

# *When faith is Not Enough*

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What does it really mean when we Reformed Christians recite our fundamental credo *Sola Fidei*? It would not be wrong to claim that for the Reformers this statement was never an embarrassment to them at any time, or in any sense. Yet we live in an age when the denial of this axiom has become the fundamental of our Reformed credo, as that credo is expressed in this very Anglo-American expression of the Reformed faith. What I mean is this. I have argued in my paper on Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin and John Owen that these men were not of that philosophical-apologetic persuasion that we have now come to call *classical* apologetics. I argue in that paper that they all three were rather of the *fideist* school when it came to the great questions of apologetics and the relationship between faith and reason. I also argue that it is not that these men denied the place of evidential argumentation, but that they denied the fundamental foundationalist epistemology of the Enlightenment Project. They refused to make reasoned arguments or evidential proofs the foundation or basis of faith, rather these tools served to confirm faith (positively), and to refute errors (negatively).

I have no desire to repeat my arguments and documentation from that paper here, but to add to it, to supplement its polemic. What I want to do is present an outlined defense of fideism. This is no easy deed, for, as in a lot of cases, it is easier to pull down and destroy rather than to build up. Thus, I confess that a lot of this paper will be taken up in the engagement of a negative polemic. I will seek to pull down the anti-fideistic strongholds as they are currently taught in various theological circles today. Here it will be important to note that my scope will be selective and therefore far from comprehensive. My intent will be to demonstrate that the alternative systems simply do not supply the desired effects that the anti-fideists seek to produce. To this end I will briefly define fideism, using a standard source. Then I will look at two critiques of fideism as presented by Norman Geisler and Stuart Hackett.<sup>1</sup> After this I will offer a brief presentation of my critique of Geisler's proposed alternative as it finds expression in his presentation of the cosmological argument. I will establish that it cannot function as he wishes it, nor supply reasonable grounds for Christian theism, according to the very standards he wishes to build upon.

After this, I will briefly critique Greg Bahnsen. This may come as a surprise to many. I propose in this paper that Bahnsen is in fact a crypto-foundationalist. I will argue that apart from the fundamental confusion his position posits, he is still trapped in a foundationalist criteria of rationality and reasonableness. In this section I will also touch on Alvin Plantinga's contribution, as mediated by Evans. From this point I want to present a brief discussion of Evan's work on revising Kierkegaardianism. Such a deed as I propose is indeed a tall order. Hence it must be noted that this paper's intent is only to present an introduction, an outline, which hopefully will encourage more thinking on the part of my reader and interaction upon this subject. I have come to the consideration that now is the right time for fideism to be revisited, now is the time for fideism to resume its place of respectability in philosophical and apologetic discourse.

I say this because in this time great changes have come about. It was the case that for recent centuries the Christian church, her best men, were subject and bound by the persuasive influence of enlightenment epistemology. The best leaders of the Anglo-American church have been trapped by an epistemology that dictated a form of rationalism. This epistemology could be characterised by many things, such as, premises must be public. That is, they must be accessible to all and sundry. If we were to use the metaphor of a note-book, our note-books must be shareable. I must be able to share my premises with the anti-theist. From this flows most naturally the idea that our premises must also be neutral. That is, they must not presuppose the thing or the matter which we, by them, seek to prove and establish. What this entails is that our premises are stand-alone, self-attesting, or self-grounding. Furthermore, stated another way, our premises and our arguments derived from our premises, must move in a properly linear fashion. It is not right, the enlightenment epistemology would tell us, that a premise or premises of a syllogism, which is presented to sustain our conclusion, itself, be sustained by the conclusion. That, they tell us, is circular and irrational.

From this, and just as important, we have inherited the idea that all our premises must be proportionate to the evidence. That is, our conclusions cannot exceed the evidential value of the premises. This certainly holds good for all

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<sup>1</sup>I have chosen to interact with these two works not only because they are very concise and systematic in their presentations, but also because in my paper on Aquinas *et al*, I have already interacted in some detail with Gerstner, Lindsley and Sproul. I do not want to merely reproduce my criticisms here. It may be helpful to note that this paper assumes the foundational ideas laid out in my earlier Aquinas paper. This paper builds upon that one.

deductive truth claims. Yet it also holds good, they say, even for inductive and probabalistic arguments. On this basis, then, there can be no leaps of faith, no unwarranted assumptions, no claims to truth and knowledge independent of a criteria of rational valuation of the evidence--whether empirical or rational. These are strong claims. Yet they are claims that the Christian church in England and America bought into, indeed, oft became the champions of, the best defenders of the rational model.

For this reason, many of these Anglo-American scholars have so often rejected and castigated Cornelius Van Til, and others such as Abraham Kuyper. In the later 20<sup>th</sup> century, considerable debate arose because of the clash of philosophical-apologetic models. This clash, for a large number of people, is still incommensurate. This is so because, among many reasons, the two systems or models, are operating by very different premises and methods pertaining to the valuation of evidence and argument. This clash of philosophical arms has also been due to the added dynamic of transcendental argumentation. It is well known and undisputed that Van Til derived the transcendental method from the teaching of Immanuel Kant. This in itself is not wrong, yet this has become a stumbling block to many, simply because many do not understand how transcendental argumentation works.

Immediately, the question is wondered, "Why am I following this apparent rabbit-trail?" The answer is simple yet very complex. I have come to regard that many Van Tillians, and followers of Greg Bahnsen, have fallen into an epistemological trap. It is, as it were, that Bahnsen, especially in that he was probably the most adamant on this point, came to hold transcendental argumentation, as is expressed in the "transcendental argument for God's existence" (herein referred to as TAG) as a *defacto* foundationalist argument.<sup>2</sup> I contend that for Bahnsen the TAG came to serve what the cosmological argument serves for the rational apologists like Geisler and Hackett. It is for this reason that Bahnsen, especially, was so strongly opposed to fideism. It is for this reason that I will offer a brief critique of Bahnsen's anti-fideist polemic.

Regarding my method in this paper, my intention is to not be overly analytic. I purposely want to stay away from a weighty tome presentation. I desire to be less formal, though hopefully, not less academically accurate. I will not saturate the reader with numerous citations and bibliographies. My aim is that this paper reflect a personal history of thinking on this matter.

#### *Fideism: Definition*

At this juncture, I will cite a well-reputed source, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,<sup>3</sup> edited by Paul Williams. Under the heading of Fideism, in an article by Richard H. Popkin, we find the best definition and brief discussion of fideism available at the "dictionary" level.

Firstly, Popkin says of fideism:

Fideism is the view that truth in religion is *ultimately* based on faith rather than on reasoning or evidence. This claim has been present in many forms by theologians from St. Paul to contemporary neo-orthodox, antirationalist writers, usually as a way of asserting that the fundamental tenets of religion cannot be established by proofs or by empirical evidence but must be accepted on faith.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>One thing may help the reader to understand my point here. My unofficial axiom in life is that there are two elements to thinking. There is the content of our thoughts, that is, what we think about, and then there is the structures of our thought, that is, the way we think about something, and why we thinking about something. Thus, I would argue that Bahnsen, *et al*, assume the very same *way* they think about faith, even though the content, in this case, the actual arguments and so forth, may differ from others such as the rational apologists.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: The MacMillian Company & The Free Press, 1967), vol 3, pp., 201-2.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 201 [emph., mine].

