

An Overview of Presuppositions and Classifications of Christian Apologetics

By [Billy C. Sichone](#)

Central Africa Baptist University

Introduction

Presuppositions of Christian apologetics

Presuppositions are starting points from which any discussions start (whether science or theology etc, regardless of field). For us to talk about evolution, we must take certain assumptions in mind. In this case, the assumption would be that the right chemical and environmental conditions must have existed for evolution to take place. But if we enquired further as to where this chemical came from, we draw a blank. Thus, the assumption is that the chemical existed from somewhere unknown. There are many other presuppositions we make in many areas. Some presuppositions are self proving (axiomatic) while others are difficult to prove until further information becomes available. In the event of opposing presuppositions, they must be proved, analysed, tested and tried for their veracity before they dislodge existing presuppositions (Geisler 2008; Khun 1986; Popper 1959).

Many presuppositions have to be tested for consistency. This means they must conform and be consistent with the existing proven presuppositions and if they do not conform, they are rejected. These consistency tests are only possible if the subject has reasonably developed and testable. The consistency theory once tested on the evolution theory suggests that this does not hold because evolution teaches that things progress from the less to the more complex (decrease->Increase) but, in reality, the reverse is true (i.e. from more to the less complex) (Ham 2012). This means that evolution does not fit into the correct model of the law of Thermodynamics. Creation however, fits in very well into this model. This affords the apologist a powerful point of argument (Gitt 1996).

The Christian faith is plagued with different shades of people. From conservative (fundamental) to extreme radical or non conservative Christians. The latter group does not hold on to Bible inerrancy and question the Lord's miracles, Bible canonicity as well as asserting that the Genesis accounts are mere poetic writings. The apologist must be prepared to handle such people. These can be refuted and silenced by referring to standard, accepted or established presuppositions. The unmasking of their false presupposition premise sorts out

many things. This group of people can be very subtle and stubborn, not ready to yield. They have a fixed mindset from which they operate. Once their basic faulty foundation is effectively exposed for what it is and torn to pieces, then progress can be recorded but, not before. Their presupposition centre around the following points:

- The existence of a personal God is doubtful.
- The Bible is an ordinary book, no different from any other ancient man made book.
- All historical phenomena must be explained naturalistically, and therefore,
- miracles and supernatural events are not possible.

The apologist must know these presuppositions before hand and blast at them using leading questions. Chances are that the radical Christian will hide their presuppositions for obvious reasons but once these are exposed, a door is open for further discussion. We list some of the common presuppositions in the ensuing section.

Major presuppositions of some groups prominent today

1. Fundamentalist: These are Christians who hold on to the Bible in its entirety as the inerrant inspired word of God. The four suppositions, Sola scriptura, Sola Fide, sola Gratia, and sola Christus (Some add a fifth: Sola dei glorium) summarise their position. Any deviation to this causes them to react and viewed as a heretic. This class is also called Conservative or Orthodox.
2. Evangelicals: Evangelicals hold on to the Bible as the word of God. Originally, it carried the same connotation as fundamentalist but over the years has been diluted to include many other things. These evangelicals are born again and are zealous to share their faith. They believe it is their duty to win souls to the saviour who can only be admitted as children of God upon repentance and faith in Christ. They hold that salvation is by grace alone not works. However, their liberal and weak application of the sola convictions knocks them out from being defined fundamentalist. In fact, Fundamentalists branched out from Evangelicals.
3. Neo Evangelicals: These are evangelicals that are even looser than the Evangelicals mentioned in (2) above. They accept that the Bible contains the word of God but has errors. By that token, they have difficulties accepting the entire Bible as the word of God, even denying that some events in select biblical passages in Genesis actually took place such as the flood. They deny the Genesis account of the fall, creation or the miracles as having been mere

fictitious stories passed down the centuries. But there is more; these deny the historical Adam and Eve. These are labelled Neo (new) to distinguish them from the initial Evangelicals and are open to many things that include ecumenism. Their presuppositions are:

- A somewhat fallible Bible.
- Probable theistic evolution.
- Probability of salvation without an explicit knowledge of Christ.
- Doubt about the veracity of miracles recorded In the Bible.
- Doubt Scriptures' completeness.

