

ST5450 – Apologetics

Reformed Theological Seminary, Dallas

Spring 2026

I. Details

- A. Dates: 2/2/2026 - 5/8/2026
- B. Times: Mon 5:30pm–7:30pm
- C. Professor: Dr. Dustin Messer
- D. Contact: Dustin@ascdallas.org
- E. Availability: Office hours will be the hours before and after class, or by appointment

II. Goals

- A. To introduce students to Christian apologetics
- B. To learn the art of Christian persuasion.
- C. To present a defense of Reformed presuppositional (worldview) apologetics: its biblical and theological warrant, its philosophical cogency, and its practical effectiveness.
- D. To learn how to lift up Christ and give reasons for the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15)
- E. To develop tools in order to understand the surrounding culture

III. Course Overview

- A. Introduction to Apologetics
- B. Biblical Foundations for Apologetics
- C. Plausibility Structures and Faith
- D. Survey of Contemporary Apologetic Methods
- E. A Case for Presuppositional Apologetics: Principles and Practice
- F. Issues in Apologetics
 - 1. The Existence of the Biblical God
 - 2. The Divine Inspiration of the Bible
 - 3. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - 4. The Problem of Evil and Suffering
 - 5. Christianity and Morality
- G. Cultivating Evangelistic Encounters

IV. Course Requirements

- A. *Participation.* The class will have equal parts lecture and Socratic discussion. Students should be prepared to engage and interact with the texts and their peers.
- B. *Reading.* Read the “required reading” list in its entirety.
- C. *Presentation.* Pick a “defeater belief” that’s faced by modern Christians. Offer a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation on the nature of the obstacle to faith, how the culture understands the obstacle, how Scripture understands the obstacle, and how a Christian might charitably engage with the obstacle.
- D. *Reading assignments.*

1. A proportion of your final grade will depend on how much of the required reading you have completed.
2. A reading report indicating the *percentage completed* of each required reading item is due on the last day of class. The report should be submitted via email.
3. Late submissions will be penalized *5 percentage points for each day beyond the deadline*.

E. *Writing assignment.*

4. You should write a paper (2500–3500 words, excluding bibliography) taking the form of a dialogue with *either* a non-Christian *or* a Christian who is struggling with the intellectual aspects of their faith.
5. You have **several options** for the dialogue paper:
 - i. The first (and recommended) option is to engage in *a real written exchange* with either a non-Christian or a Christian with doubts or intellectual anxieties, e.g., via email, social media, or an internet discussion forum. You should edit the dialogue as needed to maintain clarity and conciseness (i.e., format it to make clear the flow of discussion, correct obvious errors of spelling or grammar, excise irrelevant or tangential material).
 - ii. The second option is to write *an entirely fictional dialogue* between a Christian apologist and either a non-Christian or a Christian with doubts or intellectual anxieties. If you choose this option, you should aim to represent both sides of the dialogue in a realistic, fair, and challenging way (i.e., avoid “straw men”).
 - iii. The third option is a hybrid of the first two: *a partly fictional dialogue* based on a real exchange with either a non-Christian or a Christian with doubts or intellectual anxieties (“based on a true story”).
6. The paper should illustrate that you have a good understanding of the goals, principles, and methods of apologetics discussed in the lectures and readings.
7. Your paper will be graded according to the following criteria, in no particular order: realism, responsible use of Scripture, extent of research, creativity, clarity, structure and coherence, cogency of argument, evidence of critical thinking, and good writing style (inc. grammar, spelling, and punctuation).
8. The paper should include a properly formatted bibliography citing sources used in the writing of the assignment and sources that document or further develop the points raised in the dialogue.
9. Your dialogue paper is due on the last day of class.
10. Late submissions will be penalized *5 percentage points for each day beyond the deadline*.

V. Required Reading

While each book will be valuable to access during the class, students are expected to bring their copies of “C” to class each session.

- A. *Covenantal Apologetics*, Scott Oliphint
- B. *Bulwarks of Unbelief*, Joseph Minich
- C. *Christian Apologetics Past and Present*, Vols 1 & 2, William Edgar and Scott Oliphint
- D. *Toward a Reformed Apologetics*, Keith Matthison

- E. Timothy Paul Jones, ed., *Understanding Christian Apologetics: Five Methods for Defending the Faith* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2025).
- F. Fool's Talk, Os Guinness
- G. *Christian Apologetics* Cornelius Van Til