He goes on to say that there is a form of fideism that denigrates or denies any form of reason, such that this fideism amounts to a form of irrationalism. However, he does not end here. He breaks fideism down into two types, *extreme fideism* and *moderate fideism*. Of the extreme school he cites Tertullian and Kierkegaard. The school holds to the following axiom: "I believe because it is absurd." At this point, it is not my intention to critique this position. I will come back to some of this in my discussion of Evans' attempt to revive Kierkegaard. This school argues, for the most part, that revelatory truths are beyond reason, such that they cannot be discovered by reason, and that the mind of man is darkened by sin so that he is especially now disabled and unable to discover these revelatory truths by reason. Here scepticism concerning the attainability of any or some religious knowledge seems to be the dominant *motif*.<sup>5</sup> However, he also speaks of a moderate fideism, which is contrasted to the anti-rationalist position, which is the purer Augustinian tradition. Of this school, he cites Augustine and Pascal. This tradition is characterised by the motto: "I believe in order to understand." Moderate fideism accepts that reasoned arguments and evidences may confirm the faith as "reasonable, probable or plausible." Further, he notes that this form of fideism does not deny that there are arguments which can make the faith credible, even before the expression of personal faith. Faith is not grounded, properly speaking, upon these reasoned arguments, rather, they serve to induce the search for faith, and later confirm the faith. Popkin then notes that for Pascal, in particular, once faith has been expressed, the true force of these apologetic reasoned arguments may be properly perceived:

Augustine's philosophical dialogues show, the recognition of the basic fideistic element may be (and perhaps must be) preceded by a rational search for the truth. Once rational inquiry has revealed the need to accept some fundamental principles or beliefs on faith, then it may be possible to show that these commitments are reasonable, probable, or plausible. Purported proofs of the existence of God, metaphysical systems interpreting what is accepted on faith, and historical and psychological evidences about the nature of religion and its effects on believers can all be offered as rational explanations or even justifications of what has already been accepted on faith.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, the Encyclopedia Britannica helpfully observes, under the heading of Fideism:

a philosophical view extolling theological faith by making it the ultimate criterion of truth and minimizing the power of reason to know religious truths. Strict fideists assign no place to reason in discovering or understanding fundamental tenets of religion. For them blind faith is supreme as the way to certitude and salvation. They defend such faith on various grounds—e.g., mystical experience, revelation, subjective human need, and common sense. A nonrational attitude so pervades their thinking that some assert that the true object of faith is the absurd, the nonrational, the impossible, or that which directly conflicts with reason. Such a position was approached in the philosophies of the 2nd-century North African theologian Tertullian, the medieval English scholar William of Ockham, the 17th-century French philosopher Pierre Bayle, and more recently in the works of the 18th-century German philosopher Johann Georg Hamann and the 19th-century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. This modern attitude is often motivated by man's apparent inability to find rational solutions for the world's ills.

Moderate fideists, on the other hand, generally assert that some truths at least (e.g., God's existence, moral principles) can be known by reason subsequently reformed and clarified by faith—reason can or must play a role in the search for religious truths. This position frequently affirms that reason can, in some cases, partially comprehend religious truths after they have been revealed; or at least it shows negatively that no contradiction is necessarily involved in them or that there is a rational basis for accepting truths of faith that the human mind can in no way comprehend. Faith predominates, but reason is not ignored. Thus, the 17th-century French writer Blaise Pascal held that natural faculties are inadequate for religious certainty but suffice to justify religious faith in matters otherwise unknowable.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>I will skip over the details of his historical analysis for brevity's sake.

<sup>6</sup>Popkin, p., 201.

<sup>7</sup>"Fideism." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2003. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 27 May, 2003  
<<http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=34801>>.

I would argue that the distinction between extreme and moderate fideism is of vital importance and will serve well in the rebuttal of the anti-fideist polemic, whether that polemic is produced by Geisler or Bahnsen.

#### *Anti-Fideism: Geisler and Hackett*

At the outset I must note that it is with some reservation that I labour in discussion of these two men. I say this because there is some reason to believe that the so-called rational apologetic method, as typified by these two representatives, are of an old school, which a new school rational apologetic is now supplanting. We shall see, there are claims in the old school which are now quietly laid aside by a leading advocate of the new school apologists. Here I refer to William Lane Craig who, for example, has recently argued that the testimony of the Spirit is a self-attesting witness which is truly basic and needing no other foundation, and which is sufficient to rebut all objections.<sup>8</sup> Such a claim is expressly denied by Stuart Hackett.<sup>9</sup> If Craig is representative of a new school of apologetics, it may be that my following discussion may be somewhat redundant. If however, he is an anomaly, and the old school is alive and kicking, then what follows is still relevant.

As an aside, I do grant that the term *fideism* does have some shady roots. It was first used by Eugene Menegoz, in his work *Reflexions sur l'evangile du salut* in Paris in 1789. What is more, he used the term to mean “*Sola fides* that consists of the movement of oneself to God, independently of the adherence to certain beliefs or to revealed truths.”<sup>10</sup> In terms of Catholic usage, the encyclopedia notes that the term has the opposite meaning, namely “the acceptance of fundamental truths on the authority of God.”<sup>11</sup> I would add that it is also in this latter sense that we moderns call Protestants and classical theologians, fideists.

#### *Norman Geisler*

Geisler has written a number of books on philosophy and apologetics, and, indeed, he has made a valuable contribution in these fields. In his book, *Christian Apologetics*,<sup>12</sup> he offers a brief but systematic presentation and rebuttal of fideism. What I will do here is outline his discussion and arguments. I will pass over his discussion of Tertullian. In his discussion of Kierkegaard, he highlights the basic fideist tenets regarding epistemic scepticism. Essentially, Geisler notes that religious knowledge for Kierkegaard is voluntaristic, personal and subjective. That is, it is an expression of the will, not merely that of the intellect discovering knowledge. It is personal for as it were one is bound up in a framework of precommitments, and it is thus subjective.

Skipping Geisler's discussion of Karl Barth, he then tackles Cornelius Van Til, which is of more interest to us. He first cites Van Til as affirming that he (Van Til) starts with the presupposition of the Bible. Van Til,<sup>13</sup> notes Geisler, holds that the Bible is taken on its own authority. He notes Van Til's precommitment to all reasoning as being *circular*.<sup>14</sup> Further, for Van Til, the worldviews of the autonomous man and that of the Christianity are diametrically opposed, and

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<sup>8</sup>William Lane Craig, *Classical Apologetics* in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed by Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), p., 36-38.

<sup>9</sup>Stuart C Hackett, *The Reconstruction of the Christian Revelation Claim* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), p., 40. Another example of this is Geisler's own comments in his book on Thomas Aquinas, wherein he argues that Aquinas was both a presuppositionalist and a rationalist. See, Geisler's *Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1991), chapter 5.

<sup>10</sup>*New Catholic Encyclopedia* (San Francisco: Catholic University of America, 1967), vol., 4, pp., 908-9.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books: 1993), pp., 47-64.

<sup>13</sup>I should note, here is irony. Bahnsen labours hard to distance Van Til from any hint of fideism, yet Geisler easily connects Van Til with fideism. Evans notes that *presuppositionalism*, as taught by Van Til and Gordon Clark, is a subtle and sophisticated form of fideism, see: *Philosophy of Religion* (England: IVP, 1982), p., 185, fn 1, of chpt. 1.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 56.

so, from this, all facts are theistic facts. Again, there is no common ground, epistemically speaking, only ontologically speaking, for the two systems are engaged in a head-on collision.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, unbelievers are blinded by sin and so do not know God as they ought to know. Even the laws of logic cannot be used, apart from God's revelation, to discover divine truth, for fallen finite beings cannot use logic to discover what must be or what it cannot be. Rather, the fallen man, will only use logic to decide what is logically possible. Moving on, Geisler notes that for Van Til reasoned arguments only properly have a place within the framework of the Christian presupposition.<sup>16</sup>

Geisler then presents an "evaluation of fideism." He first notes the "positive" contributions of fideism. He states that the antirationalistic emphasis of fideism teaches rightly that God cannot be proved to exist by logical demonstration, or rationally comprehended. Further, he commends fideists for noting that reason is not the basis for one's commitment to God.<sup>17</sup> Further, objective evidence does not and cannot produce faith—as rational arguments are not coercive and because faith operates within a personal subjective dimension. Thus, there is a volitional element to faith. He will commend Van Til for holding that there are absolutely no "facts" that can be made sense of apart from a metaphysical framework. For facts are always "interpfacts."<sup>18</sup> Lastly, he commends fideists for stressing the noetic effects of sin, and that all men, believers and unbelievers, have presuppositions.

However, now comes his 'rebuttal.' He states that fideists confuse epistemology and ontology, "they fail to distinguish the order of knowing." And, "The Christian fideist may very well be right about the *fact* that there is a God, but this begs the question unless he can tell *how* he knows this is the case."<sup>19</sup> Here Geisler invokes the standard relativity argument: How can we know that the Bible is the word of God, as opposed to the Quran? He argues that we must have objective tests for truth-claims, else we can simply believe whatever we want to believe without any justification.<sup>20</sup>

In response to this initial counter, Geisler should have listened to his beloved Aquinas.<sup>21</sup> Fideism is not opposed to the use of arguments which can either confirm the case for Christianity, or better, disconfirm the case of competing truth claims. Invariably, rational apologists forget this. Fideists will heartily engage in negative apologetics. The competing truth claim of the Quran can be disconfirmed by a sound polemic.<sup>22</sup> Regarding the order of knowing and being, all that needs to be said here is that with Van Til, the fideist acknowledges proximate and ultimate epistemological starting points. Though the saint and the sinner share this ontological world, they differ in their ultimate starting points.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p., 57.

