

ST 5450
Apologetics
Reformed Theological Seminary
Dr. N. Gray Sutanto (gsutanto@rts.edu)

Chicago – Oct 12-16 2026

Course Description

This course introduces the theological discipline of apologetics. It focuses on the biblical, theological, and philosophical foundations of apologetics, a consideration of the historical examples of apologetics, and some perennial objections to Christianity.

Course Readings

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (Baker Academic), chpts. 1-2.

Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Zondervan, 2022). Entirety.

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

Abigail Favale, *Genesis of Gender* (Ignatius, 2021), Entirety.

Alvin Plantinga, "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," *The Monist* 75 (1992): 291-320.

Cornelius Van Til, "Nature and Scripture," in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by Members of Westminster Theological Seminary* (P&R, 2003), 263-301.

James Anderson, "If Knowledge then God: The Epistemological Theistic Arguments of Plantinga and Van Til," *CTJ* (2005): 49-75

James Anderson and Greg Welty, "The Lord of Non-Contradiction: An Argument for God from Logic," *Philosophia Christi* (2011): 321-338

Course Requirements:

1. Reading Pledge (20%)
 - a. Students will write a pledge on how many percent of the reading have been completed.
 - b. Due Last Day of Exam Week.
2. Apologetics Paper (40%) – 3000 words maximum.
 - i. Option 1: Students will write a dialogue paper responding to an alternative faith or worldview, while utilizing the material from the reading and lectures. You will interact with a section from a classic or contemporary text (e.g. Voltaire's *Candide*, Hume's *Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion*, Hitchens' *Religion Poisons Everything*, Yuval Harari's *Homo Sapiens* – or

Michael Tooley's *Problem of Evil* and the works of Graham Oppy), and respond to it from a Christian perspective. Have your topic/text approved by the professor beforehand.

- ii. Option 2: Students will write a paper on the discipline of Christian apologetics itself. Papers can explore, compare, contrast, or defend particular apologetic approaches, consider historical-theological questions on apologetics, or examine changes in apologetic methodologies or emphases through a period.
 - b. You should show from your paper an application of the course material and readings.
 - c. Cite at least eight sources for your paper
 - d. The paper will be graded on the basis of its fairness to the opposing viewpoint, theological clarity, cogency of argumentation, and understanding of apologetic method.
 - e. Due Last Day of Exam Week.
3. Final Exam (40%)
- a. Short and long essay questions covering the lecture and reading material.
 - b. A study guide will be provided
 - c. The exam will be available the whole week of final exam week.
4. Extra Credit: Write an Annotated Summary of Cornelius Van Til's *Defense of the Faith*. (Sample of an annotated summary will be provided in the Files Section on Canvas). Three points will be awarded to your overall grade (which would bump whatever grade you receive a half a letter grade; e.g from A- to A). The summary will be divided into fourteen sections, in correspondence to the fourteen chapters in the book, and each section will be no more than 200 words, with footnotes not included in the word count. Your summary will thus be no more than 2800 words. For every sentence or two that you write, provide a citation that shows where from the text you are getting your claim, and use the other reading material as additional material for your annotations. Van Til is notoriously difficult to grasp, and the point of this assignment is not that you would agree with everything he says, but that we would come to grips with his overall thought.
- a. Due Last Day of Exam Week.

Course Topics:

1. Introduction to Apologetics as a Theological Discipline and Biblical Warrant for Apologetics
2. Reformed Theology for Apologetics: Subversive Fulfillment and Disclosure/Homecoming
3. The World: Secularism and Secularization.
 - a. Ethics without Theology and Metaphysics?
 - b. On "Common Sense"
 - c. Sex and Gender Issues
4. Principled Pluralism
5. The Place of Natural Theology – Reformed Approaches
6. God and Logic
7. Arguments for God's Existence

- a. Historical examples
 - b. Transcendental arguments
8. Objections Against the Christian Faith

Suggested Reading Schedule:

For Intensives/Flex-Res: Read Bavinck and Watkin's *Biblical Critical Theory* before class starts.
Read everything else after class ends.

For Semesters:

Read and digest two-three chapters a week of Watkin's *Biblical Critical Theory*.

Week 1:

Bavinck, *RD2*, chp. 1.