VI. Recommended Supplementary Reading

- A. History of Apologetics / Methodology in Apologetics
 1. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (P&R, 1998).
[The definitive exposition of Van Til's presuppositionalism: a combination of representative excerpts from Van Til's writings and Bahnsen's insightful, concise commentary. Highly recommended.]
 2. Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity* (Paternoster, 2nd edition, 2006).
[A comprehensive, fair-handed, and well-structured survey of approaches to Christian apologetics. Highly recommended. The first edition is available for free online: <https://bible.org/series/faith-has-its-reasons>]
 3. Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Zondervan, 2000).
[One of the better volumes in Zondervan's Counterpoints series, featuring contributions from five leading apologists/philosophers: William Lane Craig (classical), Gary Habermas (evidential), Paul Feinberg (cumulative case), John Frame (presuppositional), and Kelly James Clark (Reformed epistemology).]
 4. William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Crossway, 3rd edition, 2008).
[Craig is arguably the best-known and most sophisticated representative of the classical approach today. This is his main text on apologetic method and practice.]
 5. Benjamin K. Forrest, Joshua D. Chatraw, and Alister E. McGrath, eds., *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction* (Zondervan, 2020).
[An impressive collection of essays summarizing the contributions of significant Christian apologists from the first century to the present day.]
 6. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (P&R, 1987).
[An insightful treatment of epistemology (theory of knowledge) from a biblical perspective by a Reformed theologian. Very relevant to apologetics, but also to other areas of biblical and theological study. Highly recommended.]
 7. Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1976).
[An influential work by a leading classical apologist; covers both methodology and application.]
 8. Douglas Groothuis and Andrew I. Shepardson, *The Knowledge of God in the World and the Word: An Introduction to Classical Apologetics* (Zondervan, 2022).
[A defense of the classical 'two-step' approach: natural theology to prove that God exists, followed by historical evidential arguments for "the Christian story."]
 9. Brian K. Morley, *Mapping Apologetics* (IVP Academic, 2015).
[An even-handed and insightful survey of different apologetic methodologies.]
 10. K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Crossway, 2013).

[An up-to-date defense of Van Tilian presuppositional apologetics (although Oliphint prefers the label “covenantal apologetics”) with helpful illustrations of its practical application. Good emphasis on the relationship between apologetics and biblical theology.]

11. R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Zondervan, 1984).

[A defense of the classical approach and critique of the presuppositional approach from three Reformed scholars, dedicated (without evident irony) to Cornelius Van Til. John Frame’s critical review of the book appears as an appendix in *AGG*.]

12. Khaldoun A. Sweis and Chad V. Meister, *Christian Apologetics: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Zondervan, 2012).

[A good selection of readings representing a range of approaches to apologetics.]

13. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (P&R, 4th edition, 2008).

[One of Van Til’s most influential works on presuppositional apologetics. This edition features an introduction and explanatory notes by K. Scott Oliphint.]

B. Apologetics in Practice

1. David E. Alexander and Daniel M. Johnson, eds., *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil* (Pickwick Publications, 2016).

[A collection of scholarly essays exploring Calvinist responses to the problem of evil; deals in depth with the philosophical issues of divine providence, human free will, and theodicy. Includes an essay by yours truly.]

2. James N. Anderson, “Secular Responses to the Problem of Induction” (2000).

[<https://www.proginosko.com/docs/induction.html>]

3. James N. Anderson and Greg Welty, “The Lord of Noncontradiction: An Argument for God from Logic,” *Philosophia Christi* 13:2 (2011).

[https://www.proginosko.com/docs/The_Lord_of_Non-Contradiction.pdf]

4. James N. Anderson, *What’s Your Worldview?* (Crossway, 2014).

[A little book of applied apologetics written for both believers and unbelievers. It uses an interactive, non-linear format to help the reader to understand what a worldview is and to reflect more critically on their own worldview.]

5. James N. Anderson, “Can We Trust the Bible Over Evolutionary Science?” *Reformed Faith & Practice* 1:3 (December 2016).

[<https://journal.rts.edu/article/can-we-trust-the-bible-over-evolutionary-science/>]

6. James N. Anderson, “The Inescapability of God,” *Christian Research Journal* 40:5 (2017).

[<https://www.equip.org/articles/the-inescapability-of-god/>]

7. C. John Collins, *Science & Faith: Friends or Foes?* (Crossway, 2003).

[A reliable and wide-ranging treatment of the relationship between modern science and Christian faith; particular relevance to issues in apologetics, e.g., Darwinism versus Intelligent Design.]

8. Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser, eds., *The Rationality of Theism* (Routledge, 2003).

[A collection of scholarly philosophical essays arguing that belief in God is rational. Part 2 contains contemporary versions of the traditional arguments for God’s existence.]

9. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, eds., *Contending with Christianity's Critics: Answering New Atheists & Other Objectors* (B&H, 2009).
[Eighteen short chapters penned by leading evangelical scholars responding to the claims of the New Atheists and other contemporary critics.]
10. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds., *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis* (Routledge, 2000).
[A collection of essays offering a sophisticated and comprehensive critique of metaphysical naturalism. A number of the arguments could be fairly described as presuppositional in thrust.]
11. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
[A heavyweight volume offering state-of-the-art formulations and defenses of the traditional theistic arguments.]
12. William Lane Craig and Chad Meister, eds., *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible* (InterVarsity Press, 2009).
[Another collection of essays responding to the New Atheists. Not all contributors write from an evangelical perspective. Includes an interview with Antony Flew following his 'conversion' from atheism to theism (or something close to theism).]
13. John M. Frame, *Christianity Considered: A Guide for Skeptics and Seekers* (Lexham Press, 2018).
[A concise, winsome, worldview-oriented introduction to the Christian faith.]
14. Gregory E. Ganssle, *Our Deepest Desires: How the Christian Story Fulfills Human Aspirations* (IVP Academic, 2017).
[A more existential approach to commending the Christian worldview, making the case that the "Christian story" about reality satisfies our deepest longings for love, goodness, beauty, freedom, truth, and hope in a way that atheism does not.]
15. Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Baker Books, 2nd edition, 2002).
[A generally reliable introduction to the basic teachings of Islam followed by a critical evaluation from an evangelical Christian perspective.]
16. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (InterVarsity Press, 1997).
[A collection of essays that together offer a comprehensive case (presuppositional in part, evidential in part) that miracles are possible in principle, that miracle claims can be rationally believed, and that the major miracle claims of the Bible are true.]
17. John Gilchrist, *Facing the Muslim Challenge* (Life Challenge Africa, 2002).
[A short but well-informed handbook of responses to common Muslim objections. PDF version is available online if you search for it.]
18. Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (InterVarsity Press, 2011).
[Exactly what it says on the tin. A cumulative-case approach to defending the Christian worldview by a leading evangelical philosopher.]
19. Gary R. Habermas, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Kregel, 2004).
[An up-to-date handbook of evidences for the historicity of the Resurrection. Evidentialist in its methodological orientation, but still invaluable for 'moderate' presuppositionalists.]

20. Daniel Janosik, *The Guide to Answering Islam* (Christian Publishing House, 2019).
[A helpful one-volume introduction to Islamic beliefs and practices with a scholarly evangelical Christian response.]
21. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Dutton, 2008).
[An apologia for the Christian faith aimed at 21st-century Western unbelievers. Keller's approach is eclectic, but has presuppositionalist themes; he cites Van Til and Frame as positive influences. A good example of culturally-aware apologetics.]
22. Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God* (Viking, 2016).
[A prequel to *The Reason for God* which aims to open up the modern skeptic to a serious intellectual consideration of Christianity. Keller argues that culturally, emotionally, and intellectually, Christianity makes more sense than secularism.]
23. John C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Lion Hudson, updated edition, 2009).
[A gem of a book by an evangelical Oxford professor debunking myths about the (alleged) conflict between Christianity and science.]
24. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Fount Paperbacks, 1977).
[Lewis's influential apologia for the existence of God and the identity of Jesus Christ. Various editions available.]
25. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Fount Paperbacks, 1977).
[Lewis's influential response to the problem of evil—a mixed bag of biblical insights and unbiblical ideas. Various editions available.]
26. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (Fount Paperbacks, 1974).
[Lewis's classic defense of miracles (and supernaturalism more broadly); includes an insightful refutation of metaphysical naturalism.]
27. Michael J. Murray, ed., *Reason for the Hope Within* (Eerdmans, 1999).
[A useful collection of essays on prominent issues in Christian apologetics, but with very little attention given to methodological concerns.]
28. Gordon Nickel, *The Gentle Answer to the Muslim Accusation of Biblical Falsification* (Bruton Gate, 2015).
[A superb defense of the integrity of the Bible in response to the common Muslim accusation that Jews and Christians have corrupted their scriptures. Also documents the contradictions, alterations, and dubious textual history of the Qur'an.]
29. Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Crossway, 2006).
[A knowledgeable and insightful treatment of the relationship(s) between science and biblical theology, from a Reformed perspective.]
30. Victor Reppert, *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea* (InterVarsity Press, 2003).
[An updated defense of Lewis's "argument from reason" against metaphysical naturalism.]
31. Mark D. Roberts, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Crossway, 2007).
[A well-informed, lay-level defense of the reliability of the Gospels, clearing away the common objections and misconceptions. A useful resource to give to skeptics.]
32. Mitch Stokes, *A Shot of Faith to the Head* (Thomas Nelson, 2012).
[A popularization of Alvin Plantinga's apologetics. Well-argued and engagingly written, but mostly defensive in orientation.]

33. Mitch Stokes, *How To Be an Atheist* (Crossway, 2016).
[Stokes argues, quite effectively, that atheists need to take their atheism more consistently; although they routinely appeal to science and morality, their own worldview is inconsistent with such appeals. Plantinga in orientation.]
34. Greg Welty, *Why Is There Evil In The World (And So Much Of It)?* (Christian Focus, 2018).
[A superb treatment of the problem of evil by a Reformed Christian philosopher: very readable, while also theologically sound and philosophically rigorous.]
35. James R. White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an* (Bethany House, 2013).
[An engaging scholarly critique of the Qur'an by a Reformed Christian apologist with decades of experience in debating Muslims. Highly recommended.]

C. Reference Works

1. W. C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin McGrath, eds., *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (InterVarsity Press, 2006).