<sup>16</sup>At this juncture, it is helpful to once again note that even Geisler will note that in the case of miracles, only upon the prior precommitment to theism, will any argument from miracles have any evidential value. It seems clear that what Van Til is doing is merely widening the application of this principle. Yet the rationalists will not do so, because it would undercut their case entirely.

<sup>17</sup>Geisler, p., 59.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p., 60. Here he notes that miracles cannot be comprehended apart from a theistic precommitment.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p., 61 [emph., Geisler's].

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>By this I mean his own concessions regarding Aquinas's embracing of a mild presuppositionalism (as cited above).

<sup>22</sup>E.g, the so-called satanic verses wherein Mohammed claimed to utter prophesies for three days, which he later rejected as satanic. This concession disqualifies him according to the rules laid out in Dt 12 and 18. Granted this argument works only for Christians and Muslims, it highlights my point well enough. If the Moslem proposes his Quran, then respectively, given our common ground acceptance (qualified) of the *Torah* his prophet fails the test. Naturally, this is not a coercive argument. The Muslim will mostly likely will to disbelieve the force of the counterfactual (which is irrelevant to my point). Granted, too, this negative apologetic can only be a finite process. For this reason, faith ultimately rests on the self-attesting word and character of God alone.

<sup>23</sup>I have heard many rational apologists argue something like this. We start with the laws of logic and causation, and the general reliability of sense perception as tentative starting points. These "prove" that God exists, who then, after a long syllogistic reasoning process, confirms the validity of these "starting" points. Irony abounds here. Rationalists pride themselves on linear argumentation, but then blindly resort to circularity. This circular method, I would argue is fideistic on two counts, for they just assert without objective reason that an immaterial law

His next rebuttal amounts to the assertion that if the fideist offers justification for his beliefs, then he is no longer a fideist. But this reply confuses the distinctions between proper grounds and warrants for faith. The proper ground of my faith may be the self-attesting word of God, and yet there exist, side by side, sound reasons which may serve to confirm my faith, demonstrating it is reasonable either by positive or negative apologetic polemics.

*Stuart Hackett*

Under the sub-heading of *Voluntaristic Approaches*, Hackett discusses fideism. By way of introduction, he notes 3 key aspects of fideism. Firstly, the logical status of evaluative criteria. Here he notes that the fideist claim is that at the ultimate level all truth claims and premises are dependent upon presuppositions and cannot be sustained or argued to, from other premises, rather they are presuppositions of all intelligible thought. Nor can there be such things as neutral or independent ultimate first principles.<sup>24</sup> The second tenet of fideism, Hackett notes, is the psychological aspect. That is, all beliefs are determined by psychological motives and biases that reflect an individual's cultural or personal idiosyncracies. Even though we may identify some of these psychological causes we will never be able to identify all of them. Thirdly, he notes the religious concern that the anti-fideist engages in a form of intellectual idolatry when he reasons his way to faith, so to speak.<sup>25</sup> From this third point, he comments that fideists object if our final or basic authority is anything other than Scripture alone, e.g., reason. Lastly, he adds the qualifier that not all fideists hold to all these points to their extreme.

Hackett further sub-divides fideists into 2 categories. He lists the experiential fideists and the revelational fideists.<sup>26</sup> The latter, he argues, emphasises the place and role of revealed truth, while the former emphasises the role of experience. He continues his classifications, he suggests there is a sub-group within revelational voluntarism, called *illuminationism*. Here he argues, the stress is on the "decisive experiential element which involves a personal encounter with God in the witness of the Holy Spirit in such a way that the individual is specially enlightened to discern the essential religious truth."<sup>27</sup> In this category he lists Augustine. Another sub-group of revelational voluntarism, he says, is *Scripturalism* in which the stress is on the acceptance of "Scripture as the basic presuppositional ground of the reasonableness of Christian truth-claim."<sup>28</sup> Here he well says, the emphasis is not that we argue to Scripture, but that we argue from Scripture. Of this school of thought, he lists Abraham Kuyper and Cornelius Van Til.

In response to fideism, he offers a series of rebuttals. Firstly, Hackett readily concedes that he always and everywhere operates on the basis of a set of presuppositions, even psychological and idiosyncratic biases. However, Hackett says, if he were to assume that at the basis of all thought is nothing but wholly personal subjective biases, even logical presuppositions, he would cease entirely all attempts to critique anything.<sup>29</sup> His basic point here comes to the issue of *pou sto*. That is, in his critique and even though he uses all power to overcome any personal biases in any rational dialogue he assumes, indeed, he must assume, that there is some objective basis for his criticism; which even the voluntarist must accept, if he thinks to defend his position.

The problem with this counter from Hackett is that it assumes a certain specific type of argument. It assumes that dialogue can only be linear working from an objective foundation, to which competing worldviews must be measured. This need not be the case. Apologetic dialogue may be more complicated than this. If one were to argue, analogically<sup>30</sup> it is not as if we find some objective starting point, but that we reason contrastively and comparatively. This method aims

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of logic, for example, binds and obligates reality as a whole, and then they will further assert, very fideistically, that God confirms the law of logic, and their entire reasoning process in the argument for the existence of God, as sound. How this approach is not fideistic, I do not know.

<sup>24</sup>Hackett, p., 33.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p., 35.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p., 36. Hackett notes that this distinction is not particularly sharp.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p., 37.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p., 38.

<sup>30</sup>I am using this term to the same end that Van Til will speak of the *ad hominem* argument.

at internal critiques of the opposing worldview, demonstrating the irrationality on its own terms. Analogical apologetic discourse, in my mind, will still allow the full force of all biases, of whatever nature, to be operative in the opponent's personal make-up. Naturally the stress here as in any system, is upon the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit.

The next objection-problem Hackett adduces is his claim that religious awareness is not an adequate epistemological basis for religious truth testing.<sup>31</sup> For this, he argues that one must first have a set of structural criteria to evaluate one's religious experience such that it is recognised as truth, and opposing ones incorrect. These evaluative criteria have to be more ultimate than the religious experience itself. This is an interesting argument, but essentially repeats the same counter often cited. The answer is that there is a proximate basis for faith and an ultimate basis for faith. This relationship between proximate and ultimate is readily and concessionally accepted as circular, even transcendental. At this point, he also addresses what he terms as interpretative contextualism. That is, one's assessment of a given religious experience is determined by his own interpretative framework, which entails all his precommitments. This objection echoes the objections to Wittengsteinian fideism. Hackett then returns to the question of valuation of competing worldviews. He argues that the religious fideist must either be arbitrary in his rejection of competing truth-claims, or his rejection must rest on logically independent grounds.<sup>32</sup> As an aside, he notes the possible counter that if the Christian fideist must be arbitrary, then all versions of fideism must be equally arbitrary. To this, predictably, he notes that this claim itself is arbitrary.<sup>33</sup>

It is at this juncture that Hackett then appends his above counters to that of the revelational fideists specifically. He complains that the claim to ground faith in the testimony of the Holy Spirit entails the same problems. For, he asserts, this fideist must still *identify* this testimony, discerning it to be of God, which must entail some sort of precommitment evaluative criteria. Next, he asserts that, biblically speaking, the Bible itself urges believers to *test* the spirits.<sup>34</sup> The problem with this response from Hackett is that it assumes, without reasonable warrant, that the testimony of the Holy Spirit cannot be self-evincing. It cannot be self-attesting. Further, the invocation of 1 Jn 4:1 entails him in an equivocation error. For there John speaks to the believers testing of rival prophetic and teaching truth claims, but the testimony of the Holy Spirit is of a different category.

From this he argues that the appeal to Scripture in turn finally appeals to religious experience, because the *writers* of the Bible wrote as they were personally and subjectively<sup>35</sup> influenced by the Holy Spirit in their collation of the biblical data and its subsequent organisation. What does this amount to? Is Hackett seriously proposing that our faith is based in the subjective personal experience of the biblical writer and not the writing itself? Responding only as a theist, I would counter that the Bible contains its own self-evidencing marks that authenticate its own witness. For as David says, the word of God is a light to my feet. The word of God has this characteristic. It has the epistemic ability to illumine me.

His next counter is to the claim that Scripture should be seen as a self-attesting *axiom-set* of the Christian system.<sup>36</sup> He counters that this is implausible, given that Scripture itself contains various levels of logicity. He notes that at times many parts of Scripture are grounded in other parts, even extra-biblical sources.<sup>37</sup> He concludes that Scripture is "neither

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<sup>31</sup>Hackett, p., 39.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p., 40. To note, I am paraphrasing and condensing Hackett's polemic here.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p., 40.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 1 Jn 4:1.

