

**An analysis of the nature,
effectiveness, and reliability of the
Bahnsenian method of
Presuppositional Apologetics when
applied to the South African context**

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Abstract

The debate amongst Christian apologists regarding which apologetical method is most useful, continues, and church history not only testifies to this fact, but also displays the variety of ways in which apologetics has been approached by theologians of old (Craig, *et all.*, 2000:7). Closer analyses of the Presuppositional method of Apologetics sheds cardinal light on this debate, and offers possible conclusions and recommendations regarding the way forward for Apologetics (Bahnsen, 1998:467). The nature, effectiveness and reliability of Presuppositionalism become evident through careful analyses of the Bahnsenian method. The views of two South-African opponents of Christianity are apologetically evaluated with the Bahnsenian method. So doing, the Presuppositional method as interpreted by Bahnsen is not only proven effective, but also indispensable to the defence of orthodox Christianity also in South Africa.

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List of Abbreviations

AIG	Answers in Genesis
BT	Biblical Theology
HBT	Historical Biblical Theology
ICR	Institute for Creation Research
ID	Intelligent Design
JCWV	Judeo-Christian World View
PA	Presuppositional Apologetics
YEC	Young Earth Creationism

Chapter 1

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The late Dr. Greg Bahnsen, scholar-in-residence at the Southern California Center for Christian Studies and well-known defender of orthodox Christianity, was a staunch supporter of the presuppositional method of apologetics (Bahnsen, 1998:2). This method of apologetics, popularised by Westminster Seminary professor Cornelius van Til, largely relies on the internal testimony of the Bible to provide credible arguments for the accuracy, exclusivity, and supremacy of the Christian faith over all other world religions.

Hence, the importance of Presuppositionalism is immense. Reliance on Scripture is fundamental to Christianity. Sadly, in today's so-called Christian community, there are many professing Christians who have interpretations of Christianity that oppose the biblical interpretations for truth that have been carried on to us by the Apostles (Thomas & Farnell, 1998:356). Understandably, there are many minor differences between the evangelical denominations of Christianity, and there should therefore be a measure of tolerance for one another. Yet, there are differences that require extreme refutation since the Bible itself issues a stern warning against erroneous teachings (Linneman, 2001:148). In extreme cases it means the difference between belief in the existence of God and the pre-eminence of Christ in redemptive history as stipulated in Scripture, and some man-centred, Christless, practically atheistic approach to Scripture.

Within the South-African context there has been numerous attacks (both past and present) on the validity of historical Christianity, as understood by the Reformers (Hexham, 1981:23). This is a recurring theme and worthy of serious attention from Christian scholars. The Christian faith as interpreted by Christ, as understood by the Apostles and revealed in Scripture, and as defended by the Church through the ages, has been, and still remains under tremendous attack in South-Africa (and the world), and must be systematically defended through Christian Apologetics (Van Til, 1980:220).

1.2 Problem statement

A study in, and hopefully, the resultant garnering of a renewed interest in Presuppositionalism should offer an apologetic alternative that may prove profitable for the South-African context.

Many South-African Christians have to deal with the criticisms of the sceptics of orthodox Christianity, almost on a weekly basis (Claassen & Gaum, 2012:39). No longer is salvation viewed as being by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone because there is no wrath to be saved from. Neither is Scripture viewed as the authoritative guide by which to live anymore, rather evolutionary science becomes the ultimate guideline for living, thus providing the ideal breeding ground for error and heresy. For this reason, a systematised refutation of the underlying philosophical tenets of such sceptics and opponents is much needed for the South African Church, in general, as they reveal themselves in views that oppose Orthodox Christianity.

There are many methods that could be consulted in this regard (and in this sense Christianity is not impoverished whatsoever). Classical Apologetics, Evidential Apologetics, Cumulative Case Apologetics, and Reformed Epistemology Apologetics all have been effective in upholding orthodoxy, but have proven to be wanting (Cowan, 2000:379). For this reason, the Presuppositional method of Apologetics may be the answer to this shortfall as a result of its proven commitment to Scripture and Scripture alone (Frame, 1994:6). Investigation into the nature and effectiveness of Presuppositionalism, with special attention to the Bahnsenian method, as applied to the South-African context, should reveal the eligibility of Presuppositionalism as a credible method for defending orthodox Christianity in South-Africa (Bahnsen, 2004:5).

Simply stated, the research will aim to give an answer to the question: Can the Bahnsenian method of Presuppositional Apologetics (PA) assist in defending the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity against the misrepresentation, misconstruction and denial of these core doctrines by South-African sceptics? This is the problem which the study will research.

Questions arising from this problem:

1. What is Presuppositionalism as defined by Dr. Greg Bahnsen?
2. Is the Bahnsenian method an effective and reliable approach to Apologetics?
3. Will specific case studies of Bahnsen employing his method, shed light on the method's potential success for the South African context?
4. Who are some of the influential sceptics and attackers of the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity in South-Africa, what do they believe, and which core biblical doctrines are being misrepresented, misconstrued, or denied by them?

5. Will the Bahnsenian method prove effective in defending the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity against such misrepresentation, misconstruction and denial of these South-African sceptics?

1.3 Aim

The chief aim of this study is to prove the effectiveness, and reliability of the Presuppositional method of Apologetics, as interpreted by Dr. Greg Bahnsen, and applied to answer scepticism and attackers of orthodox Christianity within the South-African context.

1.4 Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Describe the Bahnsenian method of Presuppositionalism.
2. Compare and evaluate the Bahnsenian method with Scripture.
3. Study and evaluate the debate between Dr. Greg Bahnsen and Dr. Gordon Stein, to shed light on the method's potential success for the South African context.
4. Study important beliefs of some of South-African sceptics regarding the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity and compare to Historical Biblical Theology (HBT).
5. Conduct a detailed refutation of such beliefs using the Bahnsenian method as guideline.

1.5 Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the Bahnsenian method of Presuppositional Apologetics is effective in defending the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity against the criticism of sceptics.

1.6 Methodology

This inquiry into the effectiveness and reliability of the Bahnsenian method of Presuppositional Apologetics is done from the perspective of the Reformed-Evangelical tradition.

1. In order to define the Bahnsenian method, a literature analysis of some of the classical works by the father of Presuppositionalism, Cornelius van Til is conducted briefly to define Presuppositionalism (Van Til, 1980), followed by a literature analysis of the presuppositional methodology of the late Dr. Greg Bahnsen, as revealed in various publications (Bahnsen, 1996).

2. The Bahnsenian method will be compared to Scripture, which is viewed as the standard for any theological inquiry. In other words, in order to determine the effectiveness and reliability the Bahnsenian method it is judged, based on its faithfulness to Scripture.
3. In order to prove the applicability of the method for the South-African context, an analysis of the debate between Dr. Greg Bahnsen and Dr. Gordon Stein (1985) is conducted, and this debate's relevance for the debate in South Africa is researched.
4. In order to determine who the influential sceptics of the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity is, what they believe, and how they differ from historical biblical theology, a comparative literature analysis of Reformed-Evangelical core doctrine is conducted.
5. In order to determine the effectiveness and reliability of the Bahnsenian method, a refutation of the misrepresentation, misconstruction, and denial of core Christian doctrines is conducted using the Bahnsenian method itself.

1.7 Concept clarification

1. Apologetics is the systematic approach of defending the Christian Faith using Scripture, logic, science, and history, to counter arguments against Christianity, and to offer arguments for the truth of Christianity (Beilby, 2011:14-16).
2. Presuppositionalism as a systematised approach to Apologetics, is the method of making a defence for Christianity from the standpoint of Scripture itself. Even though it may seem like circular reasoning, it really isn't any more circular than any other world view or system of belief. The point of Presuppositionalism is, through the combined utilisation of Scripture and logic, to prove that the Judeo-Christian World View (JCWV) is the only credible, valid, and reliable world view, by showing that Christian presuppositions are superior to the presuppositions of any other religion, world view, or system of belief (Schaeffer, 1976:180-181).

1.8 Schematic presentation

Research question	Aim and objectives	Research method
How can scepticism towards orthodox Christianity effectively be countered within the South-African context?	The chief aim of this study is to prove the effectiveness, and reliability of the Presuppositional method of Apologetics, as interpreted by Dr. Greg Bahnsen, and applied to answer scepticism and attackers of orthodox Christianity within the South-African context.	This inquiry into the effectiveness and reliability of the Bahnsenian method of Presuppositional Apologetics is done from the perspective of the Reformed-Evangelical tradition.

<p>What is Presuppositionalism as defined by Dr. Greg Bahnsen?</p>	<p>Define and evaluate the Bahnsenian method of Presuppositionalism.</p>	<p>In order to define the Bahnsenian method, a literature analysis of some of the classical works by the father of Presuppositionalism, Cornelius van Til is conducted briefly to define Presuppositionalism, then a literature analysis of the presuppositional methodology of the late Dr. Greg Bahnsen is conducted, as revealed in various publications.</p>
<p>Is the Bahnsenian method an effective and reliable approach to Apologetics?</p>	<p>Compare and evaluate the Bahnsenian method with Scripture.</p>	<p>The Bahnsenian method is compared to Scripture, which is viewed as the standard for any theological inquiry. In other words, in order to determine the effectiveness and reliability of the Bahnsenian method it is judged, based on its faithfulness to Scripture.</p>
<p>Will specific case studies of Bahnsen employing his method within the American context, shed light on the method's potential success for the South African context?</p>	<p>Study and evaluate the debate between Dr. Greg Bahnsen and Dr. Gordon Stein, to shed light on the method's potential success for the South African context.</p>	<p>In order to prove the potential success of the method for the South-African context, an analysis of the debate between Dr. Greg Bahnsen and Dr. Gordon Stein is conducted.</p>
<p>Who are the sceptics and attackers of the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity in South-Africa, what do they believe, and which core biblical doctrines are being misrepresented, misconstrued, or denied by them?</p>	<p>Study the beliefs of South-African sceptics regarding the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity and compare to HBT.</p>	<p>In order to determine who the sceptics of the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity are, what they believe, and how they differ from HBT, a comparative literature analysis of Reformed-Evangelical core doctrine is conducted.</p>
<p>Will the Bahnsenian method prove effective in defending the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity against such misrepresentation, misconception and denial of these South-African sceptics?</p>	<p>Conduct a detailed refutation of such beliefs using the Bahnsenian method as guideline.</p>	<p>In order to determine the effectiveness and reliability of the Bahnsenian method, a refutation of the misrepresentation, misconception, and denial of core Christian doctrines is conducted using the Bahnsenian method itself.</p>

Chapter 2

2. A description of the Bahnsenian Method of Presuppositionalism

2.1 Introduction

Greg Bahnsen was a scholar in his own right and has provided the Christian academic community with a wealth of material pertaining to the study of apologetics. Bahnsen, a student of Dr. Cornelius van Til, the so-perceived “father” of PA, has, through various publications, managed to offer his own helpful interpretation of the method that van Til championed (Bahnsen, 1998:5). Some may say that, for this reason, what Dr. Bahnsen has to say regarding the topic has already been done. This may be true in one sense, but I would contend that Dr. Bahnsen, even though leaning on the basic foundation of PA so thoroughly set out by Dr. van Til, has uniquely contributed to the understanding of the method, and has by no means offered a mere ‘repackaged’ van Tilian approach. For this reason, it is undeniable that Dr. Bahnsen has made a very meaningful contribution to Presuppositionalism (Clark, 2000:256).

The focus of this chapter therefore, is to investigate the method of PA as interpreted by Greg Bahnsen in his 1996 book, *Always Ready*, with all the flair and flavour he offers. The aim of this chapter would be to define the method with careful consideration of its various components. The process of plotting the various components of the method, as well as step-by-step defining them should shed light on the overarching presuppositional philosophy being employed by Bahnsen.

2.2 Preliminaries to comprehension

As with most apologetic methods there are a few preliminary concepts that must be explained before the Bahnsenian method can be put to the test. The ultimate goal of a truly Christian apologetic method is to prove to unbelievers the validity, credibility, and exclusivity of the Christian faith (Frame, 1994:2). According to the Bahnsenian method there are three preliminaries that must be understood by the student in order to approach the method with reasonable expectations. For this reason one must understand the biblical philosophy of knowledge, the conditions that are required to facilitate the apologetical method, and lastly the conditions that are essential to achieve apologetic success.

2.2.1 Biblical philosophy of knowledge

2.2.1.1 Neutrality

According to Bahnsen (1996:3) it is sad to note that the apologists of our time often make the assertion that 'neutrality' is equal to being scholarly. They would make the argument that if we as Christian apologists are going to have any success with the unbelievers and the philosophers of our time, then we must strive for neutrality (Bahnsen, 1996:4). For them, it no longer suffices to offer explanations for reality (disease, plagues, natural disasters, violence, wars, inequality, etc.) based on the foundation of Scripture, alone. Many would contend that in this sense Scripture has become passé, and in need of enhancement. Bahnsen (1996:4) finds that the overall attitude of many is that the Bible alone cannot be the centre on which our discussions with unbelievers are based. Fearing that they will lose credibility with unbelievers, the Bible is resultantly being pushed to the peripheral. For this reason, assumptions cannot be exclusively based on biblical truth. However, what apologists must strive for is neutrality, which, from the outset, says that nothing can be said for certain, because nobody knows for certain.

The problem with this kind of attitude toward the Bible, believes Bahnsen (1996:4), is that it is the very thing that Satan strives to achieve with it. The same misguided attitude teaches that if Christians can set their presuppositions aside, even if just momentarily, then true discussion can take place. If the adversary could get believers to do this then ultimately we would be affected in our Christian duty. As it involves the Great Commission of our Lord we would become ineffective in taking the message of the Gospel to those who have not yet surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. As it involves the Church, we would helplessly observe as our people become powerless in their testimony, with no compass for their path, or sword for defence against the adversary. Ultimately, if the Bible is not the centre anymore, the Church will stagnate in its spiritual growth.

2.2.1.2 A definition of knowledge

So what is knowledge, then? Bahnsen (1996:5) affirms that the short biblical answer to this question, is that true knowledge flows from God. For this reason, whenever true knowledge is discovered by human beings, it can be said to have had its origin in God. Bahnsen reminds us that Paul addresses this when he writes to the Colossians, that more specifically, it is in Christ "in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). For this reason, Bahnsen proceeds to explain, in the believer's pursuit of knowledge, even knowledge pertaining to the reaching of unbelievers with Christ's Gospel, the Bible must be the focus. It is neither profitable, nor sane for professing believers to avoid Christ and his Word (Scripture) at any point in the attainment of knowledge. All academic efforts must flow forth from knowledge of Christ.

Sadly, when Christ is pushed aside in our thinking, it reveals a heart that is misled, Bahnsen reminds. It reveals a heart that has not received the whole counsel of God, and at worst that has not yet undergone the new birth (Jn. 3). A moving away from Scripture in the defence of the faith is to surrender the very source of knowledge and wisdom found in Christ alone (Bahnsen, 1996:5).

It is resultantly fundamental to Bahnsen (1996:5) that all knowledge must be related to Christ, whatever in the world it is that we are striving to understand. If people are rooted in Him, then they will inevitably be rooted in true knowledge about the world and reality (Col. 2:7-8). Being rooted in Christ necessitates that neutrality be tossed aside, and reasoning with doubters occurs from the basis of his Word. The presupposition must be foremost that his Word is true, and that the Christian faith is real. If not, the very thing Paul warns the Colossians about will happen, the mind will be taken “captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:88).

2.2.1.3 Revelation

As a result of the transformation that occurs within an individual, Bahnsen (1996:19) believes such a person’s outlook on life also changes dramatically. He explains that when “the new man” has been born, along with this new birth also comes new presuppositions. This new outlook on life is totally governed by the new faith that he has in Christ, aided by the working of the Holy Spirit, Christ being the highest authority in his life. In this fashion, Revelation (the Word) of God becomes the touchstone in someone’s life, governing a person’s every thought, and entire being (Bahnsen, 1996:19).

Then of course, the Philosophers and doubters of biblical truth in this age would want people to be convinced that there is no reliable way to determine what is true. Bahnsen (1996:19) reminds, to believe in absolute truth, or to even have certainty that one has found the truth, is an impossibility to them. The truth, they would say, is wholly unknowable as it cannot be determined, worse yet, it does not even exist.

Bahnsen (1996:19) believes this reasoning flies right in the face of biblical teaching. To the contrary he explains, God has revealed himself to us through Scripture (and creation), in such a way that he can be known by us. Truth for that matter can be discovered. It is neither hidden, nor inaccessible as the philosophers of the world would like to believe, rather, it has been revealed.

However, for us to observe, experience, and understand this truth we must be diligent to study revealed truth, as contained in Scripture.

2.2.2 Conditions required to facilitate the Presuppositional Method

2.2.2.1 A Christian approach to knowledge

If we are going to have any accurate knowledge pertaining to creation, the existence of God, and how man can have a right standing with God, all our knowledge must be subjected to his knowledge. Bahnsen (1996:29) insightfully advises that “all our knowledge must be a ‘receptive reconstruction of God’s primary thoughts’”. In other words if the Lord is the originator of all truth it is our responsibility to deal faithfully with this truth. Thus, Bahnsen (1996:30) explains, when human beings endeavour to know anything about creation or salvation, the outcome will only be successful (true knowledge about God) if such inquiry is based on the Word of God, as the starting point.

2.2.2.2 Boldness and humility in proclaiming the truth

The view that knowledge is gained presuppositionally, presupposes two attitudes according to Bahnsen (1996:36). The first is an attitude of boldness, the second, is an attitude of humility. First, boldness is needed, but also possible in any presentation of God’s truth, in defence of the Truth. It is otherwise impossible to say anything ‘truthful’ about God if such statements are not based on the truth which is from God.

Second, Bahnsen (1996:36) points to humility as an indispensable trait that is necessary in any approach of unbelievers. He maintains that what we know about God is something that we would not have been able to do on our own accord. This points to all peoples’ great need and reliance on God’s grace to know anything about Him, because even the slightest insights into the mind of God, are possible by grace alone.

2.2.2.3 Correcting false presumption

Critics would say that the presuppositional method implies that unbelievers cannot contribute anything meaningful to society since they do not believe in biblical presuppositions. Bahnsen not only refers to this presumption as false, but also offers the correct answer. He explains that unbelievers can arrive at truth with certain things, for the reason that they do in fact have certain presuppositions. Bahnsen (1996:38) informs us that the truth of God may be denied in the

unbeliever, yet the truth cannot be entirely unknown by the unbeliever. He proceeds that all unbelievers who deny the truth of God do possess varying degrees of the truth of God.

That close attention must be paid to natural revelation in any discussion about biblical presuppositions is the answer Bahnsen (1996:38) gives in this instance. Man is without excuse in his receiving of God, because evidence for God's existence is seen in every square millimetre of his creation, from nature, to man who was created 'imago Dei' (in his image). There is no place man can go where he cannot be fully convinced that God does not exist (Ps. 139:8).

2.2.2.4 Common ground is not necessarily neutrality

Another attack launched against the Presuppositional method is that the presuppositionalist denies that there can be any common ground between the believer and the unbeliever. In answering this attack Bahnsen (1996:43) stresses the importance of proving to the unbeliever that everything in the realm of creation must be subservient to God. It must accordingly be shown from the Bible that every square millimetre of God's creation is under his rule and that there is not a single rogue molecule that is not subjected to his rule.

Bahnsen believes that the same counts for man (Bahnsen, 1996:43). Man must also submit himself to God's rule, although he does not always do so (Rom. 12:1). Two things can be concluded from the foregoing: Firstly, there is no neutrality between the believer and the unbeliever. The believer is obedient to God, while the unbeliever is still in rebellion towards Him (Matt. 6:24). Secondly however, there is a sense in which common ground can be found between the believer and the unbeliever. Bahnsen (1996:43) maintains that this common ground rests on the fact that both believer and unbeliever belong to God, in the sense of having been created in his image, and living on his Earth. So in impressing upon the unbeliever that he must submit to God's rule, it becomes vitally important to point him to the fact that God possesses all things, including those who do not believe in Him.

2.2.2.5 Where common ground is found

As in any other apologetic method a point of contact can and must certainly be established between the believer and the unbeliever. According to the presuppositional method however, this point of contact does not, and cannot occur on the unbeliever's terms. Bahnsen (1996:45) explains, the kind of common ground that can be established by virtue of the fact that both have been created by God and operate in the realm of creation, is one of metaphysical nature. It must

be said that every sphere of creation constitutes commonality between believer and unbeliever, from the laws of physics, all the way to history. The temptation again is to view this as neutrality, informs Bahnsen (1996:45). This is however not the case. Common ground is God's ground. There is no place where man can place himself, where he can operate outside of God's created realm, even as it involves intellectual thought.