Plantinga, 'Augustinian Christian Philosophy'

Week 2:

Van Til, *DoF*, Introduction-Chapter 4

Week 3:

Bavinck, *RD*, 2, chp. 2

Van Til, 'Nature and Scripture'

Week 4:

Van Til, *DoF*, chapters 5-8

Begin Favale, *Genesis of Gender*

Week 5:

Van Til, *DoF*, chapters 9-11

Finish Favale, *Genesis of Gender*

Week 6:

Anderson, 'If Knowledge then God,'

Anderson and Welty, 'Argument from Logic'

Week 7 (reading week):

Van Til, *DoF*, chapters 9-11

Week 8:

Van Til, *DoF*, chapters 12-14

Week 9 – Exam week (Week 14)

Catch up on Watkin readings

Sample Annotated Summary: Descartes' *Meditations*

Descartes's Meditations Under 1000 Words: An Annotated Summary

Pages refer to Descartes, 'Meditations on First Philosophy' in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*. 2nd ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins (eds.) (Cambridge: Hackett, 2009), pp. 35-68.

Summary Statement and the First Meditation

Descartes' *Meditation* is an attempt to find an incorrigible foundation of knowledge for the purpose of rebuilding one's noetic structure. Descartes' first meditation serves this goal, as he puts to doubt all of his assumed knowledge¹ in an attempt to discover one indubitable idea that can serve as that epistemic foundation.² Descartes first tries to do this by doubting anything that can be known through the senses³, as he infers from past experience that the sense perception may be deceiving. Yet he discovers that the ideas yielded by the senses are trustworthy so long as normal conditions obtain.⁴ Descartes continues by positing that perhaps everything he experiences is but a dream⁵, for in his dreams he had felt before that he was awake.⁶ Even though more opinions are discarded this way, arithmetic and mathematical truths would still be certain.⁷ To put even those into doubt, Descartes argues that perhaps he is a product of an evil genius that has designed him to be deceived about arithmetical axioms and the physical universe.⁸

Second Meditation

Descartes successfully subjects all of his knowledge into doubt, but realizes that a doubter presupposes a subject who doubts, and so long as one is thinking, even when he is deceived, there can be no doubt that the one who thinks exists.⁹ So since the existence of a body or a soul has been put into doubt, Descartes concludes that he is essentially a thinking being.¹⁰ He then specifies that it is from the mind, not the senses or imagination, that he has discovered

¹ "For this reason, it will suffice for the rejection of all of these opinions, if I find in each of them some reason for doubt." Pg 41

² "Several years have now passed since I first realized how numerous were the false opinions that in my youth I had taken to be true, and thus how doubtful were all those that I had subsequently built upon them. And thus I realized that once in my life I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences." Pg 40

³ "However, I have noticed that the senses are sometimes deceptive; and it is a mark of prudence never to place our complete trust in those who have deceived us even once." Pg 41

⁴ "But perhaps, even though the senses do sometimes deceive us when it is a question of very small and distant things, still there are many other matters concerning which one simply cannot doubt, even though they are derived from the very same senses..." Pg 41

⁵ "How often does my evening slumber persuade me of such ordinary things as these: that I am here, clothed in my dressing gown, seated next to the fireplace – when in fact I am lying undressed in bed!" Pg 41

⁶ "As I consider these matters more carefully, I see so plainly that there are no definitive signs by which to distinguish being awake from being asleep." Pg 41

⁷ "For whether I am awake or asleep, two plus three make five, and a square does not have more than four sides. It does not seem possible that such obvious truths should be subject to the suspicion of being false." Pg 42

⁸ "Accordingly, I will suppose not a supremely good God, the source of truth, but rather an evil genius, supremely powerful and clever, who has directed his entire effort at deceiving me. I will regard the heavens, the air, the earth, colors, shape, sounds and all external things as nothing but the bedeviling hoaxes of my dreams, with which he lays snares for my credulity. I will regard myself as not having hands, or eyes, or flesh, or blood, or any senses, but as nevertheless falsely believing that I possess all these things." Pg 42-43

⁹ "There too there is no doubt that I exist, if he is deceiving me. And let him do his best at deception; he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I shall think that I am something. Thus, after everything has been most carefully weighed, it must finally be established that this pronouncement "I am, I exist" is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind." Pg 43