<sup>35</sup>By subjectively, I am using this to denote their proper subjectivity as *agents* and *recipients* of this divine influence.

<sup>36</sup>Hackett, p., 41. In my paper on Aquinas *et al*, I demonstrate that this indeed was the very assumption made by Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>37</sup>I find this an odd argument. While it is true that the biblical writers may appeal to extra-biblical sources, I doubt that they meant to do so in a way that entailed that this source was more ultimate than God himself, rather than being merely confirmatory sources. And the fact that some parts of Scripture rests on other parts is of no consequence. No one says that every single line or word of Scripture has to same epistemic value, comparatively to one another, as every other line or word.

singly nor in conjunction, either self-evident or self-interpreting, so that a structure of logically prior interpretive principles or categories is implied as a foundation for understanding the biblical propositions themselves.”<sup>38</sup> Again, Hackett just asserts that it is not logically possible for Scripture to be self-attesting. After this, Hackett again returns to the essential complaint that fideists have no basis for disconfirming rival religious truth claims. He restates his earlier claim that the fideist must either engage in arbitrary reasoning or resort to some objective measure, which would be self-defeating. More generally, he urges that if the fideist argues that all truth-claims are wholly person-relative, he is purportedly making a truth claim about reality that is not wholly person-relative.<sup>39</sup> Superficially, this is a plausible counter. Yet it does not bind the true revelational fideist as I see it. Firstly, I do not have to assert that all premises and truth-claims are entirely person-relative. I would hold that my own, for example, is not. There is something transcendent and *other* about my faith, which is a reflection of the life and self-knowledge of Christ himself. His *faith* was not entirely person-relative, in the sense that every proposition he made must ultimately return to his finite humanity as its source. Further, I can say that Scripture declares that man is bound in sin, and a slave to a rebellious epistemology, such that his epistemology is person-relative, as it is bound by sin. Obviously here I am arguing from my view of scripture, not to it, and obviously I do not mean to suggest that my own claim is bound in sin.<sup>40</sup>

His next general counter follows the same structure as the previous. He argues that if the fideist asserts that all truth-claims are bound up in non-rational factors (e.g., sin), such that “an individual’s moral character unavoidably distorts his judgement,”<sup>41</sup> then that claim, likewise, is also bound up in non-rational factors. For the initial claim itself will be distorted by non-rational debilities. In response, I would say that this runs counter to the entire foundation of Christian theism, in that we as Christians assert that Christ sets us free. Hackett over speaks himself when he urges this counter-argument. He applies one general fairly non-Christian version of fideism as a self-defeating critique of all forms of fideism including Christian. The next significant argument he adduces is his counter that non-fideistic approaches do not entail the non-fideist in epistemological idolatry.<sup>42</sup> Leaving aside the loaded phrasing, and also the fact that many, such as Bahnsen, would make this exact claim of non-fideist approaches, what need only be stressed is that the non-fideist is using a non-biblical epistemological method which is the child of the Enlightenment. Whether this takes the particular form of a Cartesian experiment, or Lockean, or Humean method is beside the point. The point is that the common factor here is the individual starting with self, and thereby, moving epistemologically to God. Whereas, prior to the Enlightenment, the individual considered himself to be starting from God, as God is found in the revealed Word. The actual individual starting point was merely proximate and ontological. Scripture for Aquinas and for Calvin was a *first principle* which you argued from, never *to*. I would hold, therefore, that the non-fideist has embraced an epistemological method that is alternative to the method displayed in Scripture. Thus, he is engaging in an unbiblical manner of reasoning.

To sum up Geisler’s and Hackett’s claims there are two constants--firstly, there is the assertion, without reasoned argument, that Scripture cannot be self-attesting. Secondly, their claim is that fideism entails the fideist in a trap of vicious relativism. That is, he has no basis to evaluate and subsequently reject competing religious truth-claims. The response to this is simple, yet profound. Working in reverse order, the Christian fideist is not bound to accept that all worldviews are person-relative in the sense that every predication about reality is entirely bound and determined by the human conceptual framework. This being not true, there is no reason why it cannot be the case that Scripture, even the testimony of the Holy Spirit, be self-attesting. Geisler and Hackett fail to realise that the fideist is not necessarily opposed to sound argumentation and evidences, which may have confirming (positive apologetics) and disconfirming (negative apologetics) efficacy. They are wrong for beginning with and entailing their critiques in the more general secular philosophical skeptical fideism of men like Hume, or of extreme religious fideism, such as that of Shestov.

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<sup>38</sup>Hackett, *ibid*.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 43.

<sup>40</sup>The import here is that my point is that I do not have to accept Hackett’s claim that I must concede that all truth-claims are wholly person-relative, and so I am not committed to a self-defeating *absurdum*.

<sup>41</sup>Hackett, p., 43.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

Van Til is correct in positing that humans operate on multiple levels. For example, the sinner operates dualistically, expressing his rebellious autonomy in truth-suppressing endeavours, which create anti-thetical worldview claims, with which, the sinner has no common starting point. For at this level of the sinner's consciousness, the sinner determines what is and is not logically possible.<sup>43</sup> Yet, the sinner also operates according to the fact that he is an image bearer, though he will not acknowledge this fact. In this way, he can make correct predications, and there is a sense where his thinking is not wholly incommensurate with the saint's thoughts. Here there is common ground. Conversely, the saint operates by a converse duality. At times the saint will operate by the principle of remaining unrighteousness, while at times--hopefully more often than not--he will operate by the principle of his new righteousness. At the level of the remnant of his original unrighteousness, he will have common ground with the sinner. At the level of his new righteousness, he will have no common ground with the sinner.

Further, the fideist is not reduced to arbitrary assertions, or to silence, for there are alternative methods of reasoning which both Geisler and Hackett ignore. When I engage in critique of a competing worldview, it is not necessary that I begin from neutral objective premises which mediate, measure and judge both worldviews--mine and his. I can reason, with force, analogically, assuming his premises merely for the sake of the argument, and then demonstrate the irrationality and/or unworkability of his worldview given his premises. Obviously, I am using *word-meanings* which my opponent can access and correctly understand in terms of his own worldview. Yet I have not in this, now conceded my fideistic case. For the sinner operates upon a duality. In terms of his autonomy, there will be *ultimate* disparity in our respective understanding of the word-meanings. Yet in terms of his image-bearing, as that connects to the physicality of this world, he will functionally understand me. The Holy Spirit forms the epistemic bridge and foundation between worldviews. The Holy Spirit enables the sinner to "see" the force of the Christian truth-claim. Thus, in Kuhnian terms, the Holy Spirit effects a paradigm shift. The fallacy of the Enlightenment Project is the claim that intellectual progress is always linear and incremental.

By way of response to the apologetic model set out by the rationalist theists, a brief critique of the Cosmological Argument (herein this is designated as CA), as set out by Geisler may be helpful. Here I will assume that the reader is familiar in some detail with his version of the CA. Geisler adapts a basic argument from Aquinas regarding the impossibility of something, that is, a potentiality, self-actualising.<sup>44</sup> The argument then proceeds in standard CA format.<sup>45</sup> The problem with this CA, even though it is very sophisticated, is that it is nonetheless naive. The claim of the CA advocates is that they move in linear fashion from self-attesting first principles to the existence of God. But the assumption is that such things as the laws of logic and causality bind and obligate reality as a whole. Years ago I presented Geisler's CA in detailed form to my philosophy supervisor. He and I then discussed the premises. Everything hung on the question, "How does Geisler know that it is impossible for potentiality to self-actualise? Geisler, along with all his rational colleagues, assumes that something cannot be its own cause. It cannot cause itself to be or to come into being.<sup>46</sup> The simplicity of this question struck me. I could not merely retort that it is impossible for potentiality to self-actualise--that would be arbitrary. Nor could I invoke my theism--that would be circular. I was left in silence. In correspondence, I restated my problem to Geisler. Geisler's reply was to state that my supervisor was being irrational for asserting that potentiality can self-actualise. But that is not satisfactory, for what criteria of rationality is Geisler using to determine that the atheist is being irrational? The answer can only be criteria grounded in a Christian worldview. And asserting that the atheist is being irrational is beside the point. The atheist need only ask: "How can we know that logic binds reality as a whole?" He may then further this by recouring to Quantum

Theory which has quantum particles apparently appearing and disappearing in a particle accelerator. If this is true for the micro level, how can we say it is not true for macro reality?<sup>47</sup> This same fundamental question holds good for both the laws of causality and the general reliability of sense perception: How can I know that they bind reality as a whole?

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<sup>43</sup>This will be elaborated on below.

<sup>44</sup>This language and concept is taken from Aristotle.