This group has allowed a lot of things such as subjectivity, emotionalism, ecumenism, pragmatism and even attempting to co-opt things of other religions into their doctrinal position and practice. This is classical syncretism! The late Dr Funk and Dr Hoover of the Jesus Seminar would comfortably fit in this category.

4. Radicals (wrongly termed Liberals): This includes many classes of "Christians" from liberal to radical or extreme. In this group we find those that totally reject the Bible and its practices to those who may hold on to the Bible but at the extreme end. In this group, we find the anti-government as well as the Lunatic Fringes. Either of these groups emphasize different aspects to which they hold tenaciously. This group collectively operates from certain presuppositions that we list below:

- A rejection of all tenets of conservative Christianity
- All religions eventually lead to Salvation
- Everyone will eventually attain Heaven
- The Bible is not the sole word of God
- The Bible contains plenty of errors and primitive ideas
- The record of creation is a myth, while Evolution is fact
- Virgin Birth, Resurrection of Christ, and miracles are myths.

5. Neo-Orthodox: Came into being after the first world War and rejected Protestant scholasticism as well as the Liberal Protestant movement. Karl Barth led this movement which lies between the orthodox and new

evangelicals. They use the same words with orthodox Christianity but their meaning is entirely different; they attach a different sense to standard theological terms. The Christian must thus be very careful when reading their literature as it can be very damaging. The neo-orthodox claim that the protestants and orthodox Christians have both lost sight of the actual meaning of the word of God. Below are their presuppositions:

- A rejection of All Fundamental Tenets of Christianity by their belief that the Word as Scripture was not intended be perceived as such. In this groups' mind, the written physical Scripture *contains* the Word but itself is not the very Word of God. The Word is proclaimed and witnessed to, in and through the body of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Bible you possess in your hands is not divine revelation. When it inspires a message in your mind, that message is revelation. In other words, it only becomes inspired as the word of God when it *jumps, yea, leaps* out of the page of scripture, not before.
- God's revelation about Himself is an act of grace to which humankind's response is to listen. This revelation by God is presented in a threefold sense: Jesus as the word made flesh; Scripture, which points to the word, made flesh; and the sermon, which is the vehicle for the proclamation of the Word, made flesh.
- There is a possibility of Salvation to all without Christ; Due to humankind's sinful ways, there is a vast chasm between God and humanity. That humankind cannot bridge that chasm and all of mankind's efforts to follow religious doctrine, moral and ethical thoughts and actions are a waste of time. The only possible way for the chasm to be crossed is by God, and this he has done in Christ. The Neo Orthodox deny it.
- Their view of Scripture, "*The Bible is God's Word so far as God lets it be his Word*" (Barth, Church Dogmatics, I / 2, 123), has been seen as a rejection of the infallible sola Scriptura of conservative Protestantism.
- Neo-Orthodoxy relies on human reason and stress the reliability and validity of human reason to critique revelation.

As can be seen Barth and his colleagues are heretical (though some would violently object this claim!) but hide under using the same language Orthodox Christianity uses. This is a deadly error if not heresy!

6. Christian mystics: These are people who emphasise experience over doctrine or accurate teaching as a way to get to God. They claim that God can be

known by following a certain procedure such as discipline, good works, meditation and sharing their experience with others.

- Specifically, these steps are coined Purgative (foundational stage and involves cutting off certain things by body discipline etc. A kind of Gnosticism of sorts.) (Philip and Cherian 2009).
- Illuminative: Has to do with the work of the holy spirit (i.e. activities) in the soul which the person engages in as a way of receiving fresh revelation in or outside the scriptures.
- Unitive has to do with those same people living in community with others and sharing their experience.

Clearly, this is a departure from what the Bible teaches. This teaching also has the following presuppositions from which it functions:

- Rejection of "Bible Alone"
- Rejection of doctrine and theology
- Elevation of mystical experience to the level of revelation
- Salvation through mystical experience
- Spiritual Joy through mystical experience

Beware of this deviation!