Common ground, in the view of those who seek neutrality says Bahnsen, is never possible between Christians and non-Christians. We can never find common ground because the unbeliever's logic is faulty says Bahnsen (1996:46). The unbeliever suppresses the truth of God in his mind, as he seeks to place his interpretations within a faulty naturalistic scheme. In this fashion the non-Christian is convinced of the airtightness of his arguments for the rejection of any belief in the existence of God. Unknowingly, or knowingly, says Bahnsen (1996:46), his mind becomes the final authority in the establishment of such findings.

Bahnsen (1996:47) contends that natural man is in need of extensive change in order to see the truth of the existence of the God of the Bible, and natural man therefore does not need a quick or superficial fix to his problem of unbelief: What he really is in need of is extreme surgery of the heart. Bahnsen (1996:47) references Colossians 3:9-10 for insight into the process that must be followed by unregenerate man. According to this reasoning the old self must be put off, with all its evil practices, replacing these with the new man who is being renewed in the image of the God who created him.

Yet, Bahnsen (1996:47) instructs, when the presuppositionalist makes the assertion that there is no common ground to be found between believers and unbelievers, this does not preclude the fact that there is no point of contact whatsoever. Even if the unbeliever is missing the mark because he is leaning on his own, self-conscious and autonomous efforts in his quest for knowledge, this does not mean that he cannot understand anything being said by a believer. As far as epistemology is concerned says Bahnsen (1996:47), it would be faulty to think that they are proverbially speaking "like ships in the night," unknowingly passing each other by. The fact that both Christian and non-Christian have been created in the image of God proves the foolishness of this kind of reasoning. Both regenerate and unregenerate man have been created in his image, the difference being that regenerate man has been renewed in respect to it, while the unregenerate man has not.

Bahnsen (1996:47) reminds us that man can be viewed as a “finite replica” of God. We are like God in every way that it would be appropriate to be like Him. It is for this reason that man can never escape God. Everywhere that man goes he has the constant reminder that it is in God’s image that he was created. Along with the testimony of the crown of creation, being man, there is also the constant reminder of the fingerprints of God over every little part of his creation. This Bahnsen (1996:47) says, ensures that whenever man looks at himself, he must know that God exists, and whenever he looks at nature around him, he must do likewise.

2.2.3 Conditions that are essential to achieve apologetic success

2.2.3.1 God is the giver of understanding

The state of man can never be forgotten during the apologetic process, reminds Bahnsen (1996:84). In every debate with an unbeliever, the true state of his heart must not be disregarded. We must remember that sinful man is a product of the fall of human beings into sin. All of us have fallen “short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). It is in this helpless state that man refuses to seek after God (Rom. 3:10-12). It is this condition of total depravity that binds man and leaves him prisoner to his own sinful thoughts and ideas regarding truth, ignoring the manifold testimony regarding the only true God. Bahnsen (1996:84) stresses that it is for this reason that the unbeliever’s thoughts will always lead to the kind of error and folly that declares there is no God.

Sadly, Bahnsen (1996:84) says, in the name of neutrality, many seek to overlook this very obvious flaw in unregenerate man. Many would argue that there is enough truth in unbelieving epistemology to reason with them from such a neutral standpoint, leading to total conversion. This can never be the case since no compromise will ever be found between autonomy and dependence on God for salvation. Bahnsen (1996:84) explains that natural revelation as an expression of common grace will never leave the unbeliever without an excuse as he is educated by the Creator himself through its means, but this can never lead to salvation until the unbeliever rejects his autonomy, and submits to the Lordship of Christ.

2.2.3.2 Faith is necessary

At this point it must be stated that even though the Trinity causes the sinner to come to repentance, the prerequisite of salvation is still human faith. Bahnsen (1996:88) does well to remind us that faith cannot be preceded by an inquiry into its validity from an autonomous standpoint. Faith must be the starting point, because it is through genuine faith that one is aided in the process of understanding. Bahnsen (1996:88) refers to Augustine of Carthage who made

the point that it is because of faith that believers can understand the deeper things of God. The advice may come across as counter-intuitive, but is indispensable to a proper understanding of the salvific process. To simplify, Bahnsen (1996:84) explains that God rewards us by granting us understanding in exchange for our faith in Him.

The reality Bahnsen (1996:89) explains, is that someone cannot through reasoning be coerced to repent of their sins. If faith that leads to repentance is the prerequisite for reception of the Gospel which we defend through the Presuppositional method, then the conclusion must be that God is ultimately the determining factor whether anyone comes to faith in Christ. The Gospel will remain foolishness to anyone who has not yet come to repentant faith in Christ. Bahnsen (1996:89) says faith can never be the result of clever reasoning, but is always the result of the grace of God stripping away at the sinner's unbelief drawing him to repentance.

This does not mean that apologetic endeavours are futile and that reasoning with someone is useless, rather Bahnsen (1996:89) clarifies, it merely suggests that the success of apologetic efforts lies in the hands of a Sovereign God, who ultimately draws men and women unto himself. This is also why it is fundamentally important that any presentation of the truth be accompanied by a call to repentance and abandonment of faulty reasoning on the part of the unbeliever. Equally important is the determination to argue from the presupposed truth of God's Word. Only then Bahnsen (1996:88) explains, will the apologist have been faithful in presenting the presuppositional challenge to the unbeliever.

2.3 The Bahnsenian Method

2.3.1 The folly of the fool

As an introduction to his method Bahnsen (1996:60) has some things to say about the ones who suppress the truth of God. According to him it must be said that when being brought face to face with the truth as found in Scripture, the unbeliever has no answer, or 'apologetic'. (Rom. 1:20). On an intellectual level the unbeliever has no substance and all his thinking proves futile and worthless in the long run. It is exactly as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:20: "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?" Here he is rhetorically expecting the answer "nowhere," because the reality is that the unbeliever has no place to stand when facing the glory of the Gospel.

2.3.2 A two-step approach

To Bahnsen (1996:61), it is the duty of the presuppositionalist to show the 'fool' the need for Christianity as a requirement to reason intelligently. Focusing on Proverbs 26:4-5 he identifies a two-step method or approach. According to these verses one must not answer a fool according to his folly for the fear of becoming like him. But one must also answer a fool so that he does not think he is right in his thinking. This means that the fool must not be answered according to his own faulty presuppositions. The believer has to stick to his own presuppositions as the basis for argumentation. Then again Bahnsen (1996:61) instructs, the believer (apologist) must also answer the fool according to his faulty views. By doing this, he shows the unbeliever the ignorance of his misaligned thinking.

2.3.2.1 Revealing foolishness

When answering and not answering the fool, the aim should be to reveal their foolishness to them. The apologist should in one sense be comfortable too, working within his own frame of belief and answer the fool accordingly. But in another sense the apologist should be more than willing to answer the fool according to his folly. In this sense it is the responsibility of the apologist to show the sceptic of biblical truth the end result of such reasoning. Bahnsen (1996:62) contends that if "pursued to their consistent end presuppositions of unbelief render man's reasoning vacuous and his experience unintelligible".

Bahnsen (1996:63) is convinced that Proverbs 26:4-5 is indeed helpful in the pursuit of a method that can be followed to bring the folly of their thinking under the attention of unbelievers. To reiterate, in the giving of an answer to the fool:

1. The believer must refuse to answer the fool according to his foolish presuppositions, and
2. The believer must answer the fool according to his foolish presuppositions so that he can see what the end state of such foolish reasoning is.

When this kind of method prescribed in Proverbs is used by the apologist, then the unavoidable result will be that the fool will become aware of the foolishness of his world view. Bahnsen (1996:64) believes that this two-fold procedure in PA is one that achieves success in argumentation, without the danger of losing biblical accuracy. Not only does this approach offer a 'reasoned' approach to the faith, but, Bahnsen (1996:64) explains, it also stops all unreasoned arguments dead in their tracks.

2.3.2.2 The results of the two-step approach

To clarify matters, Bahnsen (1996:64) explains the two-fold approach has two results when reasoning with unbelievers about the validity of the Christian faith: Firstly, it enables the apologist to reason with the unbeliever without sacrificing core Christian beliefs. Secondly, it offers a thoughtful version of the faith, incapacitating all other faiths proving them to be worthless.

2.3.2.3 The limitations of the two-step approach

Bahnsen admits that this two-step approach is not without its limits, because of the human element. The one temptation that will be present with the believer in any defence of the faith is the desire to overcome the opponent of Christianity. In every step of the process one must however be sure not to become proud, or stubborn. The very opposite should be the case instructs Bahnsen (1996:64). As representatives of Christ, the defender of God's truth must launch any argument against unbelief with humility, gentleness, and kindness. This will have a testimony of its own, showing the opponent that our wisdom comes from above.

Bahnsen also believes that 2 Timothy 2:23-25 is insightful for the defender of Scripture. In this passage the instruction by Paul is for Christians not to put up with foolish questions, because they inevitably lead to quarrels. The reason being that the fool is autonomous in his thinking. Even so, the apologist must give the fool an answer. However, the answer must not be in relation to the fool's false presuppositions. Rather, says Bahnsen (1996:65), an answer must be given which shows the fool the folly of his presuppositions. In this event the unbeliever is being 'educated' as to the right approach to truth, and reality.

2.3.2.4 The call to civility

Another important component of the Bahnsenian method is the maintaining of a biblical level of civility during the apologetic process. Bahnsen (1996:65) again refers to Paul who prescribes that the servant of the Lord must not reduce himself to the unbeliever's tactics, but strive to remain gentle and kind during every step of the apologetic procedure. At best, the unbeliever is an intellectual 'schizophrenic' who 'opposes himself'. For this very reason he needs to be instructed in humility and civility.

2.3.2.5 The call to salvation

Bahnsen reminds that believing in God cannot coexist with an autonomous mind-set. Accordingly, Bahnsen (1996:65) points out that Paul ends at the bottom-line truth, which is that no one will believe unless God draws them. People only believe as part of God's sovereign will.

2.3.3 World views

Since the core element of disagreement between a believer and an unbeliever is their difference in world view, Bahnsen (1996:67) explains the believer can never be satisfied defending the faith based on isolated 'proofs' for the Bible's veracity. These are not bad according to Bahnsen, but they miss the point if the basis for disagreement is the result of something far greater. Even if great evidence is offered by the believer, such evidence will invariably and arbitrarily be processed by the unbeliever from within his particular frame of reference (world view). For this very reason Bahnsen (1996:97) is convinced that the strategy offered in Scripture is the only method that can have lasting and total success, because it calls for argumentation that occurs at the presuppositional level.

Any debate about truth, Bahnsen (1996:69) maintains, will unavoidably draw upon prior intellectual commitments. If one is committed to these they will affect one's entire world view. For this reason, the presuppositionalist knows that any argument must conclude in a basic or 'self-authenticating' starting point. Any debate over religion will always return to these starting points, since they are the commitments upon which any world view is built.

Bahnsen (1996:69) explains that to this extent, any debate will always return to the question of 'authority'. If autonomy is the authority, then the sky is the limit in what man will believe about life, but if God and his Word is the authority, then man will believe God and resultantly live according to his Word. To reiterate, the previously discussed two-step approach can help at establishing this: 1. Showing the unbeliever the futility of his views and how it can never lead to knowledge, and 2. A strong presentation of 'the hope' that is within, from a presuppositional commitment to Scripture.

2.3.3.1 Presuppositions

The 'prior intellectual commitments' that Bahnsen refers to is essentially what was referred to by Cornelius van Til as 'presuppositions'. Van Til believed that the only consistent method of Christian apologetics is to be found on the grounds of presuppositions (van Til, 1980:99). Bahnsen (1998:465) is in agreement with van Till when he speaks of world views as one would also define presuppositions. It is a person's presuppositions that leads him or her to certain intellectual commitments. World view and presuppositions are therefore synonymous. Reflecting on van Til's method, Bahnsen reminds us that it is a person's presuppositions that eventually lead to the formation of a specific world view.

Accordingly, these presuppositions that ultimately lead to the formation of someone's world view, cannot be viewed in isolation of each other. Presuppositions should never be viewed as independent and unique from other presuppositions in any way. Rather, explains Bahnsen (1998:465), they should be viewed as fulfilling a supportive function within a person's intricately engineered world view. Presuppositions always work in unison with each other.

2.3.3.2 The reference point

Since presuppositions lead to one's world view, van Till was convinced that they are to be viewed as the starting point, or the 'reference point' for any apologetic encounter with an unbeliever (Bahnsen, 1998:467). This reference point is what is viewed as the guiding point, the plumb line, or the ruler for any reasoning with unbelievers. It is also to these conditions that Bahnsen (1998:467) testifies and adheres to in his own approach to Presuppositionalism as is clearly illustrated in his interpretation of world views, or presuppositions. These are by no stretch of the imagination the conditions that are necessary to validate any human experience whatsoever.

2.3.4 The starting point is Scripture

So, the question may arise, exactly what is the starting point with an unbeliever if one must avoid particular questions of unbelief? The short answer Bahnsen (1996:73) offers is, the Christian apologist must be willing to defend the "impossibility of the contrary". This is to say that the philosophic perspective of the unbeliever obliterates meaning, thus being counterproductive to the attainment of true knowledge. Defending the impossibility of the contrary involves maintaining that the starting point of any thought can never be in isolation from God and his Word. Since reasoning is impossible apart from Scripture, it is with Scripture alone that the true starting point for any reasoning can be found.

Bahnsen (1996:74) stresses, it is at the presuppositional (Scripture as starting point) level where Evidential Apologetics (evidences from nature, history, logic, etc.) will not suffice.¹ According to 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 'every' thought or imagination that exalts itself above the truth that is from God must be cast down. This is something that reasoning from evidence cannot attain to. Only

¹ Cowan (2000:16) disambiguates what is understood by the Evidential Method. He says that "this method is fairly eclectic in its use of various positive evidences and negative critiques, utilizing both philosophical and historical arguments". He also asserts "it tends to focus chiefly on the legitimacy of accumulating various historical and other inductive arguments for the truth of Christianity" (Cowan, 2000:16). For the purpose of this study, the term will be loosely employed to refer to all apologetical systems that focus on evidences as the requirement for apologetic success.

Scripture, as it is used by the Holy Spirit can have this result. Bahnsen (1996:75) says this must not be viewed as circular reasoning, i.e. believing that the Bible is true, because it is true. Instead, what the Christian apologist sets out to do is to show that 'ultimate truth' can never be argued independently of its inherent 'preconditions' or presuppositions.

Being true to Proverbs 26:4-5, the believer must approach the unbeliever with the knowledge that he suppresses God's truth, therefore foolish presuppositions must be rejected in an attempt to enlighten (educate) the unbeliever. Once the two-step commitment has been made to 'reject' and 'teach,' Bahnsen suggests the following method should be employed to teach (Bahnsen, 1996:79-80):

1. Present facts inside the Bible's philosophy of fact. This means that God is seen as the determiner of truth, Christ being the One to whom we submit in the reception of such truth.

2. Attack the unbeliever's presuppositions, asking whether they lead to true knowledge. Here the unbeliever's views must be nullified by pointing to the impossibility of anything outside of Christianity. This involves a transportation of the believer to the view of the unbeliever in order to show him the folly of his view. A critique of his view must be conducted from this standpoint.

3. An appeal must be made to the unbeliever that he/she was created in the image of God, which means that revelation which is from God is a certainty. The apologist can point to this reality by, for instance, referring to 'borrowed capital' or unadmitted presuppositions which are present in the unbeliever's thinking.

4. Lastly, Bahnsen (1996:80) believes the apologist must point to the fact that no intelligent discussion regarding truth and the way of salvation is possible unless such discussion is preconditioned upon the authoritative Word of God. In this step, the believer can invite the unbeliever to see things from the Christian perspective, and see that the Christian has every reason to base knowledge on God's Word, and on nothing else.

It is at this juncture that the importance of further research is emphasised. The groundwork for understanding the Bahnsenian method has been laid, yet, further investigation into its Scriptural accuracy must still be conducted. At the heart of the reformed tradition lies its unwavering

commitment to Scripture alone ('sola Scriptura'), and it is therefore through Scripture that the method should be scrutinised.

Chapter 3

3. A Comparison of the Bahnsenian method with Scripture and an evaluation thereof

3.1 Introduction

One of the main tenets of reformed epistemology, something that Bahnsen held in high regard, is that Scripture alone is sufficient for tackling all of life's hard questions. Not only does Scripture claim to have the answer for salvation and redemption - Christ being the Way, the Truth, and the Life, but similarly claims to be authoritative in all other pursuits of knowledge as well (Jn. 14:6; 2 Cor. 10:5). Bahnsen (1996:21) is convinced that the Bible is authoritative and the ultimate standard for any pursuit of knowledge. To him the Bible is "the foundation of knowledge" (Bahnsen, 1996:21).

If the Bahnsenian method is going to be valuable and helpful in the field of Apologetics, it would therefore be necessary to scrutinise it using the same standard by which it makes its own claims. The aim of this chapter is therefore to proceed by placing the Bahnsenian method under the microscope of Scripture. If this method is indeed what it claims to be, then it must be measured against the truth of Scripture itself. After all, Scripture is the main point of departure for the Bahnsenian method. All the major tenets of the Bahnsenian method will be compared with Scripture to establish its biblical accuracy, and ultimately to verify its internal consistency.

3.2 The impossibility of neutrality and the importance of establishing common ground

3.2.1 The impossibility of neutrality

As introduction of his method, Bahnsen explains to the student the concept of neutrality. This is viewed by him (1996:7) as an academic pursuit that cannot be practiced by the believer and the one who wishes to impress the truth of God's existence, and the salvation that is only available through Christ, on the minds of people who have not yet come to this understanding. Neutrality is not merely an exercise in creating contact with the unbeliever, but it reaches so much further. Bahnsen (1996:7) explains that when the believer engages in neutrality, the result is that the intellect gets absorbed into the world of the unbeliever, and the stark distinction between Christian and unbeliever gets obscured because the believer now reasons according to the same rules as the unbeliever. This can never be the case. Bahnsen (1996:9) explains that rather than assisting in the apologetic venture, neutrality has the opposite effect of not reaching the unbeliever where he needs to be reached most. Additionally, when people engage in neutrality, they are essentially

hiding the fact that they are Christians with very specific convictions. Bahnsen (1996:9) reminds that by doing this, the believer becomes apostate in his thoughts and engulfed in a world of scepticism, like the one he tries to reach.

One of the main Bible passages on which Bahnsen bases his view on neutrality, is found in Colossians 2:2-8. In this instance he makes the point that if apologists were to strive for neutrality, that Christ would essentially be robbed through the very vain philosophies and crafty deceit employed in the process. Thus, according to him (1996:7) everything the Christian approaches, must be done from the standpoint that Christ and his Word is of most importance in every activity of life.

Is this what Paul had in mind when he wrote Colossians 2:2-3? In order to answer this question, it would be helpful to see what others have said about this passage. Melick (1991:245) seems to be in agreement with Bahnsen from the onset. It is his view that Paul, having mentioned how important the attainment of “the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery” is, resultantly tells them how this immense and otherworldly knowledge can indeed be found (Col. 2:2-3). Melick (1991:245) believes that according to Paul, the attainment of such understanding and knowledge is only possible through Christ. Since Christ is the manifestation of the only living God (Col. 2:3), then all authentic and genuine wisdom has its origin in Him. Melick (1991:245) proceeds to provide the background at play in this utterance of Paul. To him (1991:245) it is clear that the false teachers whom Paul had in mind were purely focused on wisdom per se, regardless of a true definition of such wisdom, yet what was clear about Paul was that he focused solely on Christ. To Paul, Melick (1991:245) proceeds, Christ is the suitable possessor of real knowledge, as this kind of knowledge finds its expression in Him alone.

The pursuit of knowledge outside of Christ is impossible. In the case of the Colossians a heresy threatened to replace the true knowledge of God as it is contained in Christ, with a false, knowledge. In this event they traded the immense riches of knowledge in Christ with the wisdom of man. In the end such knowledge is only a delusion Paul explains (Col. 2:4). Melick (1991:246) explains that Paul was concerned here for the Colossians in that he feared they were being thus deceived by the clever or ‘plausible’ arguments of false teachers.