<sup>45</sup>See Geisler and Winfried Corduan's *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1988), pp., 175-207, specifically, pp., 180-1.

<sup>46</sup>Ironically, God is the exception to this.

<sup>47</sup>This is the very approach my supervisor took.

The problem, then, is that any CA, and anything built upon the CA, carries this same exact tentativeness. Given that the atheist, according to the rational apologist, is expected, indeed, asked to operate by objective, neutral, public and self-attesting premises, from which he will be shown in linear fashion that God exists, he cannot be condemned if he does not grant one or more of the premises. And given that he does not know, cannot know, granting his self-confessed finitude, that the laws of logic and causality, immaterial concepts such as they are, bind reality, he cannot *know* that God exists, or that the Scriptures are the infallible revelation of God. Thus, the CA can only make sense in terms the Christian worldview. It is only explicable within that framework. Thus it can only work as confirming to the Christian, within his framework, what he or she believes. It cannot be used as a referent external to that framework in order to ground that framework, if the assumption is that actual knowledge of God's existence is attainable. The irony is that the alleged public premises of the CA only make sense in terms of a private framework of fact and valuation.

It is well to note, the atheist is not necessarily committed to asserting that some potentiality can self-actualise, only that he does not necessarily know that it is impossible for any potentiality to self-actualise. He is not committed to mistakenly making any positive claims about reality as a whole, only that he himself cannot speak for reality as a whole. Nor is he irrational if he functions as if the laws of logic and causality bind his corner of reality, so to speak, in his day to day living. He may simply grant a certain functionality, which he himself, given his finitude, cannot ultimately justify epistemologically.

In the end, the CA cannot be used to establish the claims of the Christian framework. It is no silver bullet that establishes the case of Christianity. The very foundation and ground of the rational apologist is undercut and removed. Assert he may, yet nothing will be gained, his faith will not be accepted as credible by the so-called public standards of credibility.

*Greg Bahnsen*

It has been argued by some that Greg Bahnsen was the true successor to Van Til. Certainly he has been a very vocal and prolific defender of presuppositionalism. Bahnsen, more so than John Frame, expressed a greater reliance upon the TAG as the objective ground or warrant for his faith. However, it would appear to me that Bahnsen has made the TAG serve for his form of presuppositionalism, the same way CA serves the rationalist apologist. I would propose this because during his debate with Gordon Stein, Bahnsen made the comment that if the TAG were not true, he would have no reasonable basis for his faith.<sup>48</sup> Bahnsen hangs his Christian theism on the validity of the TAG. It may be countered that Bahnsen's comment here may be a throw-away line which is not to be taken absolutely, that is, he himself was not absolutely committed to his own concession. However, I think in reality, had it been shown that TAG is not sound, I believe he would have continued to have believed, yet his faith 'system' would have undergone some serious revision. Yet I am inclined to think that he was committed to maintaining his commitment to TAG as sound on account of his many other attempts to defend it against potential counter-factuals and critiques. I think this because I strongly suspect that Bahnsen was still committed to an Enlightenment epistemology. For him, the faith was rational if and only if it could be grounded in something truly objective and reasonable.

In his lectures on fideism he maintains this thesis time and again.<sup>49</sup> But there is a problem. Throughout these lectures Bahnsen repeatedly juxtaposes faith, as rational, and fideism, as being irrational. Bahnsen actually engages in a potential fallacy of *argumentum ad verecundiam*, the appeal to some authority. While appeals to authority are not wrong in and of themselves, one must be wise in doing this. I would suggest that in doing this, Bahnsen has not been wise. In these lectures he defines by quoting, even out of context, certain "authorities" which define fideism as either irrational or speak to the extreme version of fideism. Bahnsen will then take these definitions of fideism as normative. Then he simply juxtaposes irrationalism with theism. By way of dealing with Bahnsen's claimed authorities, *ad fontes* shall be my rallying cry.

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<sup>48</sup> Greg L., Bahnsen & Gordon Stein, *The Great Debate: Does God exist?* (no place: Southern California Center for Christian Studies: no date).

<sup>49</sup> Greg L., Bahnsen, *Theistic Proof, Rationality and Fideism* (no place: Covenant Media Foundation, no date).

The *Encyclopedia of Christianity* (edited by Philip E. Hughes), defines fideism as “an approach to knowledge of God based upon a leap of faith and a negation of rational constructions.” R.C. Sproul is the author of this definition. Sproul goes on to note that this philosophical movement came about as a rejection of what he calls Thomistic natural theology, and is driven by scepticism regarding religious knowledge.<sup>50</sup> The problem here is that this is definitely a lopsided, indeed, a fairly shallow and biased definition. It may serve Bahnsen to note that it is R.C. Sproul himself proffering this definition, in which Bahnsen can note happily that while he accepts Sproul’s definition, he can rightly reject fideism, yet it does not serve good scholarship. Bahnsen also cites the *Philosophical Dictionary*, edited by Walter Brugger, which under the heading of fideism defines it as the idea that religious truths are “inaccessible to human reason and can be grasped only by faith.” The article goes on to claim that faith comes “from some authority, it is the same thing as traditionalism... and is grasped by a sense of feeling or faith” The article then connects the authors Reid and Schleiermacher in this school. Fideism, it argues, “reduces religion to an irrational faith.”<sup>51</sup> Again, I would contend this is lop-sided. Another source Bahnsen cites is *The Dictionary of Christian Theology*, edited by Alan Richardson. Richardson defines fideism as the view that holds that ‘reason could not prove the truths of religion, as Kant demonstrated, therefore believers could rely only upon faith, which is a kind of religious experiencing.’ He cites Kant, Schleiermacher, and Ritschle as authors within this tradition. He does note that “fideism” is often used by “Thomists as a pejorative term for subjectivist theories which are based upon religious experience and which undervalue reason in theology.”<sup>52</sup>

The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* provides a much more substantive discussion of fideism. It notes, introductorily, that fideism is that doctrine or attitude that minimises the capacity of human intellect to attain certitude and assigns faith as a criterion of fundamental truths. Thus God’s existence, the immortality of the soul, principles of morality, the fact of divine revelation, and the credibility of Christianity cannot be proved by reason alone, but must be accepted on authority.”<sup>53</sup> This work does define fideism into many classes, one of which it calls strict, another semi-fideism. However, the overall thrust of this article is to condemn fideism and argue that it is not that “faith must precede reason,” rather, “reason proves the truths of the faith, such as Christian revelation and Christ’s miracles. It asserts that if faith has no reasonable basis, then it would be faith that leads us to faith. By this I assume it means that if such things as the necessary preconditions of thought, logic, causality, time, space, *etc.*, could only be assumed by faith, which would then be expected to lead us to faith, that is, the Christian faith. This would, it argues, amount to “complete relativism.” This article argues in classic neo-thomist lines,<sup>54</sup> that the authority is proved, first, and then by faith, he or she believes. Again, there are problems with this article. It clearly expresses its own neo-thomist bias.

Bahnsen in his reference to this article also makes a needless comment. He notes that the article does refer to “semifideism” but then he gratuitously asserts that if you accept semifideism, you have given up the ghost of all pretense of being a fideist. Yet this is not cogent. Bahnsen has effectively “stacked the deck” definitionally in his favour, and when he is presented with a potential counterfactual, he dismisses it off-handedly. One other article I will cite, which Bahnsen also cites, is the previously cited article by Popkin (above). Yet here Bahnsen simply takes Popkin out of context, portraying Popkin as endorsing as normative the definition of fideism being irrational. Rather, what Bahnsen cites from Popkin is Popkin’s comments regarding “extreme fideism.” Bahnsen makes no reference to the moderate fideism Popkin cites.

To conclude this section, then, in my estimation, Bahnsen has failed to definitively preclude the term or the concept, fideism, from the theological discussion table. He of all, should not have so readily fallen into this error. Yet he does so because he is committed to establishing the Christian faith as a thoroughly rational and objective faith. Hence, in these

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<sup>50</sup>Philip E., Hughes, ed, *Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Delaware: The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1972).

<sup>51</sup>Walter Brugger, *Philosophical Dictionary* (Spokane, Washington: GUP, 1974).

<sup>52</sup>Alan Richardson, ed., *The Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969).

<sup>53</sup>*New Catholic Encyclopedia* under the heading *Fideism*.