7. Christian Cults: A cult by definition is an organised grouping with a human central figure or being other than the God of the Bible. This cult subscribes to teachings which are extra Biblical and places them on equal footing with or above the Bible. There are many brands and strains of cults some very close to Biblical Christianity while others are very far and can be clearly seen for what they are. Here are some of the common presuppositions:

- Rejection of Sola Scriptura and elevation of their own books to the level of the Bible
- Rejection of salvation by Grace through faith
- Rejecting the uniqueness of Jesus Christ
- Rejection of sound standard Hermeneutics
- Claim that only they are true children of God

- Rejection of one or more of the Biblical doctrines related to sin, salvation, Grace, Justification, Hell, etc.

The following are a few of the Christian cults:

- Mormons: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- Jehovah's Witnesses (sometimes styled "Watchtower" by some people.)
- Moonies: Unification of Christianity
- Christian Science Church
- Church of Scientology
- Children of God: Family of Love
- Worldwide Church of God, of Armstrong
- Spiritualism
- Church Universal and Triumphant
- Unitarianism/Universalism.
- Gnosticism/Neo-Gnosticism.
- Way International
- Holy Order of MANS
- Church of the Living God

Other Christian Cults:

- Central London Church of Christ
- Rev. Ike Penitents: Snake Handlers
- Churches for Homosexuals: Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches
- Branch Dravidians: "Waco", David Koresh

- People's Temple: Jim Jones, Jonestown

There has been a proliferation and exponential explosion of these cults. Some are complex while others appear relatively simple but subtle. These continue to flourish and increase by the day. From experience, these seem to be powerful, wealthy and capture some prominent people in society. One wonders what their source of income could be.

8. Christian Spiritism: These are to be distinguished from the Christian mystics above in that these focus more on communication with the dead using mediums and thus subtly reject Biblical revelation as binding. Animistic Necromancy is part of their diet. Subjective inward feelings and inner impression, trances, psychic readings are what they consider revelation and they vigorously pursue this path. They try to communicate with the dead for guidance and leading. Outwardly, they appear like the normal acceptable way of worship but there is this hidden side of worship.

Its presuppositions:

- God: is an infinite spiritual intelligence, an impersonal power controlling the universe.
- Jesus: was a man, not God, and during His time on earth, He was a prophet or an advanced medium who communicated with the spirit world.
- Jesus: is now a primary spirit that one communicates with in the spirit world.
- No Virgin Birth
- No redeeming cross: yet many will have a crucifix displayed above the pulpit.
- No resurrection
- No second coming
- Heaven and Hell do not exist, they are states of mind.
- People continue to live in the spirit world after their physical body dies.
- Rejection Of Bible Alone: they also use their spiritualistic manual, aquarium

- Gospel of Jesus the Christ, and Oashpe

9. Christian occultists: This a group of individuals or people that have deeply studied occultism with a view to draw some lessons and incorporate those practices into main line Christianity. Occultism has to do with the study of hidden special wisdom and revolves around astrology, voodoo and magic among many other clandestine activities. As people study these, they learn tricks and assume powers which they believe are from God to even hypnotise individuals or crowds! They also claim to heal people as seen on many TV programmes today. They operate from the following presuppositions:

- Rejection of Sola scriptura
- They believe that occult techniques are approved by God
- They believe that the spirit beings that help them are from God
- They reject most of what the Bible says about the Devil and his Angels
- They believe that occult phenomena can bring people close to God

10. Non-Christian Occults: These are different from the earlier mentioned point above in that they do not have similar views about God and the afterlife although some aspects may be similar. Like the Christian occults, they use magic, voodoo as well as science. They use science as an ally to try and get to truth and believe they can change destiny using physical means or spiritual laws. They do not pretend of be Christian and hold varying views about Hell, Heaven, the afterlife include etc. Examples of these occults could include Eckanker (ECK), Transcendental Meditation (TM) and others that emphasise soul travel, inner peace, light and tranquillity as a way to connect with your inner self which in effect is god. Their general presuppositions:

- Rejection of Sola scriptura
- Rejection of salvation by Grace through faith
- Rejection of Jesus Christ as the only saviour
- Rejection of all major Christian doctrines

11. New Age Groups: This New a Age Movement, ushered into being by Bailey does not have a central core or set of beliefs but is made up of people who share common beliefs and encourage to “shop” around for what best sits well with their belief system. Beliefs such as pantheism, monism, Panentheism, Reincarnation, Karma, Ecological responsibility and Universal religion mark this cult (Philip and Cherian 2009). Arising later, like Islam to Christianity, it

arose in the 1970s as a reaction to what was perceived as a failure of regular Christianity to affect the world. The New Age Movement (NAM) is a loose alliance and is therefore found everywhere, difficult to box or handle. However, several presuppositions govern all these new age groups (i.e. Cultural (Christmas & Easter) Christianity, conventional

Christianity, New Age practitioner, Biblical (Fundamentalist, Evangelical) Christianity, Atheist/Agnostic and Jewish, as listed below:

- Rejection Of Sola Scriptura
- Rejection Of Salvation By Grace Through Faith
- Rejection Of Jesus Christ As The Only Saviour
- Rejection Of All Major Christian Doctrines
- Salvation Through All Religions/Universalism

12. The new Prajapati movement (Philip & Cherian, 2009): This is a movement in India that seeks to mix Christian theology and Hinduism. Its basic tenets hover around making Christianity appear the same as Hinduism by deriving some aspects from the *Vedas*. It adopts some teachings from the two religions (i.e. Hinduism & Christianity) and creates a totally different religious belief system which the undiscerning believer may unawares fall into. In fact some Pentecostal churches have fallen victim of this in the past. It is founded on the following presuppositions:

- Outright rejection of Sola scriptura
- Rejection of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ
- Rejection of all major Christian doctrines
- Elevation of non Christian scriptures to the level of the Bible

This heresy seems to have taken the church by storm because of its apparent favourable view of the Christian faith claiming that Christ is mentioned in the Vedas albeit, in a veiled form, although they fail to prove some things such as death on the Cross rather than on a pole.

13. Occultic cults: These are rank Satanism groupings that worship Satan and conduct devil assisted healing sessions and practices. In Zambia, much has been said about the rise of Satanism which terrifies some people (especially the charismatics that see Satan at every turn). This movement is becoming very strong world-wide and has accrued a lot of adherents in the quest to get

rich fast. They enter this group, perform certain blood related rituals and communicate amongst themselves in clandestine associations and internet sites among many other avenues. Below are some of the active ones, as highlighted by Philip and Cherian (2009), before we highlight some of their presuppositions:

- Church of Satan
- Temple of Set
- Order of the Black Ram
- Worldwide Church of Satanic liberation
- Order Templi Satanis
- Ordo Sinistra Vivendi
- Chiesa di Satana di Filippo Scerba
- Chiesa Luciferiana di Efrem Del
- Gatto
- Werewolf Order
- Church of War
- Order of the Nine Angels and
- Dark Lily
- Bambini di Satana
- Impero Satanico della Luce degli
- Inferi
- Seguaci del Maestro Loitan

Studying about Satanism is like entering a pitch dark alley with no visible exit or way out. It sends a chill down one's spine and makes hair stand on end. That notwithstanding, it is critical to know about their existence and what they do. The presuppositions of this deadly group are as follows:

- Satan liberates the believer from religious, moral, and cultural conditioning
- Satanism is a religion of the flesh
- Satanists must find happiness here and now
- There is no heaven or hell to go to after death
- Satan is a real being prince of darkness and a friend of mankind
- It is possible to obtain favours from Satan through magical rituals
- Satan is Lucifer, a positive figure opposed to God who is seen in a negative light
- Rejection Of Sola scriptura
- Rejection Of Jesus Christ as the only saviour
- Rejection of salvation by Grace through faith
- Rejection of all major Christian doctrines
- Elevation of non Christian scriptures to the level of the Bible

Satanism is on the rise and will potentially create great havoc in the world. This also implies that the church of Christ must wake up and rise to the occasion to watch and pray.