After making known to the Colossians (Col. 2:5) that he rejoices for them when he sees their faith in Christ, and the way it is lived out by them, he then exhorts them to keep walking strong as the

ones who are in Christ (Col. 2:6). Melick (1991:246) believes that Paul was reminding the Colossians that as they had previously received Christ Jesus, so they had to keep on walking in Him. Paul was aware of the havoc that the false teachers were causing and so, chose his words very carefully (1991:247). In the Greek it becomes clear that Paul provides the word 'Lord' with the definite article 'the'. Essentially, what is significant about this is that the words 'Jesus is Lord' is being emphasised. Melick (1991:247) believes that Paul is emphasising the fact that the Colossians received "Christ Jesus, the one who is the Lord". Melick (1991:247) explains that this kind of usage explains well how serious Paul was in the guarding of knowledge as it finds its truest expression in admitting to the Lordship of Christ. Melick (1991:247) says that the heretical teaching that was starting to have some effect in Colossae, to the contrary, was not magnifying Jesus as the Lord of all.

MacArthur (1992:92) is in agreement with Melick when he adds that the phrase "walk in him" (Col. 2:6), refers to day-to-day behaviour or conduct. Essentially, Paul is to be understood as promoting a faith in Christ that involves continuing to believe in the truth about Him, as it was revealed in him. The picture of having been rooted in Christ similarly sheds light on the reality of the believer's identity in Christ. MacArthur (1992:92) points out that the verb for 'rooted' is being used in the perfect tense as a participle, and so conveys the meaning of eternal salvation or eternal security in Christ. Additionally, MacArthur (1992:93) points out Paul's view of Christ being the believer's ultimate source of spiritual nourishment. If this is the reality of the believer's relationship with Christ, then Bahnsen certainly has credence for opting out of an establishment of intellectual neutrality. If the believer is so firmly established in Christ, as a tree is firmly rooted in the soil, then it becomes virtually impossible for him/her to reason about truth matters other than from the basis of the knowledge that was imparted to him/her through Christ. In this fashion neutrality will be impossible to follow through on since the believer is one with Christ, and walking in his truth.

In this sense Bahnsen is accurate in saying that the dismal end-result of neutrality is a 'robbing' of Christ. If reasoning does not occur according to Christ's rules, then they are certainly occurring to that of the world. As mentioned, such reasoning is not according to the tradition of Christ, but rather according to 'human tradition' (Col. 2:8). Hendriksen (1964:109) is convinced this was not a reference to apostolic tradition, nor was it a reference to mainstream Judaism, although there were some commonalities with Judaism at this point. Rather, Hendriksen (1964:109) claims that Paul was referring to a Judaistic Ceremonialism, Angelolatry, and Asceticism, which the later verses (Col. 2:11-23) make clear. The point being, as it involves the pursuit of neutrality, no

reasoning should ever take place based on the traditions of man, the reason being that such traditions are contrary to the tradition of Christ, as they are of the world. These have a tendency to take men away from Christ says Hendriksen (1964:110), and ultimately to dilute any trust they may have had in Him as the only one who could save them. Such a proclamation about human tradition does not promote the case of neutrality, whether philosophically, or in any other way.

3.2.2 The importance of establishing common ground

One of the main arguments against the Bahnsenian method has been its unwillingness to admit to any common ground in the apologetic endeavour (Bahnsen, 1996:41). This is however not the case. Bahnsen (1996:41) provides a response to this concern by drawing the critic's attention to two main categories that deserve attention in the seeking of common ground between the believer and the unbeliever. He (1996:41) narrows the addressing of such criticism, and the pursuit of common ground in general, to three categories, namely the taking into account of, 1) the God whom is represented, 2) the sinner to whom he is speaking, and, 3) the context in which reasoning takes place.

Yet, all three categories are addressed by pointing to the fact that God is the creator of everything. Bahnsen (1996:42), having referenced various Bible passages of God as creator, makes the point that neutrality is not possible at all. Bahnsen (1996:43) explains that it is for the reason that neutrality is not possible, that the believer would be wrong to look for subjects that will leave the unbeliever unchallenged and unaffected by the presuppositional requirements that Scripture has of him/her. This is the very area in which the believer's first line of apologetic defense lies. Since the unbeliever (as is the believer) is a creature of God who lives in God's creation, according to the rules that God has established for his creation, he too has the responsibility to respond correctly to revelation which is from God.

One of the main texts on which Bahnsen bases his understanding of the establishment of common ground is found in Romans 1:19-20. According to Bahnsen (1996:43) no person can be totally ignorant about the things of God and the revelation of himself unto man, due to the fact that He has made himself known to human beings through his creation. Is this the teaching of this portion of Scripture or not? Can Romans 1:19-20 for this reason be successfully applied to the establishment of common ground between the believer and the unbeliever?

It is the view of Murray (1968:37) that it certainly can. He explains that the apostle, through his specific word selection in Rom. 1:19, is trying to convey that men suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness. Essentially what takes place in the mind of unbelieving man is that he suppresses the truth to such a degree, that that which is manifested, that which can so clearly be seen in God's creation, is hindered by the unbeliever regardless of the grandeur of such manifestation. The truth, says Murray (1968:37) which is revealed unto them is related to the very things that can be known of God, yet they keep suppressing such amazing truth or revelation.

In Rom. 1:20 Paul makes known exactly what it is that has been revealed unto them, or the actual content of this knowledge. He says: "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made." It is in this verse that the crux of Bahnsen's argument for the possibility of common ground lies. To him (1996:43) the conditions of Romans 1:19-20 establish the very conditions necessary to have common ground between the believer and unbeliever. These conditions not only establish the impossibility of neutral ground, but make obvious the reality of common ground. According to Bahnsen (1996:43) common ground is all around and everywhere to be found because all ground is essentially God's ground.

Similarly, Lenski (1961:95) agrees that the existence of God should become plain to man in light of natural revelation as explained by Paul. According to him (1961:95) it is for this very reason that Paul makes reference to the wrath of God. The fact that God is said by Paul to be wrathful over the unrighteousness of man is for the obvious reason that men do know about God. That which can be known about God, was manifested in creation.

Furthermore, Lenski (1961:97) brings attention to the seeming oxymoron in Paul's phrase "invisible attributes...have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:20). One might want to ask how it can be possible to see the things which are by nature unseen. Lenski (1961:97) provides the solution by pointing out that it is precisely through the things that are made by God that the unseen becomes seen, and so, it is exactly through the things that He has created that He provides testimony regarding his existence. Additionally, Lenski (1961:97) says when Paul uses the phrase "since the creation of the world" (Rom. 1:20) it signifies that he includes all people who were created. This phrase includes every person God ever created, and therefore excludes all people from the excuse that they did not receive such revelation from God, since God revealed it to all through his creation.

Bahnsen seems to be in good company when he applies his interpretation of Romans 1:19-20 to the area of common ground. At this point both the preceding commentators are in agreement with the implications Bahnsen draws from it for the approaching of the unbeliever on common ground. It is evident that such common ground is established as a result of natural revelation of God through the creation.

To conclude: Hendriksen (1981:68) makes the point that natural revelation was given by God apart from the special revelation which is present in the Gospel of Christ. This means that there is a double sense in which natural man is culpable and finds himself on common ground in many parts of the world where the Gospel has been spread. Apart from the fact that God can be seen and witnessed at work in his creation by every human being who is alive on the planet today, it is the fact that so many have also been exposed to the Gospel of Christ, in which lies the specific exhortation to repent of sin and turn to Christ for life. In this sense, Bahnsen is therefore accurate in his description of common ground when utilising Romans 1:19-20, as all men and women are subjects in God's creation, whether they believe in Him or not.

3.3 Revelation and knowledge

To Bahnsen (1996:19) it is clear that the Bible and true knowledge are closely related. In this view, when a person accepts the Word of God and perceives Scripture to be authoritative, then such a person could be said to have attained to true and accurate knowledge. And it is in this where apologetic success lies. Bahnsen (1996:20) explains that true understanding occurs whenever a person accepts Scripture as the true Word of God, since all knowledge has its origin in God.

However, the problem according to Bahnsen (1996:20) is that some may view the possession of biblical knowledge as a personal accomplishment. In this regard he refers to the type of individuals who say they are only Christians because they, through their cleverness have studied the Bible for themselves and have thus arrived at the conclusion that the Bible is true and that God must be followed, by means of their own intellectual pursuit. Bahnsen (1996:20) warns that this is certainly not the case, since knowledge of God is something that is external to the natural man, it is something that is otherworldly to him, and only something that can be received from God. However, true knowledge, explains Bahnsen (1996:20), starts with the fear of the Lord. In this instance he refers to Proverbs 1:7 which stipulates that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge". Is this what is truly in mind in Proverbs 1:7? Based on this, shall we say that this

verse teaches that intellectual self-sufficiency is not the true source of knowledge, but that a solid fear for God is?

Keil and Delitzsch (1968:58), explains that this is indeed the sense in which this verse can be understood. According to them the fear of the Lord is not merely the beginning of wisdom, but it becomes the way in which wisdom is received by the seeker of it. This phrase in the proverbs according to them (1968:58), also reminds of James' exhortation in James 1:5, where he instructs his readers who lack wisdom to ask God to give them such wisdom. It becomes clear in both these verses that wisdom is certainly something that is from God and that cannot be gained of one's own autonomous efforts in validating what is the truth.

Similarly Kidner (1964:59) agrees that the fear of the Lord is the source of knowledge but takes it a step further. According to him the beginning or the inception of wisdom is not merely the correct way of thinking, but it is more so, the correct way of relating, as believing man relates to God, that is. He explains (1964:59) more so than knowledge being a right frame of mind, it is truly inseparable from the source, and therefore the possession of true knowledge becomes a question of a person's relationship with God. So doing, he concludes (1968:59) that knowledge becomes "a relationship dependent on revelation".

Bahnsen seems to be describing the kind of person who may know a lot about the things of God, but who is not engaged in a relationship with God at all. In this sense it is obvious that such knowledge about God, that only causes a person to believe the facts, but never goes over to action, is insufficient. Bridges (2001:17) designates this kind of knowledge as foolishness. According to him there can be no genuine knowledge of God devoid of godliness. The conclusion must therefore be that those who are not in relationship with God lack knowledge at a very basic level. To fear the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, and to fear the Lord, Bridges (2001:17) explains, is to place oneself under his authority, bowing to his every command.

This is also the reason that so many hate wisdom and that so many cannot stand the Word of God. The basic reason is that they have not yet experienced the fear of the Lord. If they do fear the Lord, then they would love the wisdom which is from Him and the very start of that wisdom which finds expression in bowing down before Him in worship. Bridges (2001:17) explains that it is because of the absence of the fear of the Lord that the unbeliever is unaware of the value of

fearing the Lord and the resultant attainment of knowledge. He maintains that the only thing unbelievers are interested in is their own wisdom.

In light of these views, the conclusion can be made that Bahnsen is being biblical in his interpretation of biblical epistemology. Certainly, he is in good company by viewing revelation and the attainment of knowledge in light of one's relationship with God.

To summarise, it is the view of Bahnsen, that knowledge cannot be initially attained by one's own biblical pursuits, less so by other pursuits of knowledge that excludes the Bible. This means that the one who approaches the truth of Scripture must do so from the premise of accepting the truth of God, which was given by inspiration of God, and viewing worship of Him as the primary step in the attainment of knowledge of God.

If knowledge is not gained from the premise of accepting the Lord as the only one worthy to be worshipped, his Scriptures viewed as the ultimate standard of knowledge, and the importance of receiving God's light before being able to see the light understood, then the seeker of knowledge is essentially as Bahnsen (1996:21) explains, "led into futile thoughts and darkness".

3.4 Prerequisites for the reception of God's truth

3.4.1 The cardinal importance of God-given understanding

As it involves understanding the things of God, and the truth which testifies so clearly of God, Bahnsen (1996:84) explains that the unbeliever is not able to arrive at understanding unassisted. According to him no one has the desire to know God, and so no one actively pursues God and all related truth that testifies of Him. This reality is made plain in Paul's epistle to the Romans. In this epistle, it is said of the human race that it is completely lost in sin, and designated as lifeless in any pursuit of redemption or understanding (Rom. 3:10-12). Speaking of the results of sin, Bahnsen interprets Romans 3:10-12 to be teaching that the unbeliever has been led to promote his/her own ideas about truth over what God has actually revealed about himself. So doing, the unbeliever's thoughts are faulty at a basic level, will always result in inaccurate, futile conclusions about God and truth.

In lieu of his interpretation of Romans 3:10-12, Bahnsen (1996:84) concludes that if this is truly the reality of man's sinfulness before God, and the reality of his inability to understand the things of God, then one must concede that there is absolutely nothing the unbeliever can do to attain

the knowledge of God, unassisted by God. He explains that this interpretation cannot allow for an approach to knowledge that attempts to gather a hearing, and illustrate that a compromise between “intellectual self-sufficiency” and “soteriological dependence” on God is at all achievable (Bahnsen, 1996:84). In light of this impossibility, Bahnsen maintains that the Bible teaching is clear in this regard, and specifically teaches that the thoughts of unbelieving man, as it involves understanding the truth of God, is foolish to the core, and therefore begs transformation.

The question that must be considered is whether Bahnsen’s findings are in step with the teaching of Romans 3:10-12. Briscoe (1982:78) is in agreement with Bahnsen regarding unbelieving man’s general inability to understand the things of God. That sin is the contributor to such lack of understanding is identified by Briscoe (1982:78) as the universal problem of unbelieving man. He explains that in Romans 3:10-12 Paul is not referring to mankind’s specific acts of unrighteousness; rather he is referring to the cause of various acts of sin and unrighteousness. Briscoe explains that when this is understood about the text, the emphasis of sin is shifted; People are not viewed as sinners because they have all committed specific sins, rather, all people sin because they are all sinners. In this sense, all people are being controlled by sin prior to salvation, so producing certain symptoms of inability.

One such symptom of inability that a sin nature leads to, is the inability to understand the truth that points to God. According to Briscoe (1982:79), the phrase ‘no one understands’ leads to the unavoidable conclusion that all human beings, without exception, have been so affected by sin in their thought processes, that there will always be the deficiency of not being able to understand the truth of God, as generally revealed in nature, or specially revealed in Scripture. And so altogether, everyone has become unprofitable (Rom. 3:12). Unrighteousness, as Robinson (1931:344) explains, has become the “motto” for all human beings, thus becoming the standard according to which everyone lives and behaves.

Paul quoted much of this portion of Scripture from Psalm 14. It would therefore be necessary to determine whether his way of applying this Psalm to the human condition he so wishes to address in Romans 3, is consistent with the way the Psalmist originally used it. It becomes clear that Romans 3:10-12 is indeed consistent with the teaching of Psalm 14. David here posits in rhetorical form, that all have no understanding because all have gone astray as a result of sin. Commenting on the phrase “they have all turned aside” in Psalm 14:3, Spurgeon (1970:181) suggests that all human beings have gone apostate before their maker. Furthering his comment Spurgeon

(1970:182) makes the point that the phrase “there is none who does good” (Psalm 14:3), is a clear proof of the doctrine of natural depravity, in that the phrase testifies to the fact that all are (by nature) corrupt and in need of God’s assistance in salvation.

3.4.2 The importance of faith

Additional to God’s requirement and special granting of understanding, there is also his requirement of faith. However, the question may arise as to the sequence between these two components. Which one comes first, faith or understanding? Bahnsen (1996:88) believes that faith must come before understanding can occur. According to him (1996:87) Scripture clearly testifies to the fact that no one can attain to an understanding of God, independent of God, and achieved by reason alone. Furthermore Bahnsen explains that it is not possible for anyone to have faith in God as the result of such a person seeking for understanding. Accordingly, he explains that no one can try to satisfy their intellect by finding all kinds of proofs for God’s existence, and then upon concluding that he must exist, place their faith in him.

Bahnsen’s (1996:87) belief in the occurrence of faith before the attainment of understanding, is largely based on Hebrews 11:6. The verse reads that “without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him”. Bahnsen (1996:87) describes this verse as detailing the “unavoidable prerequisite” of approaching God, and the resultant reception of saving knowledge. In this view, and according to this interpretation of Hebrews 11:6, faith is what pleases God and results in anyone’s’ approach to God to be successful, as it enables the act of drawing near to God and knowing him.

Ultimately, as Bahnsen (1996:117) explains, it is faith that becomes the distinguishing mark between Christians and non-Christians. This is because Christians believe in the things that non-Christians do not believe in regarding God. Christians take to heart the claims of Christ, while the non-Christian denies his claims. Christians believe in Christ, while non-Christians do not believe and are judged according to their faithlessness. Again, Bahnsen (1996:117) employs Hebrews 11:6 in this instance, as he continues to explain that people become Christians as a result of their exercising their faith in Christ, as the irreducible minimum requirement for being accepted by God. According to this description, it becomes apparent that nothing more and nothing less than faith is the requirement God sets forth unto man.

Kent (1972:220) does well to explain what exactly is meant by the Word of God with his requirement of faith. He explains that the writer of Hebrews seems to be applying the quality of faith to Enoch, even though the Old Testament does not do this overtly. The reason for this is because the writer of Hebrews has such a firm understanding of the importance of faith and the impossibility of pleasing God in any way but by the expression of faith in him. Kent (1972:221) insists that this faith is expressed through obeying his commandments, and responding favourably to everything God requires of man. From this description of faith, it can be concluded that the kind of faith that is required of God, is faith that expresses a basic acceptance of the truth of God in the primary position.

Similarly, Lane (1991:338) believes that there is a certain creedal element to the phrase “must believe that he exists”. This is a phrase that was used in the early church to advance the Gospel of Christ. If this was the case in the early church, or to be specific the community of the saved Hellenistic-Jews the writer was addressing, then it will also be the safe interpretation to understand faith as employed in Hebrews 11:6, as the predominant requisite of God for acceptance by him. It is therefore consistent with Bahnsen’s interpretation that faith is the most foundational requirement of being accepted by God. For this reason Bahnsen is accurate in his application of faith, as described in Hebrews 11:6, to the list of prerequisites for the reception of God’s truth.

Lastly, it must be stressed that faith is certainly and undeniably focused on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is certainly expressed in the obeying of God’s commandments, yet the focus of obedience is to associate with Christ’s sacrifice through repentance. Gleason (2007:371) explains that in Hebrews 11:1 the “assurance” or the “substance” of things hoped for through faith points to Christ. The assurance points to Christ and the once-for-all sacrifice he made on the cross, which is the objective reality that is prefigured in the “shadowy figures” of old. For this reason, faith that is pleasing to God is anchored in the person of Christ and the value of his sacrifice.

3.5 Revealing foolishness: The two-step approach

Bahnsen (1996:61) seems to arrive at the crux of his method by introducing the reader to what he refers to as a two-step approach. Up until this point, all the foundation work, which certainly forms part of the method, has been taking place to ensure that the apologetic process occurs within the right environment, and under the right conditions.

So he introduces us to his two steps which is an application of his understanding of Proverbs 26:4-5: “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” The two steps directly derived from these two verses are basic and straight forward as are the verses. Firstly, the fool must not be answered. Secondly, the fool must be answered.

At first glance these two steps seem to be in opposition of one another. After all, the object remains the same in both steps, yet the actions required or commanded are contrary. How should one approach this apparent inconsistency? Again, the answer lies within the Bible and specifically, within the context of the book of Proverbs.

3.5.1 Refusing to answer, yet agreeing to answer

The inconsistency in the approach that is recommended by the writer seems very obvious. Yet, Christians know and confess that there is no inconsistency in God’s Word and that every word of God is profitable and valuable to instruct the child of God regarding the heart and will of God (2 Tim. 3:16). With this as basic truth regarding the Bible, this seeming inconsistency contained in the book of Proverbs will be approached.

Bridges (2001:234) attests to the appearance of a contradiction, yet offers a plausible reason for the peculiar way in which the writer structured these two commands. He suggests that both pieces of advice are certainly to be followed by the one who is dealing with a fool. Additionally, Bridges recommends that both sets of advice are to be viewed as wise methods of dealing with the fool. The real difference in the two approaches has to do with the components of character, time, or circumstance. The point that the passage is bringing across is that one does not always answer a fool, and that one does not always shy away from an answer either. Character, time, or circumstance should dictate under the auspices of wisdom-guided speech.