<sup>54</sup>It should be noted that in my paper on Aquinas, I present a case that neo-thomism is very different from Thomism, in that the former completely overturns the method of the latter, because the 17<sup>th</sup> century Thomists succumbed to Cartesianism, which induced them to revise Thomism.

lectures, he says repeatedly that the Christian faith is an objective faith, and this objective faith is established by the TAG. But clearly, there is a problem here: What does he mean that the Christian faith is objective? Objective to whom? How does the TAG make the Christian faith *objective*? What standard of criteria of objectivity is Bahnsen using? I believe that the same problem inherent in the CA is inherent to the TAG.

Some years ago, some friends of mine engaged in a public thought experiment. The leading figure in this experiment was David Byron, a Ph.D. candidate at Yale, and James Anderson, another Ph.D. candidate at the University of Edinburgh, these two, along with others, proposed a version of Christianity, which they called Fristianity. This was a hypothetical religion, which must be remembered at all times. The force of this thought experiment is self-evident once it is recalled that for Bahnsen and for Van Til, only God, the God of the Christian faith, can provide the necessary preconditions for thought and intelligibility. That is, only by presupposing God can thought and reality be made intelligible. This presupposition works transcendently. However, Bahnsen and Van Til further argue that it must not just be the God of Christian theism, but also specifically the Trinitarian God of Christian theism, for any form of unitarianism cannot account for the one and the many, for unity and diversity, nor could a unitarian god have a genuine sense of otherness, which could create significant others. Thus, only Trinitarian theism could establish the preconditions for the intelligibility of thought and reality.

In response to this, Byron posited Fristianity. This was a suppositional religion wherein its God was a diunity, a father and a son. Byron argued that hypothetically, this would meet all of Van Til's and Bahnsen's criteria for the intelligibility of reality and thought. What Byron exposed in doing this was that the TAG has an inherent inductive element within it. Byron states:

The counterexample explained... calls into question whether TAG, as usually characterised, can successfully exclude all alternative worldviews in principle merely by offering a negative transcendental critique of a few particular ones that happen to be thematized (usually on the lips of a nearby antichristian) in a particular apologetic encounter...

The Fristianity counterexample strikes at the frequently cited but inadequately defended notion in Van Tillian apologetics that "all antichristian worldviews are at bottom one" not by doubting that claim, but by asking whether the Christian apologist has an *\*apologetically useful\** (and not merely biblically warranted) basis for making it.<sup>55</sup>

The point that Byron is trying to highlight is that for the TAG to work, it must presuppose that *all* competing and alternative worldviews are at bottom the same. No other worldview can make thought and reality intelligible, thus Christian theism is proved, by way of necessary presupposition. Thus, TAG only works on the assumption of the impossibility of the contrary, the impossibility of any other worldview being able to make sense of this world. Byron wants us to see that this is somewhat of a leap. It is an *a priori* assumption that has yet to be sustained. For sure, Byron would concede that all forms of unitarianism, or finite theism, cannot supply the necessary preconditions rendering thought and reality intelligible. But on what basis must we assume that all alternative theisms must either be finite gods, or a unipersonal God? Granted, what is needed is a multipersonal infinite God. But Byron wants us to consider that it may be that a diunal deity would just as easily provide the theoretical preconditions for thought and reality.

Byron, by way of extended quotation, sums up well Bahnsen's position:

[A] He would argue that there can only be two positions, affirmation of Christianity and denial of it, and that the complaint that he hadn't addressed all varieties of anti-Christianity misses the point that all such positions are, at bottom, one. Thus, Bahnsen would claim, it is only necessary to *\*illustrate\** the refutation of a subset of antichristian worldviews in order to achieve the principal refutation of all of them.

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<sup>55</sup>These citations were taken from the <WWW: <http://www.ccir.ed.ac.uk/~jad/vantil-list/archive-Jul-1999/msg00049.html>>.

[B] He would argue that there can only be one transcendental argument, and would then object that anyone who proposes an alternative one is confused about the unary nature of a TA.

[C] He would argue that constructing a similar but relevantly different worldview, such a Fristianity, is simply not allowed, for concrete, historical reasons:

"People will say to me, 'Well, Dr. Bahnsen, why does it [the transcendently necessary worldview] have to be the Christian worldview? Why couldn't somebody come along and say that his worldview was a God who was the foundation for logic, the uniformity of nature, and moral absolutes? Why could someone not just take as much as what you [Bahnsen] have been talking about [in is seminar on transcendental arguments] as is convenient for my intellectual purposes and then just get rid of the other stuff?....

"The answer is: where did you get your worldview? Did you get your worldview building it block by block by block? Element by element? If so, the person who proposes deism or this reduced version of Christianity must show every element, on its own, is necessary and coherent with every other element. He cannot begin with a system and then say, 'Now, ok, I want to throw this part out and this part out and this part out.'

"Why? Because if you begin with the Christian system; if you begin concretely with the Christian system, you are not allowed to throw any elements out." [lectures on Transcendental Arguments]<sup>56</sup>

From this, Byron notes well:

Now, consider the fallacies at work here. For response [A], Bahnsen doesn't *\*prove\** that illustration is sufficient for comprehensive refutation; he simply assumes that Van Til is right to say that any antichristian worldview is an adequate token of its type for purposes of global refutation.

For response [B], Bahnsen correctly points out that there can only be one well-formed transcendental argument, but he neglects to account for how it is possible to know that the truth of Christian Theism, or its relevant subset, is *\*the\** transcendental principle that pertains to *\*the\** single well-formed TA. Instead, he takes for granted that the Christian Theistic TA works, and then deduces (validly) from that (not clearly sound) premise that no other TA can work.

For response [C], Bahnsen asks "where did you get your worldview?" and then makes legitimacy contingent on the notion of "begin[ning] *\*concretely\** with the Christian system". But this answer is clearly unacceptable, since [a] a thinker or supposed prophetess could *\*just happen\** to come up with the relevant apparently viable subset of principles, without actually performing a reductive procedure (a la Thomas Jefferson) on the Bible; and [b] even if a thinker happens, historically, to perform such an operation in the formulation of her worldview, that historical fact doesn't speak to the truth or falsity of the results. Thus, the Boise prophetess could claim, and attempt to transcendently justify the claim, that Frist had providentially guided her abridgement.

The antichristian debater might retort, "Why, in principle, should *\*these\** worldview origins be disallowed, but modifications of the poetry, laws, and history written to honor an ancient Near-Eastern war god be allowed?" Concrete historical circumstances do not determine principal truth. Bahnsen, perhaps sensing his lack of a principal answer to the "overargument objection", nevertheless took refuge in historicity.

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<sup>56</sup><<http://www.ccir.ed.ac.uk/~jad/vantil-list/archive-May-1998/msg00055.html>>. Contents of square brackets Byrons.

In short, Bahnsen's responses to the problem of alternative transcendental arguments fail to defuse the objection that in the end, the Van Tillian approach must finally appeal to historical factors or to fideistic stubbornness. This does not mean that no well-formed TA for Christian Theism can be mounted; it simply means that Bahnsen did not provide a clear demonstration of how to mount one.<sup>57</sup>

There have been many proffered rebuttals of Byron's Frisianity thought experiment, all of which fail to properly grasp the point. Some of the rebuttals amount to no more than asserting something like this 'well of course we know that there is no such thing as Frisianity, hence your thought experiment is not sound.' The problem here is that this is beside the point--there may be or there may arise something that might just look like Frisianity. Just because I personally have not encountered an actual Frisian, does not give me the right to assume that the TAG rules out *a priori* all alternative worldviews. What the Frisianity thought experiment does show is that the TAG is insufficient to arbitrate between the claims of Christian theism and "everyone or everything else." The TAG cannot produce the claimed objective certainty, for in the end, it rests on a sort of inductive/subjective, yet unproven assumption about reality as a whole. Like the CA, it works on assuming that because I cannot personally conceive of an (actual) alternative which could supply the necessary preconditions of knowledge and reality, there are no actual alternatives that could supply these preconditions.<sup>58</sup>

Does the TAG have any evidential value? Yes, as an inductive transcendental argument. It presents an argument which is very probable, and, for us operating within the Christian framework, a sound confirmation of Christianity. From within the circle of faith, it works, though it cannot be used to *a priori* preclude any other possible claimed circles of faith in some arbitrating capacity. As a believer, I know that there can be no actual alternative theism which could supply all the preconditions of knowledge or reality, yet I know this for other reasons, not merely because of the TAG. Bahnsen's mistake was to hinge the entirety of his case upon the TAG, for he cannot allow that there can be only a probable, non-deductive certain proof for God's existence. Here is where he has accepted the very criteria of rationalism. I believe it served for him what the CA serves for men like Geisler and the late John Gerstner.