¹⁰ "What about thinking? Here I make my discovery. Thoughts exist; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am; I exist – this is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking..." Pg 44

his existence.¹¹ To support this, Descartes observes that the meaning of wax is derived from the mind¹², for wax is still understood to be wax even when the senses perceive it to have changed forms. Therefore, only through the mind can one judge that wax remains wax in its many modes, confirming that the mind is the prime faculty through which a human makes judgments.¹³ For, though the wax might be an illusion, it cannot be doubted that he perceives the wax with his mind.¹⁴ Hence, Descartes concludes that the mind is a supreme faculty above the senses and imagination, as things are perceived only as they are intellectually grasped.¹⁵

Third Meditation

The third meditation is the beginning of Descartes' attempt to rebuild knowledge with the proposition "I exist as a thinking being" as his foundation. However, to believe in anything with certainty, Descartes must argue that his perceptions can be trusted.¹⁶ To do this, Descartes turns to the existence of God and his nature in order to see whether it is possible that a malevolent deceiver designed human faculties.¹⁷ After distinguishing between ideas and judgments,¹⁸ and showing how one can err by judging that one's ideas are identical to extramental objects,¹⁹ Descartes argues that there must be a reality outside of oneself that causes the ideas one conceives. For some conceived ideas come involuntarily, and a cause must have elicited the conception of those ideas.²⁰ This cause must be either greater or equal to the effect it

¹¹ "Properly speaking, this is what in me is called "sensing." But this, precisely so taken, is nothing other than thinking." Pg 45

¹² "But I need to realize that the perception of the wax is neither a seeing, nor a teaching, nor an imagining. Nor has it ever been, even though it previously seemed so; rather it is an inspection on the part of the mind alone." Pg 46

¹³ "Thus what I thought I had seen with my eyes, I actually grasped solely with the faculty of judgment, which is in my mind." Pg 46

¹⁴ "For if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I see it, certainly from this same fact that I see the wax it follows much more evidently that I myself exist. For it could happen that what I see is not truly wax. It could happen that I have no eyes with which to see anything. But it is utterly impossible that, while I see or think I see (I do not now distinguish between these two), I who think am not something." Pg 47

¹⁵ "For since I now know that even bodies are not, properly speaking, perceived by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the intellect alone, and that they are not perceived through their being touched or seen, but only through their being understood, I manifestly know that nothing can be perceived more easily and more evidently than my own mind." Pg 47

¹⁶ "Surely in this first instance of knowledge, there is nothing but a certain clear and distinct perception of what I affirm. Yet this would hardly be enough to render me certain of the truth of a thing, if it could ever happen that something that I perceived so clearly and distinctly were false. And thus I now seem able to posit as a general rule that everything I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true." Pg 47

¹⁷ "But in order to remove even this basis for doubt, I should at the first opportunity inquire whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether or not he can be a deceiver. For if I am ignorant of this, it appears I am never capable of being completely certain about anything else." Pg 48

¹⁸ "Some of these thoughts are like images of things; to these alone does the word 'idea' properly apply, as when I think of a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God. Again there are other thoughts that take different forms, for example, when I will, or fear, or affirm, or deny, there is always some thing that I grasp as the subject of my thought, yet I embrace in my thought some more than the likeness of that thing." Pg 48

¹⁹ "Now the principal and most frequent error to be found in judgments consists in the fact that I judge that the ideas which are in me are similar to or in conformity with certain things outside me." Pg 48

²⁰ "Hence it follows that something cannot come into being out of nothing, and also that what is more perfect (that is, what contains in itself more reality) cannot come into being from what is less perfect. But this is manifestly true not merely for those effects whose reality is actual or form, but also for ideas in which only objective reality is considered." Pg 49

produces.²¹ Many ideas could easily have come from oneself,²² however, since finite creatures cannot have conceived the idea of an infinite being, God, the highest form of reality and the only infinite and perfect being, must necessarily exist as the cause of that idea.²³ Also, since to deceive is an act of imperfection, it follows that God cannot be a deceiver.²⁴