Bridges offers helpful insight into the conundrum by referring to the Old Testament example found in 2 Kings 19. In this example the Rabshakeh speaks blasphemous words against the God of Hezekiah, saying that he would not be able to deliver them from the hands of the Assyrians. Hezekiah then responds, not by writing him a letter, offering an argument against the blasphemy. Rather, he goes to the Lord in prayer. This may be an example in which the fool must not be answered.

Yet Bridges (2001:234) explains that although in some circumstances it may be the apologist's duty to restrain, in other circumstances it would be his duty to act, and to answer the fool. Although the example of Hezekiah's praying is mentioned in the previous example, it does not preclude the act of praying to the apologist's duty of not answering the fool. Prayer should always be present, both in the answering and not answering of the fool. Paul makes this clear in 1 Timothy 2:1. However, as it involves the offering of a reasoned answer to the foolish questions of doubters, there are certainly opportunities and circumstances in which they must be answered.

In this fashion, the answer must be given "according to his folly". This does not mean that one must answer a fool foolishly in his tradition of foolishness, rather to Bridges (2001:234) it means that the answer that is provided must address his foolishness at the level of his error, addressing the error of his thought, not through his foolishness, but through biblical wisdom.

There is therefore much credence to accept both exhortations from Proverbs 26:4-5, and not view them as contradictory. What it brings to the forefront is the special time, circumstance, and character of the situation. If the environment is that of fighting or bickering, it would be best for the apologist to refrain from answering the fool. Yet, if the opportunity calls for good-natured reasoning, or if the fool creates doubt in other people, the apologist must seize the opportunity to answer the fool. As a bare minimum, wisdom must always dictate when and how, to answer, or not to answer the fool.

3.5.2 Answering the fool: A four-step approach

Answering the fool according to his folly is a process that can be divided into four different components according to Bahnsen (1996:80). The four components or steps involved in answering the fool are directly linked to previous components of the Bahnsenian method.

Step one, is to present the facts inside the Bible's framework of fact. This step is linked to revelation and knowledge. As previously discussed in this section, God is seen as the determiner of truth, Christ being the One to whom all must submit in the reception of such truth.

Step two, involves attacking the unbeliever's presuppositions, asking whether they lead to true knowledge. Here the unbeliever's views must be nullified by pointing to the impossibility of anything outside of Christianity. This involves a transportation of the believer to the view of the unbeliever in order to show him the folly of his view. A critique of his view must be conducted from

this standpoint. Again, a strong link with the biblical view of epistemology is present in this step as well. Since the Bible is viewed as the ultimate source of knowledge, the unbeliever is challenged about the futility of his view. In this step it therefore becomes important that the apologist does in fact transport himself to the view of the unbeliever, diligently comparing it with Scripture.

In step three, an appeal must be made to the unbeliever that he/she was created in the image of God, which means that revelation which is from God is a certainty. The apologist can point to this reality by, for instance, referring to “borrowed capital” or unadmitted presuppositions which are present in the unbeliever’s thinking. Similar to the preceding two steps, this third step in the process of answering the fool is also strongly connected and reliant on Scripture. The presuppositional truth regarding the reality of the nature of man’s identity in God is revealed in Genesis 1:26. Man is not a free agent in this sense and is obliged to respond according to the reality of being created in the image of God.

Lastly in step four, Bahnsen (1996:80) believes the apologist must point to the fact that no intelligent discussion regarding truth and the way of salvation is possible unless such discussion is preconditioned upon the authoritative Word of God. Although the emphasis changes some in this step, in that the believer must invite the unbeliever to see things from the Christian perspective, and see how that the Christian has every reason to base knowledge on God’s Word, and on nothing else, the fact remains that all discussion must take place on the precondition of God’s Word alone. Again, Scripture must be viewed as the main source of knowledge if any intelligent discussion is going to occur during the apologetic process.

At this point, the entire philosophy underlying the Bahnsenian method can be said to have been exposed, or discovered as such. In retrospect, this is the conclusion that could have been predicted from the beginning of the inquiry into the dynamics of the method, the one distinguishing characteristic contributing to such a prediction, the method’s strict reliance on special revelation. Scripture is indeed the one essential component on which the Bahnsenian apologetic method stands or falls. In this sense, it is a method that is birthed from a biblical view of epistemology, thus declaring that the Bible is sufficient for the apologetic task.

3.6 Humility and civility

One of the distinguishing marks of the mature apologist is that he has learned humility in his approach of the unbeliever. Bahnsen (1996:36) describes this as a humble boldness. The presuppositional apologist is bold because the basis of his faith is the Word of God which is faultless, yet his attitude is that of humility because everything he knows in the line of true knowledge was revealed to him by grace alone, not because of anything that he has done to earn it.

This is also what Bahnsen understands 1 Peter 3:15 to be teaching regarding the apologetic process. In this passage of Scripture it is clear that the apologetic task is not unique to the learned or pastors alone, but that it is the responsibility of every believer. As Peter exhorts, not only is it the responsibility of every believer, but it is also the responsibility of every believer to defend the faith before “anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). The believer must be willing to explain and defend the faith indiscriminate of colour, gender, social status, or age, and do so with the same earnestness and passion in all situations, always doing this with gentleness and respect.

Bahnsen (1996:111) has some serious matters to discuss in this regard. In the pursuit of apologetic success, he warns that it might be the mistake of some to approach the task in a spirit of arrogance. This spirit is characterised by the starting of arrogant fights with unbelievers, seeking to oppose someone, even if they do not necessarily ask to be answered in any way. More important than apologetic success is the testimony left by the person offering the defence of the faith. Bahnsen explains that the apologetic task begins with the attitude of gentleness and respect. This attitude results in the treatment of all human beings as worthy of a certain amount of respect since all people were created in the image of God.

The temptation to argumentativeness may be spurred by a false view on what is actually taught by Peter in this verse (1 Pet. 3:15). Some may think that the aim is to persuade all people that they engage in debate with. This is however not the case. Bahnsen (1996:111) explains that this is not the message being conveyed by Peter. Although well-articulated and well-reasoned arguments may cause the unbeliever to think more clearly about certain matters pertaining to God, it is not enough to persuade them to accept such arguments. Consistent with his argument regarding God-given understanding, Bahnsen (1996:111) thoughtfully explains that “we can close the mouth of the critic, but only God can open the heart”.

Stibbs (1968:136) is in agreement as he understands Peter to be recommending an attitude of proper awe and reverence before God. If this is the case then so will the correct attitude of gentleness and respect be present when the unbeliever is being approached in a defence of the faith. This attitude is one of meekness, not aggression, humility, not arrogance or self-assertion. Stibbs insightfully brings Peter's reaction to remembrance when he was confronted a third time by a stranger regarding his relationship with the Lord Jesus before his crucifixion. In this instance it appears as if Peter was neither ready to make a defence, nor to do so with gentleness and respect. It is a possibility that as a result of this humbling experience, he could warn those who read his epistle.

Similarly, Grudem (1988:153) agrees that the ultimate apologetic success does not lie in the quality of the argument, nor in the competitive nature in which such an argument is delivered. He explains that the ultimate success lies in the work of the Holy Spirit, who does the work of persuading a person regarding the veracity of the Word of God.

The above interpretations seem to affirm Bahnsen's interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15. The apologetic process should never be a competition of "I reason better than you", rather it should be the carefully considered, humble addressing of the question of an unbeliever who could come to saving faith as the result of the Holy Spirit's working in his/her life (Jn. 3:8).

3.7 A healthy approach or not?

3.7.1 Criticism

Some would look at the Bahnsenian method and view it as rather basic and repetitive. Is this truly the case? After all, Bahnsen makes the assertion that the fool must both be answered, and not answered, all from the standpoint of the authority of Scripture as the point of reference. Viewed from this angle, the method may appear to be basic to the core, but is this truly the state of affairs? Undoubtedly, these are all valid questions, and should certainly not be dismissed.

So what then is the value of the Bahnsenian method for the field of apologetics? Is it a valid method at all? In order to answer this question it would be helpful to see what other apologists have said regarding this method.

One noteworthy critic of Bahnsen and Van Til on this matter is Kelly James Clark. Clark is convinced that the obvious Achilles heel of the Bahnsenian method is its belief that unbelievers cannot understand anything. Since epistemology lies at the heart of the presuppositional-

apologetical argument Clark (2000:258) refers to this aspect of the Bahnsenian method in an attempt to discredit this approach:

“Presuppositionalists, in general, seem to assume that, lacking explicit knowledge of God, we cannot know things. Indeed, opposing apologetic approaches are considered defective because they work with a notion of rationality that excludes God. But many Christian apologists believe that even for the atheist to know something, her cognitive faculties must have been designed by God; even for the atheist the ontological fact of God’s existence is necessary for knowledge (but not the epistemological awareness of God). It does not follow that atheists must be aware of God’s existence or submit to God’s authority in order to know things. Although they deny the existence of God, their other cognitive faculties were nonetheless designed by God to produce true beliefs.”

Central to what Clark is saying is his concern that the presuppositional method denies the existence of even the most basic knowledge of the world in the mind of the unbeliever. Here Clark (2000:258) refers to presuppositionalism’s supposed unwillingness to identify the presence of knowledge in anyone who does not believe in the existence of God. It is for this reason Clark (2000:259) is opposed to presuppositionalism’s approach to epistemology, and reasoning with the unbeliever in general. If the unbeliever has no knowledge whatsoever, then a simple task as communicating with them would be impossible, let alone reasoning with them about the existence of God.

3.7.2 Rebuttal

This reaction is not unique to Clark. Historically, presuppositionalists had been accused of this very criticism. In his explanation of presuppositionalism, Bahnsen (1996:31) speaks of those who found it difficult to believe that knowledge can only be attained through the presupposing of the Word of God, and believe that the unbeliever is therefore “deprived of all knowledge”, including knowledge of the world and “the most elementary facts of experience or truths of science”.

This is also something that van Til needed to address. In answer to those who accused presuppositionalism in ways similar to Clarke, he referred to the reality of common grace. All people were created in the image of God, marred as it may be, and as an expression of his common grace, therefore have the responsibility, and the basic ability to do good things. Van Til (1969:43-44) stresses that “what they have, they have by grace alone”. This means that unregenerate man cannot be allowed to be as bad as he can be, governed by such common

grace. Van Til (1969:43-44) explains that it goes further; “he is restrained from doing so”. Although the unregenerate create their own standards to live by, they are still being held accountable by God through common grace and creating them in his image, to work for Him. For this reason Van Til (1969:43-44) is convinced that unregenerate man can make a meaningful contribution to society, whether it be in science, philosophy, sociology, ethics, medicine, art, etc.

This is also what Bahnsen (1996:37) believes about presuppositionalism as a system. He maintains that the critic has falsely inferred that the unbeliever has no ability to understand anything, within a presuppositional system. On the contrary, the presuppositionalist believes that the unbeliever can attain to knowledge regarding things, and this, regardless of the fact that he or she has rejected the truth (his existence, his attributes, his Son’s sacrifice, etc.) of God. The reason that the unbeliever can have any knowledge at all is because he does have presuppositions that have been revealed unto him. As a creature, who has been created in the image of God, the unbeliever can (and must, to add what Van Til says) respond favourably to natural revelation. Bahnsen (1996:38) explains that being created in God’s image is what allows unbelieving, rebellious, unregenerate man to have a certain amount of understanding pertaining to life, and the world.

Bahnsen (1996:38) thoughtfully explains that “although he (unbelieving man) outwardly and vehemently denies the truth of God, no unbeliever is inwardly and sincerely devoid of knowledge of God”. Natural revelation is what informs the senses of the unbeliever. Through his grace and mercy God has provided testimony of himself through the things that He has created. Presuppositionalism, according to Bahnsen, starts from the premise that the unbeliever has observed God in creation. Natural revelation is a fundamental aspect of the method and instrumental to testifying about God’s greatness. In that sense God has not left the unbeliever totally devoid of knowledge. Bahnsen (1996:38) refers to the words of the psalmist in Psalm 139:8, reminding that there is no place where the unbeliever can go, where he will not see testimony of God’s existence and his creative hand.

To summarise Bahnsen’s (1996:38) view, it must be said that although the unbeliever denies God, he has simultaneously received inescapable revelation of God. If he has received “knowledge of God” as such, he is therefore able to understand things about the world, and is able to contribute in any field in the search of true understanding, regardless of his unregenerate

state. This contribution is however limited, until the mind has been renewed through salvation (Rom. 12:2).

3.8 From theory to practice

In light of criticism launched against the Bahnsenian method, it would be beneficial to inspect the method in practice. Some may view the method as valid and beneficial in theory, yet wonder about its actual success as it is utilised in argumentation with unbelievers. This is why it will be beneficial to inspect the method as it is employed in debate. In the next chapter, Bahnsen will be studied and evaluated as he employs his method against atheist Gordon Stein. The measure of his success will be discussed within the frame of the ongoing debate in South Africa.

Chapter 4

4. A study and evaluation of the debate between Dr. Greg Bahnsen and Dr. Gordon Stein and the relevance of that for the ongoing debate in South Africa

4.1 Introduction

In 1985, Greg Bahnsen went into debate with well-known atheist, Gordon Stein.² This debate was held at the University of California, Irvine.³ It has become the focus of students of the presuppositional method, since the method, as interpreted by Bahnsen, is clearly being put on display by him in this regard. In order to structure this chapter, the statement and rebuttal sections of the actual debate will be followed. In so doing, the system that Bahnsen follows will be identified in Bahnsen's statements throughout the debate, interweaved with points of evaluation of all pertinent statements, comments, questions, or rebuttals offered by Bahnsen in his defence of Christian theism.

It will not be possible to focus on each and every aspect of the Bahnsen-Stein debate. Attention will be given to the most pertinent areas of the debate as these relate to the Bahnsenian method.

4.2 Identification of the Bahnsenian method in the Bahnsen-Stein debate

4.2.1 Bahnsen's first opening statement

In his opening statement Bahnsen (1985:1) sets out to explain exactly what he will defend in the debate. First, he makes it known to the audience that he does not wish to defend theism in general. All other religions, with the exclusion of Christianity have been found by him to lack the intrinsic qualities to be defensible. His reasons for this is the incoherence of world religions, and their trampling on reason, and experience. It also becomes evident that Bahnsen does not wish to hide his true identity in Christ in any way. He makes it abundantly clear to the audience, judges and his opponent, Stein, that he cannot with clear conscious defend any other religions with which he disagrees. It is at this juncture that he expresses his reliance on the JCWV.

² Journalist Nicolas Walters explains Stein's involvement in atheism: "His main activity... was the acquisition and production of books on free-thought and the paranormal. He built up an expert knowledge about and an extensive collection of publications in both areas, and became a considerable scholar in a movement [atheism] which contains many considerable scholars" (Walter, N. 1996. Obituary: Gordon Stein. *The Independent*, 6 September. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary--gordon-stein-1362027.html> Date of access: 16 Sep.).

³ A detailed transcript of the debate may be found at: http://www.bellevuechristian.org/faculty/dribera/Htdocs/PDFs/Apol_Bahnsen_Stein_Debate_Transcript.pdf

Very early in the debate Bahnsen (1985:1) states what he believes. His (Bahnsen, 1996:119) emphasis on adhering to a Christian world view is one of the first indicators of his consistency with his professed (presuppositional) method. He speaks at length to the phenomenon of conflicting world views. The debate is thus approached by him with the knowledge, that if Stein or any atheists in the audience are to be convinced about the existence of the Christian God, such conviction takes place at the relinquishing of their previously held presuppositions (world view) which dictates to them that there must not, and cannot be a God. To Bahnsen (1996:120), much more than a mere scientific experiment is needed to bring about such change in a sceptic. Rather, a reboot of this intricately weaved network of presuppositions must take place by revisit, review, and ultimately surrender, in light of the truth of Scripture. This is given by virtue of introduction to his lead-off argument.

After commending Stein for his work in his area of specialisation (Bahnsen, 1985:2), i.e. being kind or civil toward him (see Bahnsen, 1996:36), he then turns to the real issue at stake, which is also the issue in any debate between Christianity and any other opposing view – presuppositions – and he does so by pointing out the weakness of Stein's approach – Naturalism.

Bahnsen (1996:177) launches his first argument at the 'naturalist' vs. 'supernaturalist' distinction which is discussed at length in his methodology. As is true of most atheists the argument against God is usually launched from a naturalist standpoint (Covington, 2009:95). According to this thinking, everything believed in (whether seen or unseen), must lend itself to scientific (natural) scrutiny. Therefore, the belief in naturalism is a concept which Bahnsen wishes to refute, as opposed to belief in the supernatural. The tactic is undoubtedly called for, and is the very issue to which he speaks at length in his method. What Bahnsen (1996:62) basically engages in at this stage arguably becomes the second step of his two-step approach of the fool, which is the 'answering' of the 'fool'.

Being familiar with what Stein has to say in rejection of supernaturalism, Bahnsen (1985:2) is at this point essentially using the debate as forum to answer him according to his folly as Proverbs 26:4-5 instructs. This in and of itself, as is described by Bahnsen (1996:79-80) in his methodology can on its part be divided into four action steps. It seems obvious that very early in the debate Bahnsen utilises at least two (i.e. observable steps) of the four steps, the first of which is to present the facts within the Bible's framework or philosophy of fact.

Clearly, the Bible is not a book that has naturalistic explanations for everything contained in it. Rather, the truth is that such a great deal of the Bible details events and things that cannot be explained in terms of scientific/empirical measurement. The distinction between that which is natural (e.g. Jesus crying when he received word of Lazarus' death in John 11:35), and that which is supernatural (e.g. Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave after being dead for four days in John 11:44). The Bible does indeed distinguish between that which is natural and that which is supernatural, so Bahnsen is in this regard accurately presenting facts within the Bible's framework.

Additional to the presenting of fact from within the Bible's framework, Bahnsen (1985:3) simultaneously launches an initial attack on Stein's world view. This step is not possible without knowledge of the sceptics view. It seems evident from his comments on naturalism and supernaturalism that Bahnsen has been studying Stein's view by doing what the step requires, namely to transport oneself to the view of the unbeliever in order to show him the folly of his view. Insightfully Bahnsen draws a sharp distinction between the observable world, and the unobservable world in his argument for Christian theism, reminding Stein that there are things in the realm of reality that cannot necessarily be observed or measured through the conventional means of empiricism.⁴

This becomes his first point in his opening statement: "The nature of evidence." He emphasises that for this reason, anyone who strives to answer the existence (or non-existence) of God in a way similar to that of the observable world, operates in error, since God is not observed by scientific means (Bahnsen, 1985:3).

At this point, having shown the audience the nature of Stein's thinking, and his resultant unwillingness to admit to the existence of the supernatural, he points out the audacity that Stein has to demand an approach to the question of God's existence that does not engage in circular reasoning, or as Stein (1985:3) describes, the usage of a method that "smacks of begging the question or circular reasoning". This becomes the second point of his opening statement: The presuppositional conflict of world views.

⁴ Bahnsen (1985:3) explains by means of illustration that there is a difference between being able to answer, in the affirmative, for instance the question pertaining to the presence of a box of crackers in the pantry, and for instance, the presence of gravitational forces.

He stresses that this prohibition is unfounded and uninformed, since the very element required by Stein, is also the element which he cannot bring to the debate himself. Through this requirement, Stein is in fact revealing his pursuit of neutrality. This is something that the Christian can never yield to. There are two main reasons for this: Firstly, Bahnsen (1996:9) explains extensively that this may never be the case, for the obvious reasons of engulfing oneself in the thought pattern of the unbeliever, which, in the end, leads to a world of scepticism. Secondly, neutrality is a myth, or as he explains to Stein, it is a “pretended neutrality fallacy” (1985:3), therefore, attempting to engage in neutrality, or non-circular reasoning is impossible, let alone, the standard for sound debate methodology.

The achievement of neutrality is impossible as a result of the presuppositional, or the world view commitments of individuals, whether Christian or non-Christian. These, as has been explained, are very tenacious constructs of the unregenerate mind (Bahnsen, 1996:68) that directly influences their interpretation of life and reality. These are presuppositions regarding the world, i.e. the myth of naturalism and neutrality that Stein relies on, that have no “natural” explanation themselves, and must be relied on presuppositionally.⁵

This is an aspect of the debate between Bahnsen and Stein which is not successfully answered by Stein, and merely avoided. This is reflected in the fourth segment of the debate in which the moderator poses the question (Stein, 1985:40) to him regarding his inability to examine all the evidence, yet denying the existence of God. This is a loop-hole in Stein’s reasoning that had been identified by Bahnsen already at this point of the debate. Stein could not prove the validity of his statement regarding logic or reason being the only way to prove factual statements, neither does he successfully explain why he is an atheist. This is reflected in his concession that he does not have the answer to the question (Stein, 1985:41), even if qualifying by saying, ‘not now’, and similarly confirmed in Bahnsen’s insistence (Bahnsen, 1985:4) that he “has not at all proven by empirical observation and logic his pre-commitment to Naturalism”.