#### *Alvin Plantinga*

A few decades ago, Alvin Plantinga rocked the philosophical world when he published his work *God and Other Minds*.<sup>59</sup> One of the essentials of this work is the argument that we know that God exists *analogically*. What sparked this line of investigation by Plantinga was the realisation that he has no direct access to other human minds. And yet, he realised, given the lofty claims of the Enlightenment epistemology, he could have no warrant for assuming that there are other minds. What this effected was a systemic denial of Enlightenment epistemology. He reasoned that the basis that I assume, with sound warrant, that others have minds behind the faces I see, that I am also within my epistemic warrant to reason that there is a God. Therefore, as I reason analogically, based on comparative experience that there are other human minds, I can reason that there is a divine mind based on the analogy of teleology in the universe. This was one of Plantinga's earliest works and here he tentatively explores certain ideas. But what was revolutionary was his systemic challenge to the traditional assumptions about what grounds rationality and knowledge. Plantinga charged the Enlightenment Project with a form of epistemological imperialism. His theoretical work has since then established the bankruptcy of Enlightenment epistemology, *viz.*, foundationalism, and to demonstrate that one is within one's epistemic rights to believe in God.

What is more, Plantinga has gone on to develop and argue that as some of our beliefs are properly *basic*, so it is possible that our belief in God may also be properly basic. Briefly, some of our beliefs in life are based upon other beliefs. I may believe that in typing this essay, this computer will function properly because of many other beliefs I have

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Interestingly, John Frame, in his on apologetics, argues whether 'the TAG can function without the help of subsidiary arguments of a more traditional kind.' I am not sure if Frame is saying this because he has identified some inherent problem to the TAG, or for other reasons, for he only says that he must grant that not everyone would immediately agree with the premise "without God there is no meaning." John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (New Jersey: P&R, 1997), p 70.

<sup>59</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithica: CUP: 1967).

about this computer and from past experience. There is a sense in which my belief is based upon evidences, indeed a chain or hierarchy of evidential reasons. Yet, as Evans notes well:

Eventually, however, if the chain of evidential reasons is not going to be infinitely long, it seems that I must believe some things without believing those things on the basis of any other beliefs. It may be that in some broad sense of ‘evidence’ I have evidence for these foundational or basic beliefs, but such evidence could not consist of other propositional beliefs from which the basic beliefs are inferred, or else the basic beliefs would not be basic. So it seems plausible that not all our beliefs can be based on other beliefs, and thus that not all our beliefs can be based on propositional evidence. Presumably, then, some of our beliefs are not only basic, but properly so, in the sense that the person holding the belief not based on any other beliefs has not violated any epistemic duty and is not guilty of any intellectual failing.<sup>60</sup>

Plantinga in his recent books has sought to establish that in like manner, and if our faculties are functioning normally according to their design plan, then we are within our epistemic warrant to consider belief in God to be a properly basic belief. The fuller development of Plantinga’s ideas do not concern us here. What is important is that Plantinga has successfully turned the Enlightenment Project’s epistemological demands on its head. What Plantinga has effected is the revival—though I doubt he would put it these terms—of a healthy form of scepticism. The sceptic reacts to the Enlightenment foundationalist’s claims to be able to obtain all the needed and sufficient grounds for his beliefs. The foundationalist, it will be recalled, claims that only those beliefs which can be sufficiently justified are beliefs worthy of holding. However, historically, the sceptic has always countered that this indeed is impossible, for we have many, many beliefs that are not justified in the way or by the standards the foundationalist seeks to impose. Thus, in this sense, Plantinga has acted as the role of the sceptic.

Penelhum introduces this point:

The Evangelical Fideist is not a Skeptic, but sees the Skeptic as providing an important service for faith by making it clear that it cannot depend on reasoning. In faith, rightly understood, we turn aside from attempts to allay human anxieties through intellectual reflection and dogmatic speculation. The Sceptic helps us to do this by exposing the intellectual baselessness of our fundamental secular beliefs as well as that of the commitments which faith embodies.<sup>61</sup>

This means that the unbeliever and the believer are actually on a par, epistemologically speaking. Penelhum calls this permissive parity. That is, the sceptic serves the fideist well by demonstrating that in terms of our belief in God, we are on a par with the unbeliever in that many of the latter’s beliefs are without external justification as well. The sceptic thereby enables the permission of our beliefs. The sceptic cuts the cord holding the sword of Damocles, which was once dangling above the head of the believer, casting it aside, where it lies, now rusting and obsolete. Again, allowing Penelhum to explain it by way of two more extended quotations which summarise his thoughts:

As I understand the matter... the *religious believer* is not guilty of irrationality; that he is, as Plantinga puts it, “entirely within his intellectual rights in believing as he does.” [Plantinga defends] him against the charge that it is irrational to believe in God without adequate evidence; and [Plantinga] does it by arguing that believers and unbelievers alike are necessarily committed to principles such as the reliability of our sensory apparatus or the constancy of nature. (Not *necessarily* these principles, of course, but some such principles as these.)<sup>62</sup>

Penelhum calls this method or development *The Permissive Parity Argument*. For as the foundationalist must concede that the believer is not bound by a rigorous standard of justification, upon which even the foundationalist flounders, therefore, beliefs in God, then, are also *permissible*. Here Plantinga is correct. However, what Plantinga and others have

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<sup>60</sup>C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason* (Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998), p., 37.

<sup>61</sup>Terence Penelhum, *God and Skepticism* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983), p., 146.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 151.

also effected is an attack on positive apologetics *per se*.<sup>63</sup> Penelhum, also addresses this point when he speaks to Thomas Aquinas' conviction that though belief is based solely upon faith, Aquinas did hold that some of the revelatory truths can be demonstrated by reason.<sup>64</sup> However, Penelhum then states:

...the success of the natural theologian's arguments would show two things. It would show that the believer's key commitment could be derived from facts and standards which he and the unbeliever shared; and in consequence it would also show that the unbeliever ought to accede to it *by his own criteria of rationality*.<sup>65</sup>

Penelhum grants that it is the case that for the most part, natural theologians were trying to do this very thing. They were assuming a common ground criteria of rationality: "They were on the attack: they were trying to show that it is irrational not to believe... the success of their enterprise, or of the occurrence of something else that would have this consequence, is a necessary, if not a sufficient, condition for showing that unbelief must be due to sin."<sup>66</sup>

In response to these concluding remarks, I believe that in our positive apologetics, it need not be the case that we assume the unbeliever's premises or assume that we have a shared criteria of rationality, or that from within his autonomous epistemology he is capable of making sound logical inferences such that induce, intellectually, faith in God. It is clear that this is the very fear of men like Van Til, Bahnsen and Plantinga, that such would happen. Yet this need not be the case, for as Van Til has taught us, we can argue "to the man." We can argue analogically and paradigmatically. We need not to try and start from his worldview, his framework, seeking to build a bridge to ours, based on material found solely in his autonomous rationality.

Further, there is therefore no reason why we cannot engage in positive apologetics, analogically or paradigmatically, upon the supposition that our arguments are framework-dependent, circular, transcendental, and probable.<sup>67</sup> There are 2 things which we as believers hold. Firstly, the unbeliever functions according to a dualistic psychology and epistemology. This fact gives us common ground and removes the obstacle of absolute incommensurability between our conflicting worldviews (as explained above). Secondly, the activity of the Holy Spirit is our anchor. For the Holy Spirit can enable paradigmatic shifts in the mind and thinking of the unbeliever, flicking on the switch, as it were, thereby turning on the revelational light of Scripture.

### *Faith Against Reason: Kierkegaard*

For this section of my paper I want to take a look at C. Stephen Evans' revising of Kierkegaard's fideism. My aim here will be to merely use Evans as a lens through which one may look at the teaching of Kierkegaard. Evans, a sound and noted scholar, argues fairly persuasively that the Kierkegaard as historically received is not the same Kierkegaard historically. What struck me as I was reading Evans' account of Kierkegaard was how Van Tillian was the image of Kierkegaard Evans had created. Upon reflection I realised that this was to be expected. The common denominator here is St. Augustine whose thinking was so influential and pervasive even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Further, Kierkegaard arises out of the cultural milieu of Kant and Hegel, therefore his concepts of knowledge would naturally lend itself to dialectic

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<sup>63</sup>Plantinga, and the Reformed Epistemologists, generally only engage in negative apologetics, that is, disconfirming atheological attacks upon Christianity. They are reluctant to establish any positive apologetics for fear that these reasons or evidences become, again, a foundation for faith.

<sup>64</sup>Unfortunately Penelhum says that the fideist must reject this completely. The problem is once again definitional. It is apparent that so many want to divorce faith from reason completely, a divorce based on incommensurate worldview differences.