Fourth Meditation

Since God is no deceiver, the God-given faculties that one has were designed to be inerrant, though finite.²⁵ However, since humans possess limited noetic capacities²⁶, and are endowed with unlimited free will, errors will be made for the will may choose beyond the limitations of one's knowledge.²⁷ Therefore, to avoid erring, one must ensure that all the relevant truths are grasped before making decisions.²⁸ One might question why God deemed it best to create finite creatures, but it is not in the place of humans to question his wisdom²⁹, and rational creatures should be thankful that their free will reflects their creation in the image of God.³⁰

Fifth Meditation

Descartes asserts that some ideas exist even when they only reside within the human mind, such as that of the triangle.³¹ When one can perceive indubitably the essential features of some idea in the mind, those essential features actually do belong to that idea; just as the triangle is perceived necessarily to possess three sides. By analogy, Descartes argues that the idea of God too is perceived clearly in the mind.³² Such is Descartes' ontological argument: since Descartes

²¹ "But that a particular idea contains this as opposed to that objective reality is surely owing to some cause in which there is at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality contained in the idea. For if we assume that something is found in the idea that was not its cause, then the idea gets that something from nothing. Yet as imperfect a mode of being as this is by which a thing exists in the intellect objective through an idea, nevertheless it is plainly not nothing; hence it cannot get its being from nothing." Pg 50

²² "Assuredly, I need not assign to these ideas an author distinct from myself." Pg 51

²³ "Thus there remains only the idea of God. I must consider whether there is anything in this idea that could not have originated from me. I understand by the name "God" a certain substance that is infinite, independent, supremely intelligent, and supremely powerful, and that created me along with everything else that exists – if anything else exists. Indeed all these are such that, the more carefully I focus my attention on them, the less possible it seems they could have arisen from myself alone. Thus, from what has been said, I must conclude that God necessarily exists." Pg 51

²⁴ "From these considerations it is quite obvious that he cannot be a deceiver, for it is manifest by the light of nature that all fraud and deception depend on some defect." Pg 54

²⁵ "For if everything that is in me I got from God, and he gave me no faculty for making mistakes, it seems that I am incapable of ever erring." Pg 54

²⁶ "Rather, it just so happens that I make mistakes because the faculty of judging truth, which I got from God, is not, in my case, infinite." Pg 55

²⁷ "Because the will is indifferent in regard to such matters, it easily turns away from the true and the good; and in this way I am deceived and I sin." Pg 56

²⁸ "...nevertheless I can avoid error in the other way, which depends solely on my remembering to abstain from making judgments whenever the truth of a given matter is not apparent." Pg 58

²⁹ "For since I know now that my nature is very weak and limited, whereas the nature of God is immense, incomprehensible, and infinite, this is sufficient for me also to know that he can make innumerable things whose causes escape me." Pg 55

³⁰ "It is only the will or free choice that I experience to be so great in me that I cannot grasp the idea of any greater faculty. This is so much the case that the will is the chief basis for my understanding that I bear a certain image and likeness of God." Pg 56

³¹ "For example, when I imagine a triangle, even if perhaps no such figure exists outside my thought anywhere in the world and never has, the triangle still has a determinate nature, essence, or form which is unchangeable and eternal, which I did not fabricate, and which does not depend on my mind." Pg 58

³² "But if, from the mere fact that I can bring forth from my thought the idea of something, it follows all that I clearly and distinctly perceive to belong to that thing really does belong to it, then cannot this too be a basis

cannot fathom the idea of a God that lacks the ontological property of existing, it follows that God necessarily exists.³³ Descartes then argues that what can be perceived in clarity yields what is necessarily true, for a God who is no deceiver exists and he has created creatures with an intellect that can perceive truth without error.³⁴ Therefore it is possible for one to acquire true knowledge about God, along with the physical, intellectual and arithmetical realms.³⁵