⁵ Bahnsen’s (1996:208-209) critique of Verificationism has overlap with Stein’s naturalistic outlook. In pointing out the double standard of providing proof for religious terminology, the verificationist involuntarily and unavoidably subjects himself to his own impossible standard, that “even he cannot escape using philosophical notions or abstract principles in his reasoning or theorizing”. For this reason the Christian can turn its requirement upon itself and ask whether “the verification principle itself is either (1) a trivial truth of logic and semantics, or (2) a sentence which can be empirically confirmed”. Bahnsen (1996:209) insists, neither is possible, and so “the verificationist challenge to Christianity undermines itself”.

This is undeniably also an expression of faith, or belief in something. In Stein's case, it is the belief that everything in existence must lend itself to the scrutiny of empiricism and logic. The error being made by Stein in this regard is not much different from the error of the positivist. Bahnsen (1996:209) describes logical positivism in no uncertain terms in his methodology. The commonality between the positivist outlook on reality and that of Stein is that the "practice" and "results" of natural science is to be taken as a given authority, which is similar to the way the Christian views Scripture.

Resultantly, positivists unwittingly landed themselves in the same situation as the verificationist (and Stein for that matter): The placing of a requirement upon the acquisition of knowledge that science (and the application thereof through their own system) cannot provide. Ultimately they themselves engaged in circular reasoning. Justifiably Bahnsen (1985:41) suggests that Stein's approach has the same result (as verificationism and logical positivism) and therefore it must be said that "atheists live by faith".⁶

4.2.2 Stein's first opening Statement

From the outset Stein (1985:6) explains his approach to the debate. He explains that his inability to believe in the existence of God is not the result of finding proofs that God does not exist, but rather that according to him, the proofs that are offered for the existence of God are not satisfactory. For this reason he would define the existence of God as unproved, not disproved. This definition strikes as insufficient and Bahnsen does well to point this out:

During his questioning by Stein, Bahnsen (1985:13) is asked by Stein whether he would relinquish his belief in God if it were to be proven that there are no arguments for the existence of God. Bahnsen (1985:13) insightfully responds to this question by bringing to Stein's attention his original definition for atheism. He reminds Stein that he is the "one who said that it's impossible to show a universal negative; no one could show that there are no arguments for the existence of God". In other words, Stein is trying to determine whether Bahnsen will relinquish his belief in God in the absence of evidence for God, yet his own definition of the atheistic position admits that

⁶ "Logical positivism was, ironically, very much like a religious faith – a faith in natural science (which might be called 'scientism'). This became very apparent when the positivist attempt to elucidate the strictly empirical foundation of natural science came to grief over the self-refuting character of the verification principle. When the elucidation failed, the logical positivist did not relinquish his original faith in natural science at all. He acted like a 'true believer'. He held on to that commitment to science, regardless of its philosophical problems." (Bahnsen, 1996:209).

nothing has “disproved” the existence of God. So, in essence, he is requesting something of Bahnsen which he is not willing to do himself. His question is therefore self-defeating.

Additionally, during his first rebuttal, Bahnsen (1985:15) insists that Stein, through his definition for atheism, engages in “linguistic revision”. For this reason, Bahnsen stated that there is no real difference between a Christian who defines his position as being true, and an atheist who is able to say his definition is true. Both lean on others who have informed and influenced them in the adoption of their specific view. Bahnsen (1985:15) continues by pointing Stein to the fact that he has oversimplified the task that is before him by attempting to prove his argument in reverse. Merely showing the theistic proofs to be inadequate (i.e. by simply briefly mentioning eleven proofs he finds to be insufficient, not even touching on Bahnsen’s presuppositional approach) is not the same as showing the theistic proofs to be false, and therefore the main objective of the debate has not been reached by Stein.

There is a remaining aspect of Stein’s first opening statement that Bahnsen points out as not only insufficient, but also as contradictory. Bahnsen (1985:15) explains that it is impossible and contradictory to reduce the laws of logic to mere human convention. Previously Stein (1985:11) has indicated that he believes in the universality of human logic, yet describes them as conventions which are shared. This seems to be a logical error on the part of Stein which Bahnsen is quick to point out. Rightfully, Bahnsen (1985:15) explains that the laws of logic are not conventional or sociological but that they rather have a “transcendental necessity” about them.

Something that must be stressed at this point is that the laws of logic are not material. Bahnsen (1996:144) explains in his methodology that this is the fundamental obstacle that must be overcome by anyone who believes that the physical side is the only side of everything that is in existence. No one can “simultaneously and consistently” be faithful to the laws of logic and have a view of reality that ties it to the realm of the physical alone. This is a logical fallacy since the laws of logic are not material themselves, but immaterial. It is therefore self-defeating to say that it is logical (immaterial) that reality is merely physical (material) in nature. The laws of logic are likewise real, yet not tied to the physical! Bahnsen (1985:15) continues to point out that if the laws of logic are not material even in an atheist’s (Stein’s) world view (1985:12), then – if the atheist is consistent in his reasoning – there must be no laws in an atheist’s world view.

For this reason, Stein’s position regarding the conventionality of the laws of logic must be rejected. They are not material and can therefore not be determined by the shared views of the majority of

people. This approach places him in a terrible predicament when he eventually explains his understanding and justification of morality, or in his providing of an answer to the problem of evil in the world.

Keeping with his view that the laws of logic are determined through convention, Stein (1985:39) proceeds to explain the presence of evil in the world. According to him, as revealed more extensively in a question posed by the moderator regarding the Jewish Holocaust, the evil that was committed against the Jews was also determined through convention. He explains that since Germany has for centuries been part of the same JCWV and the rest of the “developed world,” they were bound to operate within the moral standards of this world view.

The problem with this line of thinking is revealed in the following qualification by Stein (1985:39): “Well, Germany is part of Western European tradition, it’s not deepest Africa, or some place on Mars.” Firstly, this statement reveals his belief in the development of morality through the means of convention. He distinguishes Western Europe from other parts of the world, like Africa. Yet, secondly, what should be quite alarming is the fact that Stein does in fact deem it necessary to make such a distinction. This gives the idea that Africa cannot, or should not be held to the same moral standards that reigns in Western Europe. Apart from its obvious contradiction with the above described nature of the laws of logic, this statement is highly misleading and immoral.

In a few words, Stein concedes that the affairs in Africa should not be scrutinised through the lens of the JCWV. If everything pertaining logic and morality are in fact defined upon the shared agreements in a group of people, then why should it matter what Africans do? Why should it matter to anyone of the Western World the murders they commit, the corruption that is present at government level, the exploitation of the masses (which is interestingly often democratically determined through consensus) , and the resultant famine and pestilence, must all be viewed as the shared internal morality reigning in Africa. If this reasoning is correct then we must be able to say – what counts for Africa, does not count for America, or Europe, or wherever. Later, during his final closing statement in the debate, Stein (1985:33) admits that according to his view morality is largely determined through “consensus”.⁷ He explains that it is rather like a moral referendum,

⁷ Stein (1985:33) describes moral laws as consensus in the following way: “It’s a consensus reinforced by the teachings of society through its parents to children, teachers to students, the media, literature, the Bible: all these things reinforce morality through teaching and the socialization process. And also we pass laws to punish people who violate some of the more blatant [offenders] in cases that we have said are no-no’s.”

in which people decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong, and so the majority wins.

Yet, the truth is, it does matter what Africans do. Murder of thousands of people in Hitler's Germany is just as wrong as Africa's long history of manslaughter. Bahnsen (1996:170) also points this out in his reaction and methodology. Surely, if Stein were to be asked if he thought it was immoral he would probably have said, "yes". However, he speaks of morality and evil as if it is something that is defined differently from culture to culture, and that it is therefore not to be viewed as absolutely good or evil. So for this reason Bahnsen (1996:170) reminds that there really is no reason for an unbeliever (atheist) to be offended at the occurrence of immorality (such as Hitler's killing of thousands of Jews) because he has removed the very basis for his protestation. Since he is the one who decides what is moral, he is also the one who decides what is not, and so rejects things like murder, child-abuse, etc. This is a clear contradiction within atheism which Bahnsen (1985:16) successfully points out.

4.2.3 Stein's second opening statement

At this point Stein (1985:20) revisits his belief in the existence of logical or moral convention by focusing on the problem of evil exclusively. He begs the question that if an all-powerful, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God does indeed exist, then why is there evil in the world at all?

This is a concern that Bahnsen (1996:166) describes in his methodology. Stein's protest against the existence of evil can accordingly be understood as having its origin in Scottish philosopher, David Hume (1981:88), who described the problem of evil as something that God should be able to prevent, because He is omnipotent. It is also something that He would be opposed to, because He is omnibenevolent. So then why does evil exist is the question Hume (and Stein) pose? Contrary to the view of Hume and Stein, this does not reveal an inconsistency in the Christian's world view. Bahnsen (1996:171) maintains that because the Christian believes in the omnipotence and the omnibenevolence of God, he is therefore convinced that God has a moral (good) reason for the evil that is in the world.

Upon probing Stein regarding his reliance on Hume's theorising, Bahnsen (1985:27) poses the question as to Hume's dubious interpretation of the uniformity of nature, let alone his rejection of miracles. It is to be remembered, as Bahnsen (1985:27) reminds Stein, that Hume grossly undermined scientific law since he was convinced that there was no solid ground for assuming that the future would be like the past. He continues by pointing out that it is for this reason that in

Hume, not only does logic or morality become determined through convention, but so also scientific laws.

This fallacious thinking of Stein is revealed even more when Bahnsen (1985:28) asks him how he interprets the uniformity of nature. Stein answers by describing the uniformity of nature as the inherent regular behaviour, referring, for instance, to electrons which repel other electrons, and electrons that are attracted to opposites. Bahnsen then asks him if he knows that this will be the case with every electron. This becomes yet another climactic stage of the debate.

It does appear as if Bahnsen has Stein in the precarious position of having to admit to adhering to presuppositions himself, even if reference must be made to them as 'scientific presuppositions'. Being questioned by Bahnsen in this way regarding his belief in the uniformity of nature as a result of experimentation, he (1985:28) admits to believing that hypothetically one experiment could change scientific results dramatically, but says "it will be on the front pages of every physics journal". In so doing Stein, finds himself having to admit to adhering to presuppositions nonetheless. Having asked Stein if he had read all the witnesses about electrons, he answered in the affirmative, and bases it on the experiments that have gone before. Yet the concession has been made by him that universal laws regarding electrons could change if only one witness has a different finding. Stein (1985:28) is therefore conceding that there may be a differing view which is yet to be discovered which will change the traditional view regarding electrons. For this reason Bahnsen (1985:28) is accurate to point Stein to his held presuppositions regarding the properties of electrons. This becomes yet another point at which Stein has to admit, even if unwillingly, to the exercising of a degree of faith.

So doing, Bahnsen (1996:79-80) is being faithful to the third step of "answering the fool according to his folly": In the aforementioned, Bahnsen has done well to indirectly refer to "borrowed capital" as he led Stein to observe his "unadmitted presuppositions". Even though Bahnsen does not mention the fact that Stein was created in the image of God he has nevertheless succeeded in pointing Stein in the direction of understanding his reliance on his own presuppositions, which happens to be similar to the Christian relying on his presuppositions.

4.2.4 Bahnsen's second opening statement

Rather, the burden of proof is, once again, on the atheist in this regard. As has been shown above, Stein (atheists) cannot place the burden of proof on the Christian for the existence of evil in the

world, if he cannot successfully define evil himself (Bahnsen, 1996:167). And so Bahnsen (1985:24) explains that neither an '*a priori*' (without experience), nor an '*a posteriori*' (with experience) approach to the laws of logic, provides a satisfactory explanation. If the laws of logic are merely self-verified (*a priori*), as Stein suggests, Bahnsen (1985:23) asks, "why the laws of logic are universal, unchanging, and invariant truths"? The reason he (1985:23) offers for the existence of such laws, and the reason avoided by Stein, is because these laws reflect the thinking of God. It is as if the mind of God – his thinking and thought processes – are reflected through them.

Bahnsen's (1985:24) defence of the absolute nature of the laws of logic as a reflection of the existence of God reaches a climax as he stresses the arbitrary nature of logic if they were mere conventions. He reminds that if they were merely conventional then they could not assist us in dealing with the problems in the world. Yet, he (Bahnsen, 1996:79-80) insists, as he utilises step three of "answering the fool according to his folly" yet again, that the atheist "absolutely" relies on the absolute nature of logic, and so finds himself in yet another logical bind – he utilises the foundation of the world view he so strives to defeat.

It is when Stein questions Bahnsen regarding his second opening statement that one can see his shift from the third step to the fourth and final step. This is the step in which direct reference is made to the Word of God, pointing out that no intelligent discussion regarding truth and the way of salvation is possible unless such discussion is preconditioned upon the authoritative Word of God. In his method he describes this component of argumentation as the complete and total surrender to the Word of God as the starting point of epistemological soundness. Everything believed in must in this way be placed under the Lordship of Christ.

Additionally, Bahnsen (1996:80) believes that in this step the apologist can invite the unbeliever to see things from the Christian perspective, and see that the Christian has every reason to base knowledge on God's Word, and on nothing else. This is the very thing Bahnsen (1985:25-26) does when he explains that "universal invariant," or, the uniformity of nature as example, can be explained from no other world view than the Christian-Judeo World View. This is also the reason that Bahnsen believes the study of maths, or anything logical in nature, has its origin in theism.

Having been previously asked by Stein (1985:25) whether mathematics is theistic or atheistic, Bahnsen offers that it is not only theistic, but adds that it is also Christian theistic, because of the

impossibility of an opposing world view (the impossibility of the contrary). Stein resultantly expresses his inability to come to grips with Bahnsen's approach and so asks him as to why he thinks he can know the thinking of God (or the explanation of the origin of logic). Answering Stein, Bahnsen once more explains that what is known about God by him, as it applies to universal standards of reasoning for that matter (maths, science, logic, etc.), has been revealed through the Scriptures, thus re-emphasising his reliance on the Bible.

During the rebuttal phase of the second session the holes poked by Bahnsen in the world view of Stein (1985:29) are becoming bigger as he confesses to having no answer to the origin of the laws of logic. This, he describes as a "trap" that he fears he might have fallen into. Yet, mistakenly Stein asserts that neither does Bahnsen have an answer for the laws of logic. He says, Bahnsen's insistence that they reflect the thinking of God, is a "non-statement". Again Stein (1985:29) refers to his previous argument, that merely saying that God created the universe does not answer the question. To him, the only acceptable answer is to explain, or 'show' exactly how He created.

The intrinsic problem with this requirement of Stein is, once again, that he cannot subject his own pursuit for answers to the same criteria. To say that it is the duty of Bahnsen (or any Christian) to explain exactly how God created the world, is tantamount to saying, for instance, that everyone who believes the Egyptians built the pyramids must be able to explain how they built them. The point is that even though knowledge regarding exactly how the Egyptians built their pyramids may evade us, the question of Egyptian origin does not. Similarly, even though complete knowledge regarding the process of the creation of the universe may not be available, it can be stated, as a bare minimum, that God created it.

Summarising his rebuttal, Bahnsen (1985:32) stresses once more that the atheist world view does not have an answer for the laws of logic and its universal nature. The universal laws of morality is yet another obstacle that, according to him, is not, and cannot be surmounted from within the atheistic world view.

4.2.5 Last words of the debate (Stein's and Bahnsen's closing statements)

Stein (1985:34) maintains that the laws of logic are determined through consensus. Unsurprisingly, he applies this thinking to his understanding of the laws of science, saying that the findings of science are merely probabilistically determined. Furthermore, Stein (1985:34) admits that if the laws of science (or logic) were to change, it would create a crisis as everything

known about the laws of science would have to be revisited and revised. Even though he believes the chances of something like this happening are very slim, he does however make provision for the possibility in his world view.

This is the fundamental flaw in Stein's atheistic world view that Bahnsen (1985:35) refers to in his final apologetic effort. He reminds Stein that he has not been able to provide an answer to the transcendental argument for God's existence. This is because the atheist cannot provide an answer. Convention alone cannot account for anything, as Bahnsen (1985:35) aptly points out. Rather, the laws (of logic or morality) that govern society, are identified as such laws, based not on consensus, but on the absolute nature of the laws themselves. It is in this light that the transcendental argument is proved. Laws of morality (or any laws) do not make sense if not viewed as originating in the one lawgiver, the Christian God. Within the atheistic world view, there is no answer for morality.

Bahnsen (1985:37) reaches his conclusion by referring to the apostle Paul's words in Romans 1, which states that God has been faithful in making himself known to men through creation. In so doing, he once more exhibits his trust in the presuppositional truth of the Bible. This has been Bahnsen's point of departure, it has been that which he relied on throughout the debate, and it is also that with which he wishes to close his argument.

4.3 Summarizing with the aim of bringing the debate to South African soil

In the preceding debate, Greg Bahnsen has succeeded with his own blend of the presuppositional method of apologetics. Not only is the method salient in its application of the laws of logic as they are presuppositionally derived from Scripture, but it is also basic enough for all to practice. It must be stressed yet again that the strength of the method lies in its reliance on Scripture as starting point. As Bahnsen has explained before, this is no more the process of circular reasoning than the atheist's reliance on unproved logic is the process of circular reasoning. All have their presuppositions. Yet, Bahnsen has succeeded in debate with Stein to illustrate, through his two-step and four-step approach, and his resultant application of presuppositional logic, that the JCWV is the superior world view, and reveals that the atheist world view (and all other world views) are plagued with inconsistencies.

The question however remains to be answered as to how the method will fare on South African soil. In order to answer this question, a study must first be conducted through which a better

understanding of the beliefs (similar to that of Stein) of some of South African sceptics and attackers of Christianity, will be attained. The findings will then be compared to HBT to determine whether they are consistent with a conservative evangelical hermeneutic.

Chapter 5

5. A study of the beliefs of South African sceptics and the attackers of Christianity, regarding the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity and a comparison to Historical Biblical Theology

5.1 Introduction

In 2012, George Claassen, celebrated atheist science journalist⁸, and Frits Gaum, well-known Dutch Reformed minister, leader, and author⁹, in collaboration with present-day sceptics of Christianity, published the book, *God? Gesprekke oor die oorsprong en uiteinde van alles* (God? Conversations about the origin and culmination of everything). In the book, several writers describe the road that led to their disbelieving of the Bible and the exclusivity of Christ for salvation. They list some of the motivating arguments that have led them to the acceptance of their current position. The book takes the shape of a ‘conversation’ as other ‘free thinkers’ have also been invited to participate in the conversation by responding to the statements that are made by the atheists and sceptics.

The following study endeavours to reveal how anti-Scriptural philosophy or Higher Criticism of the Bible, supported by evolutionary science, has influenced the thinking of two of the writers, Claassen and a former Dutch Reformed minister, Abel Pienaar, as revealed in the book. It serves furthermore to describe the nature of their unbelief when compared to historical-grammatical biblical theology, traditionally known as orthodoxy.

5.2 Biblical Theology and Orthodoxy

Since the views of these writers will be measured against the historical biblical interpretation of the doctrines which they address respectively, it would first be necessary to explain what is meant by both the terms ‘biblical theology’ and the Church’s historical view of ‘orthodoxy’.

To understand what is meant by the term Biblical Theology (BT) it would be necessary to first define the word ‘theology’. As is evident, it is a combination of two terms each possessing their own meaning. Broadly speaking, and without going into the minutest of detail, ‘theology’ is in its

⁸ Biographical information taken from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Claassen

⁹ Biographical information supplied by, Olivier (1998)

simplest form ‘the study of God’. Culver (2005:20) explains the definition of the term by looking at its Greek origin. According to him, it is a combination of two words; ‘theos’ (θεός), meaning ‘God,’ and ‘logos’ (λόγος), meaning the ‘science of something,’ ‘word,’ ‘doctrine,’ or ‘teaching’ (Acts. 18:15). Hence, he defines theology as “the study that focuses on God”.