14. Secular Cults: A cult by description is a group centring around some extra-Biblical teaching laid down by some human being dead or alive. It is these teachings that guide the practice of that group(s). In this context of secular cults, we would say that these are groups that arose after the Second World War to fill up a yawning gap as well as offer alternative answers as to why war takes place with its devastating effects. These cult leaders believe and teach that God does not exist, that Churches use the scriptures to control the masses and religion is a sheer waste of time and energy. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones of the UK attempted to answer these cultic teachings by taking a series on the following subject "*Why does God allow war?*" It was an attempt to Justify God's ways as well as strengthen the faith of the faint hearted that were devastated by the war and its deleterious effects. That said, they have taken advantage of the aching void, bitterness and disillusion of the world's vulnerable and spun a web that leads people to question the very existence of God and His potency/relevance. But God is God, he always has His own witness and interpreter of His sovereign ways.

15. Rationalist groups: This group thrives and exists around facts and figures, analysed and conclusion drawn. They believe that alternative solutions exist that replace the 'God' idea. This group also thinks and believes that if man is at the centre of everything, then the development agenda moves faster. Thus, we may have groups like Humanism and atheism (although these are distinct from rationalism) that are opposed to faith or any spirit world ideas (Geisler 2008). As far as they are concerned, facts and figures speak not the 'Pie in the sky' ideas.
16. Humanists: These put man at the centre of everything and crowd God out. In fact, to the humanist, God does not exist and is a figment of imagination where people find solace in times of need. God is viewed as *the opium of the masses* but as man takes the centre, development is envisioned and the 'God concept' is eliminated eventually. Admittedly, the word "humanist" has several meanings and must be interpreted in its context. In addition, there are different types of humanists which include Christian, secular, philosophical, modern, literary, religious, renaissance and cultural among many. Generally speaking:

They do not believe in:

- A personal God, a Goddess or a combination of Goddesses and Gods
- Supernatural beings such as angels, demons, Satan, Holy Spirit, etc
- Heaven or hell or life after death
- The separation of a person into body, soul and spirit
- Survival of an individual in any form after death
- The existence of a deity, or they don't really care about the topic
- The concept of a personal God, and regard humans as supreme

They do believe:

- Excellent codes of behaviour and morality can be created through reason
- About human rights and equal opportunities for all
- Humans created the Gods and Goddesses in their own image
- There is no God in heaven to intervene and save us from a disaster

- That full responsibility for the future of the world, its political systems, its ecology, etc. rests with humans
- A universe that was not created
- In the theory of evolution and a universe that obeys natural laws
- Rejection of divinely inspired ethical and moral codes in favour of codes derived by reason from the human condition

Generally, this group does not believe in God and place humans at the centre of the equation. Since they hold that human beings are the most important, they will thus be very liberal on many controversial issues such as cloning, gay and bisexual, aborting, mercy killing issues etc. Man, not God, determines his own fate.

Importance of minding sources

It is important to know from what premises the authors we consult reason from, whether in agreement with our position or not. What are their basic premises? What drives them? What agenda do they promote? In our case, we are unashamedly biblically presuppositional and so are the major sources we consulted, such as the Calvin Research group that hold on to the conservative position and hold on to the four Solas i.e. *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Christus* and *Sola Fide*. From our assessment, we concluded that they will do everything to maintain this position as well as defend it because they believe this is the right position of scripture.

Other distinctives define them more fully such as holding on to Inerrancy of scripture, full sufficiency, divine inspiration, Canonicity, revelation and infallibility of the totality of scripture. To be fair, in this discourse, we consulted other sources not necessarily Christian, Religious or even evangelical. This, in our view, gives balance. Sources such as Corliss Lamont (1997), come to mind with his tome on humanism.

Conclusion

In summary, and from the foregoing, we can then say that a competent apologist must not only thoroughly know their position, defend and protect it from scripture but must have an intelligent working knowledge of what the other grouping hold. Knowing the premise from which they operate enables a person to handle even the hardened critic of the Bible. Note that we handles the branches or classes of Apologetics in a separate paper, stay tuned!

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