Select Bibliography

- Mark Allen and Joshua Chatraw, *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness* (Zondervan, 2018)
- James Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of its Presence, Character, and Epistemic Status* (Paternoster, 2007)
- James Anderson, *Why Should I Believe in Christianity?* (Christian Focus, 2018)
- Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (P&R, 1998).
- Craig Bartholomew, *Contours of the Kuyperian Tradition* (IVP, 2017)
- Herman Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, eds. N. Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, and Cory Brock (Crossway, 2019)
- Herman Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation: A New Annotated Edition*, eds. Cory Brock and N. Gray Sutanto (Hendrickson, 2018).
- Johan Bavinck, *Johan Bavinck Reader* (Eerdmans, 2013)
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- Joshua Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age* (Zondervan, 2020)
- Steven Cowan (ed.), *Five Views of Apologetics* (Zondervan, 2010)
- William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Blackwell, 2012)
- William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (David Cook, 2010)
- William Edgar, *Reasons of the Heart* (P&R, 2003)
- William Edgar, *Created and Created: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (IVP, 2016)
- William Edgar and Scott Oliphint (eds.), *Christian Apologetics: Past and Present*, 2 vols. (Crossway, 2009-11).
- Paul Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Zondervan, 2019)
- J.V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classical Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Baker Academic, 2019)
- John Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* (P&R, 2015)
- John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (P&R, 1995)
- Abraham Kuyper, *A Centennial Reader*, ed. James Bratt (Eerdmans, 2003)
- Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles* (Scribner & Sons, 1898).
- Keith Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2010).

for an argument proving the existence of God? Clearly the idea of God, that is, the idea of a supremely perfect being, is one I discover to be no less within me than the idea of any figure or number.” Pg 59

³³ “But from the fact that I cannot think of God except as existing, it follows that existence is inseparable from God, and that for this reason he really exists.” Pg 59

³⁴ “But once I perceived that there is a God, and also understood at the same time that everything else depends on him, and that he is not a deceiver, I then concluded that everything that I clearly and distinctly perceive is necessarily true.” Pg 61

³⁵ “But now it is possible for me to achieve full and certain knowledge about countless things, both about God and other intellectual matters, as well as about the entirety of that corporeal nature which is the object of pure mathematics.” Pg 61

Matthew Levering, *Proofs of God: Classical Arguments from Tertullian to Barth* (Baker Academic, 2016)
 Russell Re Manning, John Hedley Brooke, and Fraser Watts (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology* (Oxford, 2013)
 Alan Noble, *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age* (IVP, 2018)
 Thom Notaro, *Van Til and the Use of Evidence* (P&R, 1980)
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 Scott Oliphint, *Reasons For Faith* (P&R, 2007)
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 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard, 2007)
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 Greg Welty, *Why is there so much evil in the world?* (Christian Focus, 2018).
 Christopher Watkin, *From Plato to Postmodernism* (Bristol Classical Press, 2011)
 Christopher Watkin, *Thinking Through Creation* (P&R, 2017)

Grading System

A	(97-100)	4.00
A-	(94-96)	3.66
B+	(91-93)	3.33
B	(88-90)	3.00
B-	(86-87)	2.66
C+	(83-85)	2.33
C	(80-82)	2.00
C-	(78-79)	1.66
D+	(75-77)	1.33
D	(72-74)	1.00
D-	(70-71)	0.66
F	(below 70)	0.00
I	(incomplete)	—
W	(withdraw)	—

The grade “I” indicates that the work required for the course was not completed. It is given only when special, extenuating circumstances (such as illness) prevent the student from completing the work or taking the examination.

A written request for an extension must be submitted prior to the due date of the work concerned. If the request is granted, it remains the responsibility of the student to complete all work for the course as soon as possible. In any case, an “I” grade must be removed within the extension time granted; otherwise it will be changed to “F.”

The grade “W” indicates that a student has withdrawn from a course after the drop deadline. This grade is granted by the academic dean only in extenuating circumstances.

If a course is retaken, the original grade remains on the transcript and is included in the GPA.



Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: ST 5450

Professor: Sutanto

Campus: Washington, D.C. and Chicago Extension

Date: 2026

MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes <i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i> <i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i>		Rubric • Strong • Moderate • Minimal • None	Mini-Justification
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	Reading, lectures, and writing, focus on content, clarity, persuasive argumentation, and logical analysis.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Moderate	Lectures and reading will emphasize that Scripture is a resource, rather than a hindrance, for apologetics.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	Lectures and reading will show how Reformed theology impacts our understanding of apologetics.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Minimal	Lectures and reading focus on understanding our theology better and the world better so that we might grow in

			confidence and patience.
Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Strong	This is a specific focus of this course.
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Moderate	The course will focus on engaging with and understanding alternatives to the Christian faith for the sake of persuasion.
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.	Moderate	Ministers should be able to aid their congregants through some of the intellectual and existential challenges against the Christian faith.