BT can therefore be defined as the study about God within the context of Scripture. Its meaning is further highlighted as Culver (2005:21) distinguishes between the non-technical and technical use of the term. In a non-technical sense, he explains that BT simply refers to teachings that have been derived from the Bible. Yet, Culver (2005:21) continues to explain that in a technical sense, BT strives to understand the true message or the true meaning of the Biblical text. In his estimation BT can therefore be described as a method of study that strives to determine the meaning that the original writers of the Bible attached to the words they were inspired to write under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, within a specific historical context. Unfortunately, as Culver (2005:21) explains, this method has been negatively influenced by the unbiblical philosophy or world view of liberal academic culture that has made its way into evangelicalism. More attention will be given to this later in this chapter in order to describe and understand the depth of the problem of unbelief.

Orthodoxy simply refers to the teachings contained in Scripture that have traditionally been accepted by the Church over the centuries. The word is a combination of the Greek word ‘orthos,’ meaning ‘right’ (ὀρθός), and ‘doxa,’ (δόξα) meaning ‘judgment’. Systematised interpretations of Scripture, or confessions of faith, that fall within the parameters of orthodoxy, to name some of the more popular ones of the Church include: The Apostle’s Creed of the Early Church (A.D. 200-750), The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), The London Confession of Faith (1644), The Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), and the youngest of them all, The New Hampshire Baptist Confession of 1833.¹⁰ Any statement that involves God, origins, biblical history, Christ, the Bible, or any other that hinders the truest interpretation thereof, will be measured in light of the combined testimony of these traditional Church confessions.

5.3 Theology Proper

¹⁰ This list is not exhaustive. There are other confessions, older and newer, that would agree with these confessions in terms of biblicity, hence orthodoxy. The statements of faith listed serve as examples of the more popular ones.

Theology proper is the theological term for the study of God's existence and his character. Usually it is as a result of the way that the Bible describes his character that many are unwilling to believe in his existence. In this regard, George Claasen (2012:18) quotes Robin Dunbar of Oxford University stating that even though in everyday life most people make the effort to measure claims of truth against proofs for truth, as it involves "religion," studies point to the fact that the same people are convinced by "stories" that apparently contradict scientific finding. In proof of this statement Dunbar is quoted saying, "tales of supernatural beings walking on water, raising the dead, passing through walls, foretelling the future, and the like, are universally popular". This is what Claasen (2012:18) offers as a reason for not believing in the orthodox view of God's existence and his attributes (character). To him, that modern man still has faith in a God who possesses such supernatural attributes (walking on water, and the like), is unfathomable.

The Church has however not only for millennia declared the existence of God, but also his possession of supernatural attributes. Scripture even claims the existence of God in terms of the foolishness of not believing in him. Twice, the psalmist warns against the unwillingness to believe in God: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 14:1; 53:1).

This truth is already made plain in the opening lines of Scripture. Genesis 1-3 details the origin of human life and the events that led to the status quo, and again, the existence of God is here viewed as a basic assumption. One of the major themes of the book itself is that God is the main character of the entire Bible and that it is his story that is being detailed within its pages. Hughes (2004:18) reminds that this was also the view of Tyndale House, Cambridge alumnus, Derek Kidner, who pointed out that it is not by chance that God is the main character of the opening line of the Bible, since the name 'Elohim' repeats itself a staggering 35 times. For this reason he (Kidner) was convinced that the whole book of Genesis is about the main character, God, from beginning to end. Additionally, there is the historical testimony of the numerous occasions in which God conversed with people and intervened in human history. We read that He talked to Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:28); that He commanded them (Gen. 1:29; 2:16). We read that He eventually revealed himself unto Abram, and that He called him into service (Gen. 12:1). These are but a few introductory examples of God being perceived through the faculty of the senses, thus setting the norm to which He continued to reveal himself unto many others in the Bible.

It must however be emphasised again that Scripture does not set out to prove the existence of God, but simply assumes it. Feinberg (2001:183) explains that although this is true of Scripture,

there remains a few Scriptural instances in which a form of an argument for God's existence is implicit in the text. Psalm 19:1; Romans 1 and 2 are three such examples. Feinberg (2001:183) suggests that the point that can be made from Psalm 19:1 is that it begs the question "why does the heavens declare the glory of the Lord"? The simple answer then, or the point that David is making is that someone like God, who possesses great power must have made the earth the way it is. Additionally, Feinberg (2001:183) adds that as the nature of the planet is pondered, the obvious conclusion must be that whoever created it all must "have great power and wisdom, and he must be a beneficent creator". The same conclusion can be made of Romans 1:20 and 2:14-15 as Feinberg (2001:184) explains that both these passages point to natural revelations that play the all important role in testifying to the existence of the Creator. It is for this reason that belief in his existence is closely tied to belief in who He is (omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, transcendence, etc.).

5.4 Christology

Equally important to the study of God's existence is the study that relates to the Person and work of Christ. As Culver (2005:420) aptly summarises, this is the study that strives to investigate the biblical data about Christ and to reach clarity regarding "who He was and what He came to do". The importance of Christology is immense and can never be moderated. This importance and centrality, as Culver (2005:420) points out, is indicated in the Apostles Creed of the Early Church.

In the English rendition of the creed it states the following regarding Christ:

"I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried; he descended into hell¹¹; the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the father almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

¹¹ This phrase has been quite the source of disagreement within the Church. It is the view of Wayne Grudem that it is not a biblical, nor an apostolic tenet. He suggests that "there are several compelling reasons against keeping the phrase: It has no clear warrant from Scripture and indeed seems to be contradicted by some passages in Scripture. It has no claim to being 'apostolic' and no support (in the sense of a 'descent into hell') from the first six centuries of the church. It was not in the earliest versions of the Creed and was only included in it later because of an apparent misunderstanding about its meaning". He goes on assuring that even so, "unlike every other phrase in the Creed, it represents not some major doctrine on which all Christians agree, but rather a statement about which most Christians seem to disagree" (Grudem, 1994:594).

Emphasising the importance of Christology even more, Culver (2005:420) states that of the 109 articles in the creed, 69 of them relate to Christ directly. The 69 references are further divided into 21 referring to the Person of Christ, and 48 referring to the work that He has done.

All aspects of this view regarding Christ is scripturally defensible. Regarding his deity for instance, apart from numerous other references in John (5:23; 8:58; 10:30; 20:28), the beginning verses of this Gospel tell the story of the time in human history that the Second Person of the Trinity, namely Christ, became a human being, namely Jesus of Nazareth: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn. 1:1). Despite major resistance to this interpretation, the orthodox view remains that this verse teaches that Jesus was God in every sense. As Bruce (2009:109) reminds, Jesus who is the Word shares the nature and being of God, and for this reason John 1:1 stresses the reality that the Word (the Second Person of the Trinity, the Christ, the Anointed One, Jesus of Nazareth, the Lion from the Tribe of Judah) is what God is in essence, nature and attributes, i.e. the one who had always been in existence, the Ancient of Days¹² (Dan. 7:9, 22).

However, it is not only as a result of the misinterpretation of Greek grammar in John 1:1 alone that the deity of Christ has been misunderstood by some. The traditional view of Christ being fully God and fully man, that He made atonement for sin, in its totality, by dying on the cross, being buried, and then finally being resurrected from the dead on the third day, has similarly been viewed as false or unhistorical, based on the misinterpretation of Christian history as well. Pienaar (2012:268), for instance, suggests that Jesus received his status as one of the Persons of the Trinity at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. He furthermore states that this is also the point in history when Yahweh, the God of Israel, was changed by the council members to be a Trinity. Although the existence of the Trinity, Father, Son (Christ), and Holy Spirit is likewise defensible from John 1:1 and other verses, the error lies in Pienaar’s interpretation of Christian history. This view unavoidably infringes on bibliology.

5.5 Bibliology

Though seemingly redundant, bibliology is in its simplest assessment, the study of the Bible. God has not only revealed himself generally through nature (as explained previously) but He has also provided for a special way to reveal himself unto man through Scripture. Erickson (2000:178)

¹² According to MacArthur this term “refers to God the Eternal One, who confers the messianic kingdom on the Son to rule at his second coming and following” (MacArthur, 2010:1209).

highlights the difference between these two means of revelation by describing special revelation as God's "particular communications and manifestations of himself" to a select group of people (e.g. prophets and apostles) at select times. These communications, he continues, are now only available within the pages of Scripture. The Greek meaning of the word "revelation" means to "reveal". To summarise, bibliology can therefore be defined as the study of the Bible that has been specially provided by God in addition to the revelation of himself through the created order, and written by men who have received revelation from God regarding himself.

5.5.1 Inspiration

Inspiration is the process through which special revelation was made possible. This primarily refers to the way in which the Holy Spirit supernaturally influenced the writers of Scripture, causing them to produce as Erickson (2000:225) describes, an "accurate record" of that which God intended to reveal in writing. This he suggests was tantamount to being the Word of God.

Although various Bible passages support the view of inerrancy (2 Sam. 23:2; Jer. 3:4; Jn. 10:35; Acts 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), a strong case can be made for the doctrine based on 2 Timothy 3:16 alone. This verse states that "All Scripture is breathed out by God" suggesting that Scripture has its very origin in God, and testifying of his superintendence over the entire process of its production over the centuries. As Erickson (2000:227) explains, Paul is making the point that Scripture is divinely produced, comparing it to the Genesis account where God breathed life into man (Gen.2:7), and just as life is from God, so also is Scripture.

5.5.2 Inerrancy

The reality of the inspiration of Scripture begs the question of its accuracy. If Scripture is inspired by God, then it must certainly be without error, or inerrant, as the logic demands. If God doesn't make mistakes, then certainly his Word will be without mistake as well. Grudem (1994:90) explains that inerrancy means "that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact". In other words, as it pertains to truthfulness, or falsehood, the Bible can be trusted and accordingly defined as reliable and inerrant. In basic language Grudem (1994:90) explains that "the Bible always tells the truth, and that it always tells the truth concerning everything it talks about". What Grudem (1994:91-92) recommends is true, regardless of the ordinary language, loose quotations, or unconventional grammar that it at times exemplifies. Similar to inspiration, various passages testify to Scripture's inerrancy (2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 12:6; Prov. 30:5; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18). The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is in agreement with Grudem

in this regard. In the Confession's section on the Holy Scriptures, the writers insist that as a result of God's superintendence in the writing of Scripture, all of it must be held in the highest regard.¹³

Relating to the inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture is the reality of its historicity. Grudem explains (1994:91) that since the Bible is inspired by God and inerrant, it also speaks authoritatively to issues relating history, even though ordinary language is often employed. On cursory glance, it will become evident that much of the Bible has to do with the telling of real historical events. Events that are essential to Christianity, such as for instance, the virgin birth, the identity of Christ, and very importantly, the events of the cross and his eventual resurrection, are treated as real historical truths.

As it has been postulated, these doctrines have not been uniformly accepted in the modern and post-modern era. Farnell (1998:85) is convinced that the driving factor, contrary to popular belief, is not so much the result of scientific research as it is the result of philosophically motivated presuppositions. Farnell insists that the presuppositional roots of Historical Criticism are inherently antagonistic to the biblical view of inerrancy. Fuelled by a strong anti-supernaturalism, anything that reminds of the miraculous is accordingly rejected. Farnell (1998:85) calls it an "ideology whose very nature negates the Scriptures". Historical Criticism has its origin in most of the Bible rejecting systems of belief. Although not exhaustively, Farnell (1998:86-113) continues to illustrate how direct lines can be drawn between all of these and the development of Historical Criticism: Inductivism (Francis Bacon), Materialism (Thomas Hobbes), Rationalism (Benedict Spinoza)¹⁴, Deism (Toland, Collins, Tindal, and others), Skepticism (Hume), Agnosticism (Kant), Romanticism (Schleiermacher), Absolute Idealism (Hegel), Evolution (Darwin), and Existentialism (Kierkegaard).

One such practical way in which Historical Criticism has attacked orthodoxy is its approach to the synoptic Gospels, or what has also been termed 'the quest for the historical Jesus'. Here the same methods that lead to the denunciation of inspiration, inerrancy, and belief in the supernatural

¹³ Rewritten in modern English by Kirkham (2001:4) the Confession instructs (speaking of Scripture) that "the glory of its contents, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of its style, the agreement among all its parts, the expanse of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full revelation it gives of the only way for human salvation, together with many other incomparable characteristics and its complete perfection – all these arguments provide abundant evidence that it is indeed the Word of God".

¹⁴ Farnell (2012:11) informs: "While very few ideas stem from absolute beginnings or a single root cause, the nascent beginnings of the historical-critical ideology of all these searches actually can be largely traced to the profound, albeit belated influence of the Jewish apostate Benedict Spinoza."

have collectively been focused on the Person and work of Christ, stripping the true Jesus of his true identity as the miracle-working God-man, who beats death. Farnell (2012:7) explains that its purpose is to defeat the influence of the gospels on the Church and society at large, propagating as Edgar (1998:133) warns the dubious theory of the literary dependence of both Mathew and Luke in the gospel of Mark and an unknown source named Q.¹⁵

The third and most recent quest for the 'true' Jesus of history, although consisting of a development phase, is believed to have been started in 1988 with Neil and Wright's publication *History of Interpretation*, using the phrase, "the third search" (Farnell, 2012:18). It has influenced media anomalies like the Jesus Seminar which Thomas (1998:14) describes as a council of liberal scholars under leadership of Robert Funk, that have denied, by vote, 82% of what the four gospels teach about Jesus. Thomas (1998:14) says that though strongly reacted against by many in the evangelical community, it is counter intuitive that many of these responses have come from evangelicals who themselves engage in Historical Criticism.

Regarding its development, the phenomena of Historical Criticism has evidently become quite systemic, and has grown to include the associated disciplines of Source, Form, Redaction, and Tradition Criticism, the application of these which is viewed as the quintessence of scholarship among the liberal (Linnemann, 1990:39). In this regard it comes as no surprise that while offering an explanation for his rejection of Christianity, Pienaar (2012:264) uses language that smacks of the influence of Historical Criticism, the discipline of which, similar to many European and American seminaries, is also advocated by lecturers of the Dutch Reformed Seminary of South Africa where he was trained as a former minister. He offers that to question the historicity of the 'Bible stories' is not the same as questioning the truth that can be learned from them.

There are hints of the influence of Neo-Orthodoxy in his statement. Spurred by developmental Higher Criticism, and influenced amongst others by liberal theologians like Emil Brunner, Culver (2005:22) explains how Karl Barth (1886-1968) developed his view of Neo-Orthodoxy in which Scripture was largely treated as moralistic truths pointing to God, and meaning was determined by the reader. Because all eternal or divine truths reside in the world of the eschatological (supernatural), for Barth it meant that the divine could not enter the space-time world.

¹⁵ Edgar (1998:132-157) offers a detailed analysis of the faulty basis, assumptions and resultant danger inherent to this approach, widely known as the Two-Source Theory of the origin of the synoptic gospels.

If for instance this view were to be applied to the work of Christ, there would essentially be no forgiveness of sin, since the historicity of the cross and the resurrection (1 Cor. 15) are essential to salvation. The physical death, burial, and resurrection of Christ form the pillars of Christianity and cannot be compared to mere stories that have mere moral truths to convey. These creeds have been strongly emphasised in all of the above mentioned statements of faith as an absolute minimum requirement for earning the label of orthodoxy.¹⁶

Unlike Barth with his Neo-Orthodoxy that doubted the historicity of the Bible, Pienaar (2012:270) however seems to treat the historical accounts in the Bible, retold by the Holy Spirit inspired (2 Pet. 1:21) eye-witnesses, with the utmost of suspicion, even in a moralistic sense. Unlike Barth who did provide for the supernatural (eschatological), he views the Bible as merely a book with an archaic, pre-scientific (pre-naturalistic) world view and therefore makes no apology for no longer believing in the “antique interpretation” (2012:264) of the Bible that has inevitably “collided” with his “new understanding” of it.

5.6 Creation

Generally speaking, the objections of many sceptics of Christianity can be described as the product of a combination of false BT and atheistic/evolutionist philosophy. Sweetnam (2009:151-152) for instance explains that in the early decades of the nineteenth century, pioneered by men such as Georges Cuvier (1768-1832), birth was given to the ‘Gap Theory’ of creation, as the Church was forced to provide biblical explanations to new geological findings. The theory was designed to harmonise the biblical account of creation with long periods of time that, at that time, seemed to have been confirmed through science. This novel theory, Sweetnam (2009:152) says, soon transitioned from scientific debate to theological, when prominent Scottish evangelical, Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) delivered a sermon in which he endorsed the postulations of Cuvier.

For other theologians, this idea of a ‘former creation’ did not do justice to the Hebrew grammar in the opening verses of Genesis 1. Similar to the Gap Theory, the theory of ‘Theistic Evolution’ was conceived of as a viable option. Akin (2007:370) for instance, describes long-time Princeton Theological Seminary principle, Charles Hodge (1797-1878) as dismissing only of the “denial of

¹⁶ The Westminster Confession explains that “...the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation...” thus affirming the importance of the historicity of his birth, crucifixion, and resurrection (Westminster Confession of Faith: Chapter 8, Article 6).

design” element of Darwinism, yet accepting of both the ideas of evolution and natural selection. Akin explains, it is because the ideas of evolution and natural selection could be harmonised with the biblical view of divine design, that these ideas could also be reconciled with the Christian view of God being the creator of humans.

A third and final approach is ‘Young Earth Creationism’ (YEC), or ‘Creation Science’ as it is also commonly known in Christian circles. Dr. Henry Morris (Institute for Creation Research) is one of the well-known names that popularised this view in his book *The Genesis Record* which was the only commentary on the entire book of Genesis that was available at the time of its publishing (Ehlert, 1976:5). YEC has not only entered the discussion, but has also confidently challenged the tenets of both Gap and Theistic Evolutionary theories. As a more recent scientific development, YEC not only rejects the idea that God used evolution to create, but also offers proof for a young earth and universe, created by God in six literal days (Gen. 1:1-31) with an age, estimated by Ham (2010:49), of approximately 6000 years. Although there is disagreement among young earth creationists as to the exact figure (6-12000)¹⁷, the estimation stands in stark contrast to Darwinian estimates. Fowler & Kuebler (2007:122) references these as 4.5 billion years for the age of the earth, and 15 billion years for the universe respectively.

Morris (1976:45) refers to Archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656) of the Church of Ireland as one of the pioneers of one of the best-known chronological systems, calculating the start of creation as 4004 B.C. This, he reminds, was done at a time that was understood not to have been ignorant of science. Also Isaac Newton (1643-1727) who was vehemently opposed to Egyptian chronology that places the start of their monarchy before 5000 B.C., was in agreement with this figure. Other chronologies include those of Luther, 3961; Melancthon, 3964; Kepler, 3993; Lightfoot, 3960; Hales, 5402; Playfair, 4008; and the Septuagint, 5270 B.C., all falling safely within the parameters of orthodoxy.

Pienaar (2012:272) however makes no excuse for the evolutionistic/Big Bang view that he has adopted. He lists Darwin, Einstein, Hawking and many others as those who have influenced him in his decision. For Claassen (2012:39), all “faith traditions” of Christianity that he once held onto, faith in a “creator-god,” “salvation,” “life after death,” had been demolished by scientific findings.

¹⁷ Taking into consideration the varying interpretations of the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, Morris (1976:45) recommends that even if certain gaps were present in these genealogies, they would collectively never support “a date for the creation of man earlier than about 10 000 B.C.”

Similar to Pienaar, he lists Dawkins as one of the main influences in the adoption of his view, and admits that he would even recommend Dawkins' pure naturalistic and anti-supernaturalistic outlook as a code of life for his children to follow.

5.7 Conclusion

Now that the orthodox views of the Church have been measured against the unorthodox views of Claassen and Pienaar, the background has been set for the refutation of these unorthodox/atheistic views through the utilisation of the Bahnsenian method of PA, and the lessons that have been learned from the analysis of the debate between Bahnsen and Stein.

Chapter 6

6. A detailed refutation of the sceptical beliefs of Claassen and Pienaar using the Bahnsenian method as guideline

6.1 Introduction

The point has finally been reached where an apologetic refutation of the sceptic views of Claassen and Pienaar can be conducted. All components of the Bahnsenian method (see Chapter 3 & 4) are being incorporated to reach this result.