<sup>65</sup>Penelhum., p., 157.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>I am thinking here of the CA being presented in a more transcendental fashion.

categories.<sup>68</sup> What I will do here is to take an abbreviated, if not patch-worked, examination of Evans' construction of Kierkegaard. Firstly, Evans tackles the historical idea that for Kierkegaard truth is actually contradictory. Against this, Evans argues that when Kierkegaard used the word contradiction, for him, it carried more of the sense of paradox. For example, Evans argues, when Kierkegaard affirms that the incarnation of Christ is a 'contradiction,' he means not an absolute logical contradiction. Evans:

...we must recognize that the term 'contradiction' is not used solely or even mainly in this period to refer to a logical contradiction. The Hegelian philosophers who present Kierkegaard's chief philosophical opposition used the term 'contradiction' to refer to any relation of opposition. For example, Hegel himself calls nature a contradiction, since nature is a union of contingency and necessity, irregularity and regularity, unpredictability and predictability. It is clear that Hegel does not mean to claim that the existence of the natural world is a formal contradiction, but rather to call our attention to the incongruities and complexities that are found in our experience of nature.<sup>69</sup>

From this, Evans is able to note that the cause of this paradox is the very nature of man itself. Evans, who then cites Kierkegaard:

Misunderstanding of the paradox:

consists in the delusion that the incomprehensibility of the paradox is supposed to be connected with the differences of greater or lesser understanding, with the comparison between good and poor minds. The paradox is connected essentially with being a human being, and qualitatively with each human being in particular, whether he has much or little understanding.<sup>70</sup>

Evans notes then that Kierkegaard refused to concede that there is such a thing as independent human reason that can produce a unified systemic account of Reality.<sup>71</sup> For this to be possible, reason would have to have a "view from nowhere, the world seen from no particular place or perhaps from all angles simultaneously."<sup>72</sup> Why man cannot effect a unified systemic account of reality is exactly because of the inherent finitude of the human, and of the human mind: "The finitude that infects any attempts to develop a 'final system' of philosophy also shapes human knowledge in general."<sup>73</sup> Regarding the incarnation, Evans again notes that for Kierkegaard, given the limitations of human knowledge, divine truth should appear as "doubly baffling." Thus, says Evans, Kierkegaard held that divine truth should be received because it has been authoritatively revealed.<sup>74</sup> Kierkegaard accepted that a mark of a true prophet was exactly because it was divinely revealed.

Yet here is a complication within Kierkegaard's thinking that needs to be mentioned. Evans indicates that, for Kierkegaard, authority must not be obeyed because prior arguments have established the authority. Kierkegaard gives examples of a child's relationship to his or her parent, or that of a citizen's relationship to a policeman. In neither case is it appropriate to imagine that the authority of either parent or policeman needs first to be established before either child or citizen obeys.<sup>75</sup> It is easy to see how Kierkegaard would differ from Augustinian fideism and yet be acceptable by modern day presuppositionalists, who refrain from making any alleged self-attesting premises foundational to faith

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<sup>68</sup>Here is a key difference, I think, between modern Augustinians and Thomas, in that we are now more readily willing to see human knowledge in terms of paradoxical or dialectical categories, whereas Thomas appeared to see human knowledge as more unified yet as expressed under the rubric of *mystery*,

<sup>69</sup>Evans, *Faith*, p., 81.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 85, citing, Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*, ed., and trans., by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington, Indiana: IUP, 1967), vol. 1., p., 4.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 87.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 87

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p., 88.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, pp., 88-9.

in God. Evans himself disagrees with Kierkegaard and sees no reason why all sorts of rational inquiry would have to entail a lack of faith in the revealer. Evans, in language echoing Augustine and Thomas, says: "A distinction should be made between critical questions about the content of what is revealed and critical questions about the credentials of the source."<sup>76</sup> Evans furthermore does note that Kierkegaard in his work *On Authority and Revelation* does admit that at times some sort of criteria to discern the difference between a true and false prophet are possible. Hence, some rational reflection is necessary and appropriate. Yet, says Evans, Kierkegaard did more substantively maintain that in the final analysis, reason was unable to provide any certitude, not even miracles or any other accompanying characteristics could help.<sup>77</sup>

In the next chapter, Evans tackles Kierkegaard's claim that faith is against reason. Evans again argues that what Kierkegaard meant by this is that faith is against 'concrete reason,'<sup>78</sup> not reason *per se*. By 'concrete reason,' Evans means the actual reasoned worldviews which have been set up to oppose the Christian faith. Evans notes that it is unfortunate that Kierkegaard did not make these proper distinctions when he opposed reason.

The next important thought Evans highlights is Kierkegaard's concept of sin and how it damages human reason and intellect. Evans notes that Kierkegaard held that there are two key debilitating features bound in all human reasoning: pride and selfishness.<sup>79</sup> Evans recapping and then citing Kierkegaard:

Strictly speaking... human reason cannot be absolutely pure, for human thinking is always the thinking of a concrete, existing human being. Even the objective scholar is motivated by interests of various kinds, and what Kierkegaard calls *pure thought* is a mirage that does not exist:

Pure thinking is--what shall I say--piously or thoughtlessly unaware of the relation that abstraction still continually has to that from which it abstracts. Here in this pure thinking there is rest for every doubt; here is the eternal positive truth and whatever else one cares to say. This means that pure thinking is a phantom. And if Hegelian philosophy is free from all postulates, it has attained this with one insane postulate: the beginning of pure thinking.<sup>80</sup>

Evans then states, that for Kierkegaard, thinking is performed by whole persons, wherein the whole person is brought to bear on the thinking process, and minds are not disconnected from personalities.<sup>81</sup>

In summation, if Evans is right, it must be clear that Kierkegaard is not that far removed from what we now call presuppositionalism. It is clear that Kierkegaard reacted to his own specific philosophical climate. He reacted to the stuffy and arrogant Hegelianism and Kantianism around him. And yet, in the tradition of Pascal, Anselm and Augustine, he spoke strongly, as he obviously thought he needed to, against the imperial claims of reason and autonomous man. And if Evans is right in his re-reading of Kierkegaard's understanding of the term 'contradiction' then Kierkegaard's claim that the incarnation is absurd is perfectly reasonable, as it is the very heart of the matter which the Greeks in Paul's time thought foolish. If Evans is right in his analysis of Kierkegaard, then we need to rethink our often off-handed rejection of Kierkegaardianism.

### *Conclusion*

What has been my purpose in this paper? My aims have been manifold. On the one hand, I wanted to demonstrate that the constant refrain by rational apologists that fideism necessarily denies the place of reason or that it necessarily leads to absolute relativism is false. I wanted to show that while faith is grounded upon the self-attesting nature of

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p., 89.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p., 90.

<sup>78</sup>Evans, himself, not Kierkegaard, has coined this term.

<sup>79</sup>Evans, *Faith*, pp., 96-7.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

Scripture alone, that does not automatically preclude reasoned arguments or evidences. I also wanted to expose some of the gratuitous assertions often made by the Hacketts, the Geislars and the Gerstners of rational apologetics. Another aim was to respond to men--who in my opinion should have known better--from the presuppositional side of the apologetic divide. My intention was to demonstrate the gratuitous definitional one-sidedness on the part of Bahnsen in his opposition to fideism. I am inclined to call that strategy of his simply "the fallacy of stacking-the-deck." Fideism is a vast and complex cluster of ideas which is held very diversely by very diverse men of varying philosophical and theological backgrounds. It is clear that the fideism of Barth, Shestov, Pascal, Augustine, Kierkegaard, for example, all contain large areas of disagreement and overlap.

Furthermore, I did want to play the part, the servant, of the sceptic. I wanted to show that the claims by rational and certain presuppositional apologists are not sustainable. My anxiety is that just as presuppositionalists become concerned when Christians ground their faith in a human argument, there is the danger that many presuppositionalists are apparently doing the same. When I hear Bahnsen saying to an atheist that if the TAG was not sound, he would have no reasonable basis to believe, alarm bells should be sounding aggressively; indeed, as they were for me. For how can I not imagine that Bahnsen has now become a strange bedfellow with Sproul and others? It was said of Kant that he made room for faith. In a sense, in a small way, my intention here has been to facilitate, to enforce and to ensure that faith is not crowded out. My final hope is that this paper, together with my previous paper on Aquinas, Calvin and Owen, may work to drive us all back to the theological roots of our Protestant fideism.

As presuppositionalists, we need to be ever so careful that we do not fall into the same holes we allege that the rational apologists have dug for themselves, namely, idolatry and autonomy.

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