**THE TRANSCENDENTAL METHOD OF APOLOGETICS**  
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The transcendental method is an apologetic method to help fallen, sinful man to understand that God is the Creator of all things and man is the creature. It is transcendental because God exists and there are no “brute facts”, no philosophical systems that can operate autonomously.

As Reformed Christians, we use the Christian-Transcendental method that was developed by Dr. Cornelius Van Til. Dr. Van Til took the grain of truth from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and tried to take apologetics back in line with the Reformation (we ought to try to be Biblically Reformed in every aspect of our doctrine and life, including our apologetics).

Christian-Transcendental apologetics teaches that the existence of God is the necessary condition for knowing, or being in the world. The evidence of the existence of God, while being in experience, also transcends experience. This method teaches us to ask what are the presuppositions behind the fact that makes any fact possible.

As Christians we know that God exists and it is impossible for God to not exist. The existence of God is the presupposition behind every fact as the Creator and Sustainer of any fact. We know that if anything is true, it is true because God has made it this way, and it is the way the things are in the world.
When we come to an unbeliever, or unbelieving thought, it is a fact; it is because God made it that way. For instance, an unbeliever cannot justify his “facts” and account for each fact that the unbeliever makes while trying to suppress the knowledge of the True God.

This method does not deny the use of “proofs” in apologetics (contrary to some caricatures), but we must keep in mind that when we talk about proving or not proving the existence of God, proof is very limited. We do not attempt to prove theism, as Dr. Van Til says, but only to show that we can find no meaning apart from Christianity and the Self-Sufficient God who has revealed himself to the creature. The Christian-Transcendental method is not concerned to argue for Christian theism, because there is no “bare theism” but we receive it by revelation from the All-Sufficient God.

For instance, in debating or witnessing our faith we are not concerned to merely win an argument but to teach what Christ said about every fact, that ends in showing forth Christ and making him known. All things are created by him and for him and we can be confident to know that God is who he says he is and has solved the human predicament and condition by coming as Christ on behalf of his people. Ultimately, this means that we start with the authority of Special revelation from God which are the Scriptures and received because they are the Word of God (as the Westminster Confession of Faith states in Chap. I).
Man is a created being and knows, according to Romans 1:18ff, that there is a Creator-God and that he has created all things including themselves. This Christian-Transcendental method avoids using autonomous human reason as the foundation for teaching unbelievers about God. What this means is that we must never try to pretend that we are anything more than creatures and that God does in fact live. Man lives in God’s world and although he tries to suppress this truth with false philosophies and his own autonomy, the only real way that man can understand this clearly is through divine revelation (1 Cor. 2:6-14).

Some who use autonomous human reason as the starting point in their apologetics want to try to “prove” the bible and the existence of God through reason. This should not be. We must begin with God’s revelation to man. Reason should not be the judge just because there are no “brute facts” and the Bible, God’s revelation to man, reveals that He does indeed exist. Man cannot live consistently in God’s world while denying his existence; it is impossible. Everything that is- - is created, expect God himself. Every fact is what Christ in Scripture says it is; he is the Creator of it. There is no brute fact because every fact speaks of this God who made it. There can be no neutrality because there is no fact “out there” that can say nothing. All facts and assertions reveal their Creator and bear the Creator’s ownership, as Dr. Scott Oliphint has said.

This helps us to understand the “impossibility of the contrary”. Logic in apologetics is not neutral. Logic is impossible to maintain as law apart from the
Christian conception of creation and revelation. Dr. Oliphint says, “A right presupposition must carry the weight of justification to everything else.” In all unbelieving philosophies, no matter how diverse, there is one consistency. There is a suppression of the truth of God revealed in creation and Scripture, and the autonomy of man is exalted to be the judge over revelation.

The impossibility of the contrary is that because man the creature lives in God’s world, we as Christians must try to help non-believers to understand that while they may suppress the true knowledge of God because of their sin, they cannot consistently live in God’s world with their own philosophy-- because God truly exists. If non-believers can use logic for instance, they are using “borrowed capital” because Christianity alone explains the continuity of all things in this world historically. Therefore, although they try to disprove the existence of God with logic, they cannot really accomplish this in their false system of thinking.

It is impossible to fathom the idea that God does not exist because in denying his existence non-believers are using the gifts which God graciously gave to them in order to deny him. They cannot be honest with themselves and say that there truly is no God because they know that he does indeed exist because he has left man without excuse (This is one reason why Psalm 14 says: “the fool says there is no God”). To love, to know, to be, are all things that cannot be done unless God truly exists. This lack of hope and inconsistency in non-believing philosophical systems can only bring despair.
The very fact that man is a creature made in the Sovereign God’s image, he cannot truly and wholly be man without the knowledge of himself and a knowledge of God. As Calvin said (paraphrased): “All knowledge is summed up in knowledge of ourselves and knowledge of God” (Institutes, I.i.1). Non-believing philosophical systems cannot properly and consistently operate within God’s created world because they are inconsistent with the reality of the God who truly does exist and who has revealed himself to every man. The facts in this world can ever be interpreted in a “brute” fashion. Man has either a believing or unbelieving presupposition in which he approaches God, himself and the creation. The unbelieving presuppositions do not make sense and cannot properly operate in the world that God has created. All knowledge must begin with the truth that there is a Creator and we are his creatures. Man is not autonomous, he is dependent upon God for everything, including his thinking correctly about himself and the world.

We must always keep in mind the Creator-creature relationship which is the “bedrock” upon what everything else rests. This is a foundational distinction to all things. Because of this, there is an epistemological distinction. This means the believer and the unbeliever’s knowledge is going to be different. As there are two types of existences (believer and non-believer), there are two types of knowledge. True knowledge can only come by special revelation from God. Our apologetics then should be as Dr. Van Til stated: “We look for irreconcilable tensions in all non-believing thought. In all systems of thought that are non-

Christian, there is incoherency and irrationality somewhere in the system and we have to find the inconsistency of the position involved.” This is the great truth that assists us in doing true and biblical apologetics according to the Christian-Transcendental method.

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