6.2 Providing an answer against atheistic scepticism

Transition from Step One to Step Two of the Bahnsenian method (refer Chapter 3) is a necessary progression for the goal of refutation. Even though as Bridges (2001:234) explained, there are indeed times when the fool must not be answered, Step Two in this context is of cardinal importance so that false views of the Bible could be corrected, and the truth defended. The study will at this point turn to the four steps involved in providing an answer to atheistic scepticism:

6.2.1 Present facts inside the Bible's philosophy of fact.

Before certain statements will be answered and refuted, it must be stressed that God will be viewed as the determiner of truth. Revelation/Scripture will be held as the primary instrument against which all statements will be measured, and so will be treated with the utmost of respect.

6.2.1.1 Regarding the creation

Referring to the previous discussion on creation, and for the purpose of refuting Claassen's and Pienaar's attacks on the Bible effectively, the YEC model will not be chosen for the sake of providing a mere alternative to their view regarding origins, but rather accepted as factual. The validity of the YEC model can be posited from Scripture for some of the following reasons:

1. The genealogies presented in Genesis 5 and 11, biblically and historically traced do not exceed the 12000 year higher limit estimation for the age of the earth, within the YEC model. As was discussed previously Morris (1976:45) is not even sure if this estimation is accurate according to these genealogies, placing the creation of man no earlier than about 10 000 years ago.
2. The normal understanding of the Hebrew word for 'day', or 'yom' (יֹם), is that it is one literal 24-hour day. The understanding is therefore that God created everything in the universe, including

earth and man, in a 144-hour period. The motivation for this belief as Hamilton (1990:53) explains is from the Hebrew Bible in which 'yom' is viewed as a normal day of the week. He explains that although there are areas where it refers to an unspecified period of time, these are few and far between. He suggests that the burden of proof falls therefore upon those who do not view 'yom' as a literal 24-hour day, especially as a result of the fact that Scripture describes 'day' in terms of the passing of an 'evening' and a 'morning' in Genesis 1.

3. An obvious conclusion from within the biblical framework is the fact that both theistic evolution (for instance, the 'Day-Age' theory¹⁸, where a day is seen as millions of years) or the Gap theory cannot successfully be reconciled with the biblical doctrine of hamartiology (the study of sin). Morris III (2009:96) reminds that the biblical account tells that death entered the world as a result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve after being tempted by Satan (Gen. 3:6,17; Rom. 5:12). The logical deduction from this is that evolution (millions of years) could not have been the method that God chose to create man, since it requires the life and death of many different between phases (generally described as the 'evolution' of non-living matter into primate-like humans with myriads of random between phases) before the eventual birth of homo sapiens. Morris III (2009:97) warns that if there was such a long history "of pain, suffering and death before the rebellion of Adam brought death into the world, then a whole sweep of biblical teaching is thrown into the black hole of allegory".

4. A final reason for the advocacy of the YEC model is motivated by the order of the creation days detailed in the Creation Week (Gen. 1:1-31). It should be observed that according to the description found in Gen. 1:11-19 (Day 3 and 4) all things botanical were created on Day 3, followed by the creation of the heavenly entities (sun, moon, stars, and all other galactic and intergalactic entities). It is a scientific fact that plants generate their food using the sun through a process called photo-synthesis. Without the sun plants will quickly die. For this reason, it is illogical that the creation days were long 'ages' in which God used evolution to create everything. Morris (1976:64) for instance applies this reasoning to Day 6 of creation in which insects, such as bees, were created that play a vital role in the pollination process that many plants so desperately require for survival. Although this reason/motivation is of scientific nature, the specific order of Day 3 and 4 of the Creation Week is of biblical significance.

¹⁸ For a full discussion of the Day-Age theory of theistic-evolution see Morris (1976:53-57).

These and other reasons refute evolution from a biblical perspective. It is neither biblically possible nor necessary for the world to have come about as a result of evolutionary processes. It would therefore be inconsistent with the biblical data to hold to evolutionary-creationism, or theistic-evolution.

6.2.1.2 Regarding the Creator

Those who attack the credibility of the Bible may however even be persuaded regarding the impossibility of reconciling evolutionary findings with the biblical data. It is because of this reason that some may agree to the impossibility of theistic-evolution. Yet many, such as Claassen and Pienaar, remain unconvinced regarding the existence of the Christian God, or any god for that matter, attributing matters of origins to the unnecessary and impossible processes of evolution.

The Bible however unequivocally points to the Christian God as the Creator of everything. Not only does He exist according to the Bible, as explained in the previous chapter, but He is also the one who created ‘ex nihilo’¹⁹ and rapidly. The Creator God is discussed in numerous Bible passages as well. The book of Ecclesiastes exhorts the reader to remember his Creator in the days of his youth (Eccl. 12:1). Isaiah proclaims boldly that the God of Israel is the Creator of the “ends of the earth” (Is. 40:28). Similarly, in the New Testament Paul for instance explains to the church at Rome that the heathen wrongly worshipped the creation instead of the Creator (Rom. 1:25). In the context of persecution, Peter instructs his readers to “entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (1 Pet. 4:19).

Additionally, on numerous occasions the Bible refers to everything that the Creator has made as the ‘creature’. Although this is a term that is generally employed by atheists, viewed biblically it has its origin in the verb form of the word, which is ‘to create’ and therefore must be viewed as strictly Christian-theistic, when speaking about matters of origins. In other words, the existence of a ‘creature’ presupposes the existence of the ‘Creator’. Various Bible passages attest to this as well: God gave the command for living ‘creatures’ to come forth according to their kinds (Gen. 1:24). Man (who is a creature himself) was later given the task of naming the creatures that God created (Gen. 2:19). The Psalmist similarly attributes ‘ownership’ of all the earth’s creatures to God, implying that He is also the Creator of them all (Ps. 104:24).

¹⁹ This is the Latin term for ‘from nothing’. God created the universe and the Earth, and everything in it from no pre-existing matter. But more than that as Elwell (1988:541) explains, “it means that the absolute origin, sustaining, and meaning of all things is in the living Lord of Israel and of the church”.

With the primary facts presented and explained from within the Bible's philosophy of fact, the anti-biblical, and atheistic presuppositions of Claassen and Pienaar will now be addressed, also from a biblical perspective.

6.2.2 Attack the unbeliever's presuppositions, asking whether they lead to true knowledge.

The aim here is to nullify Claassen's view, and to point him to the impossibility of his view. By gaining such understanding, and critiquing inaccuracies, the correct alternative will be discussed and proven. The success of the refutation of these false ideas would be attributed to the utilisation of the Bahnsenian method.

6.2.2.1 Naturalism

One does not have to read far into Claassen's chapter entitled "When the stones of science start proclaiming," to come to the conclusion that he has been influenced by a 'naturalistic' outlook on life. The title possibly refers to the archaeological method of 'carbon dating' which Bowman (2007:9-10) explains as the process of determining, through the amount of radiocarbon present in articles of nature, the age of such articles (rocks, trees, etc.). He attributes this "discovery" to American scientist, Willard Libby, who is seen as the first to theorise about the possibility, and who was later awarded the Nobel Award for chemistry in 1960. Even though there is scientific evidence for the inaccuracy of radiocarbon dating²⁰, it is the naturalist tendencies of Claassen that will henceforth be addressed. His naturalist commitment is well supported in his own words when, ridiculing the Christian commitment to the authority of Scripture, he says (2012:31): "I want to reformulate it [i.e. his naturalist commitment] in the idiom of those modern Christian believers who are still refusing to accept scientific discoveries when it does not conform to their stringent interpretation of the Bible: 'Who will dare place the authority of Darwin, Wegener, Penzias and Wilson, Mayr, Venter and science, above that of the Holy Spirit?'" This is the very commitment that will be addressed through the Bahnsenian method.

The naturalist can according to Bahnsen (1996:119) be defined as someone who seeks "natural" or "scientific" answers for all events, whether reported or personally experienced. He suggests that even though it is a scientific approach to the gaining of understanding, it must still be classified as a world view. In this sense, naturalism can be viewed as a 'faith' in and of itself. It is clear that

²⁰ See Riddle's (2007) explanation in his chapter on Radiocarbon Dating.

Claassen's views are in line with naturalism. He (2012:23) for instance refers to Lewis Wolpert's (2006:xii) quote in his *Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast* where he offers that "one cannot believe impossible things". This is contrary to Claassen's (2012:27) own recommendation though; 'Naturalism,' 'Darwinism,' or 'natural science' is not a faith based system, but is according to him researched, reasoned, empirical, and therefore scientific. It is also clear that it is the theory of evolution that has influenced him in the utterances he makes regarding Christianity, or a theistic outlook on life in general. To him (Claassen, 2012:24), the faith that modern man has in the existence of "gods, God, or whatever Spiritual Higher Order" is "inexplicable".

Since it is evident that Claassen has been influenced by the theory of evolution, it is therefore necessary that his belief in evolution must be challenged. The YEC model provides a viable platform for such challenging.

6.2.2.2 The Development of Young Earth Creationism as a 'hard science'

Firstly, although the biblical case has already been made for YEC, it would be beneficial to the argument to state that YEC is not solely the conclusion of conservative Christians and their interpretation of the internal testimony of the Bible. YEC cannot merely be classified as the 'faith' of some within Christianity. Rather as will be shown, it is also the view of many scientists (interestingly Christian and secular) who have conducted research themselves and have thus been led to the conclusion that Darwinism is not possible.

Henry M. Morris, a name that has been mentioned before, can be viewed as the pioneer of the modern-day defence against evolutionistic thinking. Morris (1976) who was foremost a scientist (hydrology) founded the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) in 1970 that at its core strives to conduct scientific research inside the Bible's parameters for origins. The institute offers formal graduate and professional training programs, and has over 30 years of experience in graduate education. ICR "conducts laboratory, field, theoretical, and library research on projects that seek to understand the science of origins and earth history".²¹

Similar to the work of Morris, 'Answers in Genesis', a YEC organisation, successfully made its way into the debate, the U.S. branch of which is probably most notable, led by Australian founder and president, Ken Ham.²² 'Answers in Genesis' (AIG) has delivered a tremendous pool of

²¹ Biographical information taken from the ICR website: <http://www.icr.org/who-we-are/>

²² Biographical information taken from the AIG website: <https://answersingenesis.org/about/history/>

creationist and YEC proofs in opposition to evolutionistic explanations. Apart from their popular and thoroughly scientific 'Creation Magazine' which is compiled by leading creation scientists, the organisation also publishes a technical journal edited by Dr. Andrew Snelling PhD (geology), called 'The Answers Research Journal'. The journal is largely aimed at the scientific community and helpful for academic research.²³ AIG has also been credited with the development of the internationally visited 6500 square metre 'Creation Museum' in Petersburg, Kentucky that is aimed at scientific creation education within the parameters of the Bible account of origins found in Genesis 1.²⁴

These two examples are by no means exhaustive but merely representative of the more popular ones. The research that has been done by ICR, AIG and other organisations or scientists with a similar persuasion, has succeeded to popularise the legitimacy of YEC as a 'hard science'.

Lastly, examples are also to be found in the secular media. For instance, in the 2008 documentary, 'Expelled,' the question of Intelligent Design (ID) is explored by director Nathan Frankowski and actor, lawyer, and political commentator, Ben Stein. The documentary uncovers the antagonism of the general scientific community toward ID, by interviewing some like Richard Sternberg, Caroline Crocker, and Michael Egnor amongst others, who have in many ways endured the crucible as a result of their support of ID. This is contrasted to the findings of Darwinists like, Richard Dawkins and Michael Shermer who are outspokenly against it. Although the documentary has been denounced by its critics, it has been supported by many Christians who believe in ID.²⁵

6.2.2.3 The scientific claims of Young Earth Creationism

In light of the objections that sceptics have to the acceptance of creationism, is it possible that what is really at the heart of their objections is a philosophical presupposition? Could it be that the world (the scientific community especially) is so philosophically inclined to accept atheistic-evolutionary science, that the opposing alternative of ID is viewed as nonsensical? If so, then this could be compared to the Copernican revolution that shook the beliefs of the then 'scientific community'. Correctly, Claassen (2012:23) refers to Copernicus as someone who was thoroughly

²³ Biographical information taken from the AIG website: <https://answersingenesis.org/answers/research-journal/about/>

²⁴ Biographical information taken from the Creation Museum website: <http://creationmuseum.org/about/>

²⁵ Biographical information taken from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expelled:_No_Intelligence_Allowed

scientific, but he wrongly equates his importance for scientific discovery to Charles Darwin's theorising. As has been shown, there are many scientists today who in the Copernican tradition, are standing up against the false Darwinist beliefs of both the church and the scientific community that has fuelled such beliefs.

There are abundant evidences from natural science that demands a Creator, rather than millions of years of evolution, according to Morris III (2009:6-7): There are evidences from design, for instance the uniqueness of the earth for sustaining life in comparison to other planets, and the uniqueness of the Milky Way in comparison to other galaxies. There are evidences from science. Take for instance the order, precision and stability that is present in the universe. How can this be purely randomly derived as evolution demands? Newton's Laws of thermodynamics long ago proved the stability of energy. Geology also points to biblical events, such as a world-wide flood during the time of Noah, which helps to make sense of the status and appearance of many fossils.

Additionally, Morris III (2009:7) is convinced that many "Earth Clocks" point to a young earth, for instance the fact that the earth's magnetic field is decaying too fast. Similarly, biological material is decaying too fast. There is also too much Carbon 14 found in deep geologic strata. Diamonds are said to have too much Carbon 14. Minerals have too much helium. There is not enough mud on the ocean floor to account for millions of years, and neither are there enough minerals present in the sea.

6.2.2.4 Uniformitarianism vs. catastrophism

Proving the scientific credibility of the above mentioned (by no means exhaustive) list of proofs for YEC, falls outside of the scope of this study, but needs mention since that is what Claassen does by listing his proofs for evolution. One such proof that he offers in the debate deserves closer inspection. According to Claassen (2012:264) the YEC tenet that the earth is really only about 6-10000 years old is seriously contended by the rate of the continental shift that has been taking place on the earth since continental split. Referring to Alfred Wegener who theorised regarding the possibility that the continents were once one big land mass, John Tuzo Wilson who confirmed this theory by proving the existence of movable tectonic plates under the landmasses of the earth, and lastly GPS observance that has led scientist to conclude that the continents are still moving away from each other at a rate of 5-10cm per year, Claassen recommends that if YEC were true, according to this reasoning the Iberian Peninsula would have been as little as 1.6 km away from New York City.

6.2.2.4.1 Continental Drift

Yet, this claim is at best proof for YEC, and not for millions of years as evolution requires. According to Snelling (2006:188), it was before the findings of Wegener that creationist, Antonio Snider in 1859 first suggested in a publication that the continents had been drifting apart for centuries. This suspicion was built on his understanding of Genesis 1:9-10 where the Bible describes how God gathered the oceans in one place. He suspected that at this point in the earth's history there may have only been one large land mass in existence, and that the continents as we know them today were not yet shaped. It was as a result of this suspicion that he proposed that the split of the original 'super continent' and the horizontal drift that contributed to the current position of all the earth's continents occurred as a result of the world-wide flood that is described in Genesis 7:11-8:19. Snelling (2006:188) suggests that Snider's publication went unnoticed for two possible reasons: Firstly, he published his book in French and so missed the large and expanding English-speaking world under British Imperialism. Secondly, and more importantly, 1859, which was the year of Snider's publication, was also the year in which Darwin published his controversial *The Origin of Species* that garnered the attention of multitudes as a result of its controversial nature.

6.2.2.4.2 Catastrophism leading to continental 'split' and 'sprint'

That the continents are moving is scientific fact – that the continents have been moving at the same rate since the actual split occurred is doubtful. Snelling (2006:190-191) offers the following answer regarding seafloor experiments for the technically minded:

“While the seafloor surface is relatively smooth, zebra-stripe magnetic patterns are obtained when the ship-towed instrument (magnetometer) observations average over mile-sized patches. Drilling into the oceanic crust of the mid-ocean ridges has also revealed that those smooth patterns are not present at depth in the actual rocks. Instead, the magnetic polarity changes rapidly and erratically down the drill-holes.”

This he says:

“...is contrary to what would be expected with slow-and-gradual formation of the new oceanic crust accompanied by slow magnetic reversals. But it is just what is expected with extremely rapid formation of new oceanic crust and rapid magnetic reversal during the Flood (Gen. 6-8), when rapid cooling of the new crust occurred in a highly non-uniform manner because of the chaotic interaction with ocean water”.

Claassen's theory is based on the basic assumption of the uniformitarianism of science. For this reason he concludes that the continents have always been moving at the same pace. However, if uniformitarianism is momentarily discarded by Claassen, it is at this point that as Snelling (2006:191) observes, that he should embrace Snider's original theory of 'Continental Sprint' instead of mere 'split'. It is through such concession that "a catastrophic plate tectonics model explains everything that slow-and-gradual plate tectonics does, plus most everything it can't explain" (Snelling, 2006:191). It is for these reasons that Claassen's claim is not seen as a threat to YEC, but merely confirmation for a world-wide flood in which continental shift would have occurred very rapidly.

6.2.2.4.3 The distinctness of historical geology

Authors Whittcomb and Morris (1961:131) explain that the Lyellian approach to geologic interpretation coupled with the Huttonian catchphrase that 'the present is the key to the past,' must be viewed as the catalyst that led to the principle of uniformitarianism, the pervading principle in geology. Yet they warn that the principle can never actually be proven. Although the principle that the present explains the past is reasonable, since it is the indispensable principle of other sciences, it is not necessarily required in the field of historical geology. In defence of this view the authors suggest that historical geology is unique among the sciences since it deals with past events that are not reproducible, like for instance in an experimentation laboratory. They (1961:131) explain that it is as a result of the absence of human observers who could record and test these past events that it becomes impossible "to prove that they were brought about by the same processes of nature that we can measure at present".

The uniformitarianism of Charles Lyell (1797-1875) was originally a controversial 'doctrine', as Hessenbruch (2000:423-424) explains. He offers that the findings of Lyell lay largely in the realm of the theoretical. Referring to Gillispie's (1951) interpretation of the historical events leading to the universal acceptance of uniformitarianism, Hessenbruch (2000:424) states that Lyell's doctrine did not rely on empirical results alone. Lyell is said to have universalised the principle of uniformity, arranging the facts according to his theory. Furthermore, Hessenbruch (2000:424) recalls the view of Hooykaas (1970) who maintained that uniformitarianism was not a scientific law, proven through the general means of empiricism, but in essence "a methodological principle". For this reason empiricism was not viewed as the strength of uniformitarianism, but rather that of catastrophists, such as Cuvier and Buckland (and Snider as discussed) who attributed geological evidences to great floods such as the biblical deluge of Genesis 6-8.

6.2.2.4.4 The Genesis Flood

Although uniformitarianism cannot account for present-day geological evidences, there are indeed various legitimate arguments that explain such evidences. The Genesis Flood, for instance, has helped scientists make sense of present-day natural phenomenon such as continental drift, not as the result of the employment of the principle of uniformitarianism, but rather as the result of comparing the estimated geological effects a world-wide flood would have had, to the present-day geological evidences in the world. One such scientific argument that is offered in this regard involves the tremendous geological evidences present on earth in the form of large sediment deposits.

The Grand Canyon in the United States of America is arguably one of the greatest natural evidences for YEC, and simultaneously very strong evidence for a world-wide flood. Of particular interest to YEC is the Colorado segment (plateaus) of the canyon which Whitcomb and Morris (1961:151) believe poses another problem for the uniformitarian principle. In this case it is the proposed “sedimentary processes” of uniformitarianism that are questionable when looking at “those great areas of very thick [sedimentary] deposits which have gone through one or more cycles of uplift and submergence and yet remain marvellously horizontal and continuous” (Whitcomb and Morris, 1961:151).

These authors continue to explain that what is truly remarkable about the entire Grand Canyon, not just the Colorado region, is the fact that the entire region has been raised from well below sea level to a height of well above sea level, measuring at roughly 2km, and this while maintaining the horizontal strata near perfectly. This phenomena fits very well with the world-wide flood. It is believed by Whitcomb and Morris (1961:151) that the region was raised from below sea level since most of the sediments are of marine origin (deposited by the flood). In addition to the rapidly formed strata, Snelling and Vail (2014) refer to the massive scale of erosion caused by the receding water that would have contributed greatly to the way the canyon is currently shaped. According to them, that the high cliffs of the canyon experience only minor rock falls, indicates the stability of the rocks which is ultimately only consistent with “their formation by recent catastrophic erosion, not millions of years of slow erosion”.

