, for this reflects the fulfillment of the apologetic prerequisite, honoring Christ as holy in our hearts. This loyalty, this basic heart commitment, this ultimate presupposition of Christ as the source of all knowledge, as Christ as our ultimate starting point, stands in contrast to the sin-induced hostility

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of the natural man who stumbles in the dark, vainly attempting to invent his own reality from his pretended autonomy. Returning to the matter of the aspects. The apologetic discipline consists of three aspects that very much do overlap, and this is because the aspects presuppose and supplement one another. Consider what Frame has to say. I quote

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"To give a full account of the rationale of Christian belief, the first aspect, one must vindicate that rationale against the objections, the second aspect, and alternatives advanced by unbelievers, the third aspect." Understanding these three aspects then, as apologetics as proof, defense, and offense, how do we now understand the nature and scope of the apologetic discipline?

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What does the apologetic discipline cover in terms of its ground? Pull up Amazon.ca or.com depending on where you are, and just pull it up on your internet browser and type in "apologetics" in the search field, and then click enter. What do you think you're going to find? Most of the books that come up, if you're searching based on popularity, are along the lines of the historical and theological.

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Perhaps even the philosophical, though not in the Dooyeweerdian sense, that is, concerning the comprehensiveness of our world and life view. I grew up personally reading Josh McDowell's *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Norman Geisler's *Big Book of Christian Apologetics*, and Lee Strobel's *The Case for* series, you know, the case for Christ, the case for Creator, etc. They all dealt with factual, historical, and theological matters, but they were very much constrained there.

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To best describe this apologetic, known as evidential and classical, both distinct from one another, these were surface-level apologetics that can be likened to a dull blade that neither cuts nor pierces. In other words, ineffective. To understand the true scope of apologetics, we need to gain a biblical understanding of the scope of the Gospel. Let me briefly explain. The good news of Jesus Christ

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is not solely that of Savior, but that of Redeemer of the whole cosmos, beginning with the human heart. The Gospel is not solely concerned with the spiritual life of the individual, though it certainly begins there, but is rather all comprehensive and all-encompassing. Van Til is our helpful guide towards understanding the nature and scope of the apologetic discipline. In his book *Christian Apologetics*,

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he explains that while the evidential deals largely with the historical, apologetics is far more expansive in that it deals most prominently with the philosophical. Allow me to elaborate on what Van Til meant. While evidential, also referred to as factual, argumentation can be necessary at times, such a discussion cannot really or properly take place

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until the underlying philosophy of evidences and facts are first addressed. For example, a naturalist may want to discuss evidence for the Big Bang in relation to the origin of the cosmos, but in order to properly discuss the presented evidence, a discussion must first be had as to what evidence is, how evidence can be intelligible to the human mind,

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how we can know with certainty that we are rightfully interpreting the data. As Van Til writes, I quote, "To interpret a fact of history involves a philosophy of history. But a philosophy of history is at the same time a philosophy of reality as a whole. Thus we are driven to philosophical discussion all the time and everywhere." If we are then driven to philosophical discussion

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all the time and everywhere, and philosophy can be defined as the discipline of the disciplines, as articulated by the Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd and elaborated today by the philosopher Daniel F. M. Strauss, then we must understand the scope of apologetics to be all comprehensive. And this means that, though we could certainly narrow our focus down to specifics, we cannot by any means break down the

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Christian religious worldview into multiple independent components when it is truthfully a whole unit. How can our apologetic not be all-encompassing? How can our apologetic not be comprehensive when Christ is Lord not solely over the Church but over all creation? The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 27.

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"for God has put all things in subjection under Christ's feet." Everything within creation is under the dominion of Christ. He is the absolute sovereign. And this means that the apologetic discipline cannot be reduced to factual, evidential, or historical matters, but must be naturally extended to every sphere of life. As Christians, as apologists,

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remember what I had said in the last episode? We are all apologists whether we like it or not, we have a worldview that has much to say about government, politics, ethics, education, the arts, and everything else under the sun, because the Bible has that much to say. Up until this point, we have looked at what the apologetic discipline covers. But there is more to its nature as a discipline, such as

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What is the *modus operandi* of the apologetic mandate, or the apologetic instruction as laid out by the Apostle Peter? The answer to that question is tied to the missional function of the Church, and we read of this in Matthew 5, verses 13-16. Consider what Jesus says, and I quote, "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?"

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It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Do you know how I said that there were three aspects to the apologetic discipline?

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Well, there are two facets to its *modus operandi*, its operational method, that of preservation and advancement. From what we can understand from Jesus' teaching, the Church is called to be the salt of the earth, which means that as the Gospel is proclaimed and as the teaching of the Word of God is wisely applied, there ought to be a regression or sudden restraint of the darkness brought about by man's sinfulness in the world.

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The Prince of Preachers, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, testifies of this, writing, "In the Church there is a preserving force to keep the rest of society from utter corruption. If the Church were not scattered among men, the rice would putrefy. We are to remove the darkness of ignorance, sin, and sorrow." But preservation alone is insufficient. This is why the Church is called to be the light of the earth.

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How might we understand that phrase? To be the light of the earth, or to be lighted by Christ, as Spurgeon says, is to make known that gospel, that good news that proclaims the Christian philosophy of life to all the four corners of the world, to every societal sphere, to every cultural aspect. And it is by doing so that light is shed upon that which was dark and hidden,

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and in effect vanquishes the dark, for it is judged by the light, the light of Christ, the sovereign King and Lord overall, the Judge over all creation. This facet of advancement has been manifested throughout the history of the Church whenever it has been found to be faithful to its scriptural mandate. That is, when the Church has been found faithful to its scriptural mandate.

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And as to what that might look like in modern terms: David Chilton writes in his book *Paradise Restored* that this passage is, and I quote, "nothing less than a mandate for the complete social transformation of the entire world. We are commanded to live in such a way that someday all men will glorify God, that they will become converted to the Christian faith. The point is that if the Church is obedient,

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the people and nations of the world will be disciplined to Christianity. We all know that everyone should be a Christian, that the laws and institutions of all nations should follow the Bible's blueprints. But the Bible tells us more than that. The Bible tells us that these commands are the shape of the future. We shall change the world." In summary, then, the apologetic discipline consists of three aspects, proof, defense,

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and offense. It consists of two facets, preservation and advancement. Just as the three aspects presuppose and supplement one another, so do the two facets. For how can there be any preservation of what is true, what is beautiful, and what is good, if there is no advancement of the Christian philosophy of life? And how can there be any advancement of the Christian philosophy of life if there is no preservation of what is true, what is beautiful,

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and what is good. You ask, What is apologetics? Here now is a fuller response compared to what I had given in our last episode. Christian apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life over all non-Christian philosophies of life, and this consists of presenting a rational basis for the Christian religious worldview, answering the objections of unbelief

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and destroying all alternative unbelieving or anti-Christian thought systems to the glory of God alone. The discipline of apologetics is not, therefore, a discipline confined to evidential argumentation. Whether that be concerning the historicity of Jesus or the textual fidelity of the Bible, it is instead a discipline that addresses every aspect of man's creational interaction.

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Think of the academy. Think of the market. The church. The family. The state. Society. It is all encompassing in scope because biblical Christianity is a world and life view. It is THE world and life view. Nothing less. Join me next time as we explore the biblical methodology of the Christian apologetic discipline, drawing from the wisdom of Van Til and Bahnsen.

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Grace and peace to you all.

Closing

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