Yet despite such compelling evidence for YEC, Claassen (2012:30) views YEC’s effort as, at best, stubbornly ignorant. Despite such overwhelming evidence for YEC, Claassen maintains that Evolution is the key to the past.

To motivate his view Claassen (2012:31) quotes evolutionary biologist, Jared Diamond (2002:vii) who said: “Evolution is the most profound and powerful idea to have been conceived in the last two centuries.” This sheds light on the true nature of his (and others like him) unbelief. Ironically, he is right to admit that evolution is an “idea”. Lyellian Uniformitarianism which informed Darwinian Evolutionism is only an idea that has serious flaws of which geological uniformitarianism is but one example. That it is a “powerful” idea is not to be trifled with either, since Sniderian Catastrophism went near unnoticed in 1859 when ‘The Origin of Species’ was published.

To conclude, Evolution has for many years been the popular view, and will remain the popular view until the minority view of Christian Intelligent Design is embraced by the general population.

For this reason, the importance of the Bahnsenian method for apologetic success in the debate with Claassen cannot be understated. Although there are compelling reasons to believe in an Intelligent Creator, the statements of Claassen have betrayed a philosophical bias that has been at the heart of, and fuelling his particular view, thus far.

To restate, it is abundantly clear that Claassen (2012:31) will esteem the so-called authority of “Darwin, Wegener, Penzias and Wilson, Mayr, Venter, and science, above that of the Holy Spirit” because he is presuppositionally biased to the ‘doctrine’ of these men. For all practical purposes the debate is therefore presuppositional in nature and will benefit from the employment of the Bahnsenian method.

6.2.3 An appeal must be made to the unbeliever that he was created in the image of God, which means that revelation which is from God is a certainty.

To follow Bahnsen’s advice, an inquiry will be conducted into the unadmitted presuppositions and possible inconsistencies or ‘borrowed capital’ present in this line of reasoning. This time Pienaar’s statements will be scrutinised accordingly.

6.2.3.1 The inconsistent ‘faith’ of unbelief

It should at this point be evident that evolution does not offer sound scientific solutions to questions pertaining origins. Neither does it scientifically assist anyone who desires to base their doubt in the existence of the Creator on it. Atheistic views can therefore be said to be highly philosophical or presuppositional. It is for this reason that the argument must be continued on the presuppositional level.

The reality of the matter is that there is a world of difference between the presuppositional truth of the Bible and the presuppositions of Claassen and Pienaar. The first views God as the ultimate source of truth, whereas the second views naturalism²⁶ as the ultimate source of truth. Two world views are in collision. The first submits to the authority of God and the Bible, the second submits to the authority of Darwin and the naturalism that his book caused to escalate.

Again, this is the fruit of Darwinian influenced naturalism that has placed the Bible in a suspect position. Bahnsen (1996:177) describes this phenomenon as the “reproach of the transcendent”. He (1996:180) continues to explain that the attackers of Christianity are philosophically and presuppositionally biased toward anything that reminds of the supernatural when the Bible has a massive amount of references to the realm of the supernatural or the “metaphysical,” when referring to God. The fact that He is personal, infinite, perfect, pure (Ex. 15:11; Mal. 2:10; Jn. 4:24); a Trinity and unique in his nature (2 Cor. 13:14; Ps. 90:2); eternal (Ps. 90:2); self-existent (Ex. 3:14; Gal. 4:8-9); immutable (Mal. 3:6) and omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-10), to name a few.

These references are not welcomed within a naturalistic world view, even amidst gaping internal inconsistencies. Similar to the treatment of Claassen’s view, applying the Bahnsenian method to Pienaar’s view will also be beneficial to the debate:

6.2.3.2 The verificationist blunder

Similar to Stein, it is the expressed view of Pienaar (2012:254-255) that nothing about the existence of God could be said with certainty. He refers to German philosopher Immanuel Kant to support his view who said: “We could neither prove nor disprove God’s existence, because we had no reliable means of verification.” (Lotz, 2014:86) Similar to Claassen, it is through this quotation that Pienaar reveals his naturalist precommitment, hence also revealing the presuppositional nature of the debate. His philosophical bias called verificationism, is also grossly inconsistent both in its methodology and in the way he applies it. Bahnsen (1996:207) explains the verificationist fallacy as follows.

²⁶ This is the general term for the philosophical presupposition that everything must have a natural (as opposed to supernatural) cause. Many different approaches, e.g. verificationism, or falsificationism can be classified similarly. It is therefore not the intent of this study, nor possible, to probe each and every “naturalistic” influence that led to both Claassen’s and Pienaar’s adoption of their respective views.

The basic assumption of the verificationist, or the Logical Positivists, was that a basic sentence (in language) was only meaningful if it could be empirically tested and thus confirmed to be significant and true. This principle, if faithfully applied to all sentences would have, they believed, been the end of all “religious talk”. This, they thought, would have resulted in the denunciation of metaphysical claims for which they believe there was no proof.

Bahnsen (1996:208) reminds that the verificationism principle turned out embarrassing to the Logical Positivists. They did not realise that this principle would have to be subjected to everything they claim as well, in order to be consistent. Bahnsen (1996:208) explains that when applied faithfully to every sentence, including the sentence that “a basic sentence (in language) is only meaningful if it could be empirically tested and thus confirmed to be significant and true,” it is then that the Logical Positivists’ ‘presupposition’ regarding the truthfulness of language was ironically, falsified. The falsificationist’s presupposition suffered the same humbling fate, only from the opposite side, requiring that all sentences must be subjected to falsification.

To paraphrase, Kant (and Pienaar) is in effect saying the same thing that the Logical Positivists and Falsificationists said about religious language. To Kant “the existence of God can only be proven or disproven if his existence can be ‘scientifically’ verified” (Pienaar, 2012:255). This statement resultantly suffers the same humbling fate since there is no way to, yet again ironically, ‘verify’ the statement that is made by Kant and supported by Pienaar.

This speaks to the inconsistent ‘faith’ of unbelief. In Pienaar (2012:255), this inconsistency reaches its peak as he speaks of his personal experience. He says:

“I want to creatively develop and experience my spirituality – in ways that are consistent with my postmodern insights and observations, of course. I want to give expression to the values of love, honesty and righteousness that is already present in me.”

The problem with this statement is twofold:

Firstly, how, from a verificationist or naturalist standpoint, can he authoritatively speak about any of the values that he lists? None of these can be proven to be ‘true’ values according to the verificationist requirement. Neither can the true virtue of them be verified through the application of the same requirement. These values, according to his own reasoning, are therefore highly unknowable.

Secondly, is it even possible to speak of morality from within a system of belief that precludes the existence of God? Certainly not! This is an aspect that was similarly discussed in the Bahnsen-Stein debate when Bahnsen countered Stein regarding his definition of morality or 'righteousness'. From within a Christian world view, values are described as moral because they reflect the laws of God. In this sense, they (laws or morality) are reflective of the mind of God. Bahnsen says this of the laws of logic for instance. The same fallacy committed by Stein is arguably committed by Pienaar as well. He attests to the existence of these laws outside of the biblical world view. Yet these laws and values make sense only from within a biblical world view. Neither Darwin nor Kant can account for the existence of morality. Attributing the existence of laws and values to mere consensus alone will not suffice and is inconsistent in the least.²⁷

To conclude, Pienaar's view should be treated as suspect, and at best, presuppositional or philosophically motivated. Naturalistic and atheistic values influenced by Darwinism have led him to the philosophical bias he has toward Christianity, which has been proven to be inconsistent with the moral values he borrows from Christianity. For these reasons his view takes its 'rightful' place among the many false religions of the world.

Because all human beings, including Claassen and Pienaar, have been created in the image of God, a moral appeal will now be made unto them from the Scriptures.

6.2.4 The apologist must point to the fact that no intelligent discussion regarding truth and the way of salvation is possible unless such discussion is preconditioned upon the authoritative Word of God.

Having demonstrated the presuppositional, yet faulty nature of both Claassen's and Pienaar's views, Step Four has finally been reached in which the presuppositional truth of the Bible, which defends the exclusivity of the Christian faith, can be expounded.

Bahnsen (1985:37) set the example in this regard, when in debate, he referred Stein to the biblical truth that fools say in their heart there is no God. He (1985:37) went on to explain that this statement is not to be misunderstood by him: "When the Bible uses the word 'fool' it is not engaging in name calling. It's trying to describe somebody who is dense in the sense that they will not use their reason as God has given them." Having done this, Bahnsen preconditioned discussion on the Word of God and proclaimed its presuppositional truth.

²⁷ The inconsistency and impossibility of consensus as an explanation for morality has been dealt with extensively in Chapter 4.

6.2.4.1 From general revelation

Not all who observe nature are necessarily led to the same conclusions about it, especially as it involves the question of origins. Some look at it and see the unique involvement of God, while others, like Claassen and Pienaar see pure scientific processes that are explained through random processes caused by the similarly random, 'Big Bang,' or some closely related theory. Although the impossibility of the last mentioned view is supported by the foregoing discourse, which is historical and logical in nature, the Bible similarly, and presuppositionally, supports the sole existence of the Christian Creator God.

In this fashion, the Bible offers compelling arguments for the existence of the Christian God, and Him alone. One such argument is the 'argument from design' (Morris III, 2009:21-25). It doesn't require a very keen observer of nature to notice the brilliance of nature. From the smallest flower in our gardens, to the biggest whale in our oceans, nature demands our fascination because it is indeed brilliant and fine-tuned. The Bible explains that the marvel and brilliance of nature, and the fascination that it evokes must be attributed to the fact that God created it. The Bible is to be viewed as authoritative pertaining the question of design, and so, two primary and classic examples from Scripture will be referenced.

6.2.4.1.1 Romans 1

Romans 1 offers insight in this regard. In his historically accurate letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul, similar to the psalmist, views the 'design' or the 'marvel' of creation as a testimony to God's existence. He says:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:18-20).

In this short, yet potent passage, Paul explains that people have no excuse to deny the existence of the Creator because of the testimony of nature. The crux of the passage is that God has not left man without a reason to worship Him. Nature, or 'general revelation' faithfully does this, and has done this "ever since the creation of the world" (Rom. 1:20). That people should be able to conclude that God exists is not unique to modern man with his technological inventions.

Hendriksen (1980:71) explains that even without such inventions as microscopes or telescopes (e.g. The Hubble Space Telescope) all people in history would have been able to experience the immensity of the universe with their own senses.

Hendriksen (1980:71) goes on to name some examples:

“...the arrangement of the leaves around a stem, the cycle of the divinely created water-works (evaporation, cloud formation, distillation, pool formation), the mystery of growth from seed to plant – not just any plant but the particular kind of plant from which the seed originated, the thrill of the sunrise faint rosy flush to majestic orb, the skill of birds in building their ‘homes’ without ever having taken lessons in home building, the generous manner in which food is supplied for all creatures, the adaptation of living creatures to their environment (for example the flexible soles of the camel’s feet to the soft desert sands), etc., etc.”.

These and countless more are examples of God revealing his attributes through nature. Still people choose to “suppress” the existence of God even when they look at nature.

The first plea to Claassen and Pienaar in this regard is that they would stop suppressing the truth of God’s existence when they look at nature around them. All God’s creatures are marvellously made, hence testifying to his existence. The following passage supports and elaborates this plea.

6.2.4.1.2 Psalm 19

Psalm 19 serves as an excellent Old Testament example. The psalm is written from the premise that God is the creator of the universe. The logical conclusion the psalmist then makes regarding the knowledge of God as creator, is that He is worthy to be worshipped. In verse one he expresses this thought when he says: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” Everything else the psalmist is about to say in the rest of the psalm regarding other aspect of creation can be placed under this one main idea; that the works of God’s hands testify of his creative power, and his worthiness to be worship. According to this reasoning the heavens, or nature in general, shares two kinds of information regarding God: Firstly, one sees that He is the Creator, and secondly, that He is worthy of worship by the creatures whom He had created in his image (Gen. 1:26).

Charles Spurgeon (1970:305) eloquently captures the essence of this verse saying: “He who would guess at divine sublimity should gaze upward into the starry vault; he who would imagine infinity must peer into the boundless expanse; he who desires to see divine wisdom should consider the balancing of the orbs; he who would know divine fidelity must mark the regularity of the planetary motions; and he who would attain some conceptions of divine power, greatness, and majesty, must estimate the forces of attractions, the magnitude of the fixed stars, and the brightness of the whole celestial train.”

Accordingly, a second, yet related plea is that Claassen and Pienaar would, as in the days of their youth, once more gaze into the heavens and testify (as the heavens) to the handiwork of God, and worship Him as God. Endless testimony is available from within the realm of creation alone that God exists and that therefore He alone must be worshipped.

6.2.4.2 From special revelation

Nature and the oracles of God are viewed as closely related to the Bible writers. Broadly speaking, the first testifies of his existence and his awesome attributes, the second testifies of his desire to be in relationship with man. Although the whole Bible is considered special revelation unto man, there are various examples from within the Bible where God specially revealed himself to people. The most notable, profound, and vital example is undoubtedly the first advent of Christ.

Jesus Christ is undoubtedly the ‘sine qua non’ of the Christian faith. There are many historical arguments that can be offered as proof for the birth of Christ, his miracles, his death on the cross, and his eventual resurrection from the dead to name a few, all of which testify of his person and work. He is the primary truth unto a world of unbelief. Interestingly, He is the one whose work Paul refers to in the verses preceding his argument for the existence of God from nature in Rom. 1:18-20. This is what he says in verse 16-17 of the same chapter:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16-17).

The gospel that Paul is talking about here has been summarised by Christ himself in the following words from John 14:6: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” The same Christ who revealed himself through nature has specially revealed

himself in human form, has died on the cross for the sins of human beings, and was resurrected from the dead on the third day. He is the only way to heaven.

6.3 Conclusion

Christ is the one of whom Paul testified. He is the one of whom all creation testifies (Ps. 19). He is also the one who not only actively created this magnificent and complex universe and everything that is in it, but also the entire spiritual realm (Col. 1:16). It is of his gospel that Paul was not ashamed because it was through his gospel that Paul was saved (Rom. 1:16-17).

This is the same gospel of whom this writer is not ashamed and by whose gospel he was saved (Jn. 14:6). It is also the prayer of this writer that Claassen and Pienaar would come to the soul-saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and likewise declare that He who was crucified, buried, and resurrected, was indeed the perfect and loving Son of God (Matt. 16:16).

Chapter 7

7. Conclusion

Presuppositionalism can be distinguished from other apologetic methods based on its argumentation from Scripture. This does not mean that other apologetic methods are unbiblical but rather give the focus and departure point of the method. As was pointed out, the quest for philosophical neutrality (refer Chapter 2) is impossible because all people have their unique set of presuppositions or world view that drives their understanding of the world. Common ground is however found in the reality of all human beings being created in the image of God. The presuppositional apologist can for this reason appeal to the conscious (and logic) of any unbeliever through Scripture.

This must be done from within the Bible's view of the fool. Proverbs 26:4-5 explains what the modus operandi should be when approaching the fool with the truth of Scripture. The instruction is two-fold: 1. The believer must refuse to answer the fool according to his foolish presuppositions, and 2. The believer must answer the fool according to his foolish presuppositions so that he can see what the end state of such foolish reasoning is. Both actions are necessary and needed in various circumstances and it must be decided by the apologist whether the process can advance to Step Two, according to his own discretion. The usage of this method, limited as it may be, should result in the 'educating' of the fool when he/she becomes aware of faulty presuppositions that lead to a faulty world view when: 1. Facts are presented within the Bible's philosophy of fact, 2. False presuppositions are attacked from reason, 3. Reference is made to man's creation in the image of God, and 4. Discussion is preconditioned upon the authoritative Scriptures.

Keeping constantly in mind that God is the ultimate giver of understanding that leads to faith, the apologist must not forget the Christian virtues of patience and civility when addressing the foolishness of unbelief. Paul's instruction (2 Tim. 2:23-25) to Timothy is helpful as Paul reminds him that the apologist must not fight at the level of the unbeliever.

The method is thoroughly biblical as there are various Bible passages that are employed by Bahnsen to support it: The impossibility of philosophical neutrality is supported by Colossians 2:3-8; however common ground (not neutrality) is established through reference to general revelation. This is specifically supported by Paul's description of people's responsibility to worship God in

Romans 1:19-20, since they can see that He exists when looking at nature; the attainment of true knowledge is, similar to general revelation, closely linked to special revelation. To support this truth Bahnsen refers to Proverbs 1:7 which teaches that knowledge starts with fearing the Lord; Bahnsen however does not assume that the unbeliever can do this unassisted. He refers to Romans 3:10-12 to highlight the unbeliever's great need for regeneration, faith being the basic requirement (Heb. 11:6). It can therefore be concluded that the Bahnsenian method is not only presuppositional, but biblically presuppositional.

The method has also shown itself successful in debate. In 1985 Bahnsen faced well-known atheist, Gordon Stein regarding the great question, "Does God exist?" The method achieved tremendous success against Stein by challenging his false presuppositions and pointing him to the authority of God and Scripture. It became evident through the debate that true 'logic' will always point to the existence of God, and false 'logic' will always face irregularities and inconsistencies, such as the 'consensus' of morality, or the fallacy of randomness as an explanation for origins.

The conflict between Bahnsen's and Stein's world view was clearly put on display in the debate. Bahnsen can be described to have employed the Christian-Judeo World View while Stein leaned heavily on a Naturalist world view. It was however revealed throughout the debate that the Naturalist world view cannot work if followed through to its logical end. The JCWV, however, shows internal consistency since all its tenets are based on the existence of God, the authority from which it is derived.

Penultimate to the application of the Bahnsenian method to the South African context was the exercise of comparing the beliefs of South African critics to what has historically been termed 'orthodoxy'. For this purpose, The Apostle's Creed of the Early Church (A.D. 200-750), The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), The London Confession of Faith (1644), The Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), and The New Hampshire Baptist Confession of 1833 were all selected to be representative of the standard for orthodoxy against which the views of two South African sceptics, George Claassen and Abel Pienaar, were measured.

This exercise revealed faulty notions regarding the areas of Theology Proper, which Claassen attacks in the form of anti-supernaturalism, Christology, or the deity of Christ, which Pienaar attributes to the faulty finding of the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., Bibliology (Inspiration and

Inerrancy), which Pienaar says is merely an inaccurate book with a prescientific world view, and lastly Creation, or God's involvement in creating the world, which Claassen says is impossible in light of evolutionary findings.

The step had then finally been reached in which the so-determined unbiblical or unorthodox views of Claassen and Pienaar could be addressed through that which was learnt from studying the Bahnsenian method, both, in theory (methodology) and in practice (Bahnsen-Stein debate). The method was meticulously followed, firstly, determining whether the sceptics could be answered in light of Proverbs 26:4-5. Once it was determined that both Claassen and Pienaar could justifiably be answered, Step Two, which is to 'answer the fool,' was then initiated.

Secondly, all the necessary steps under Step Two were similarly used: 1. Facts were presented within the Bible's philosophy of fact, 2. False presuppositions were attacked from reason, 3. Reference were made to man's creation in the image of God, and 4. Discussion was preconditioned upon the authoritative Scriptures.

Combined, these steps revealed the faulty scientific approach of Claassen and Pienaar who were both found to exhibit 'naturalist' inclinations. Claassen's reliance on Darwinism was addressed from history, showing that the faulty view of uniformitarianism as an explanation for origins he adheres to, does not provide the scientific basis to determine the past, but also from science and Scripture, which gives credence to YEC, and not Darwinism. Having concluded that Claassen has a philosophical bias in favour of Darwinism, Pienaar's, likewise naturalist approach, was also addressed. His, however, through the usage of logic, pointed out the logical fallacy of 'verificationism'. Indeed verificationism was shown to be logically inconsistent and impossible as a philosophy to live by.

As a last step, both Claassen and Pienaar were pointed to the presuppositional truth of the Bible, and in specific, Romans 1 and Psalm 19. These two classic passages dealing with the marvel of creation teach that people must not only conclude that there is a God when looking at creation, but that they must also worship this God because He is the Creator of all.

The Bahnsenian method has undeniably proven successful in defence of the orthodox view of Christianity. The method has not only provided a strong biblical bases from which this could be done, but has also provided a systemised 'method' which the apologist can employ in his/her

responsibility to “make a defense to anyone who asks...for a reason for the hope that is” within, doing so “with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15).

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