

Reformed Theological Seminary – Atlanta

ST5450: Apologetics | Fall 2026

Rev. Gabriel N.E. Fluhrer, Ph.D.

Course Description

The English word “apologetics” is a transliteration of the Greek word *apologia*, which means “to make a defense.” Therefore, the study of apologetics is the study of the defense of the Christian faith. Or, as the great Dutch theologian and apologist Cornelius Van Til defined it, “Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.”¹

Accordingly, this course will provide an exegetical and philosophical basis for the discipline of apologetics, from a Reformed and presuppositional standpoint. In addition, this course will endeavor to trace out the massive (and neglected) influence of Geerhardus Vos, and his method, on the thought of Cornelius Van Til. Understanding this influence will have practical implications, both for the student’s on piety and his or her practice of presuppositional apologetics.

Finally, students will interact with unbelieving thought, other schools of apologetics, and one of the more sophisticated unbelievers, Dr. Graham Oppy. In sum, this course will provide the student with a grasp of the basis and practice of apologetics in the Reformed tradition, for the glory of Christ and the good of His church.

Course Objectives

1. To give the student a firm exegetical basis of the Christian worldview as it applies to the questions of apologetics.
2. To acquaint the student with various apologetical methods throughout church history and arguing that the presuppositional school is the most consistent with Scriptures and the Westminster Standards.
3. To equip the student to commend and defend the Christian faith over against all unbelieving worldviews, for the glory of God and the good of Christ’s Church.
4. To demonstrate to the student the usefulness of apologetics for their own lives and ministries.

Contact Information

Professor: Rev. Gabriel N.E. Fluhrer, Ph.D.

Executive Assistant: Sara Kaitlin Van Puffelen

¹ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 17.

Email: sk@1stpresbyterian.com

If I can assist you in any way during the course, please do not hesitate to contact Sara Kaitlin to set up a meeting for us!

Academic Integrity

All work submitted must be the student's own. Group-produced work is not permitted. Plagiarism and copying of old assignments are considered cheating. Students who do not fulfill assignments with requisite academic integrity will be referred to the Academic Dean with a recommendation for discipline (the student should also consult the relevant sections in the RTS Handbook for further details).

Zoom Policy

Your professor may allow you to Zoom into class or watch Zoom recordings for excused absences based on the professor's discretion and subject to the availability of equipment. Students should contact their professor well in advance of the class meeting. For a third absence the Registrar should be consulted. Your professor may require additional interactive assignments to offset the absence of classroom interaction. Sync or Remote Live courses have priority for the limited Zoom equipment.

Extension Policy

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class.

Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Registrar's Office. The request must be approved by the Professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed. (RTS Catalog p. 46 and RTS Atlanta Student Handbook p. 18)

Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request. (RTS Catalog p. 49)

Class Methodology

A. Lectures and Attendance

Our classroom time will consist of lectures, with discussion and class interaction. Attendance, therefore, is an absolute requirement. If you must miss a class, leave early, or arrive late, you should seek permission (via an email). Failure to attend class, or to engage while in the class, will be noted. There will be no unexcused absences.

B. Reading Assignments

1. Required Texts:

Bahnsen, Greg. *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*. 1-143; 261-404; 530-697. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998.

Oppy, Graham. *The Best Argument Against God*. London: Palgrave Pivot, 2013. **ALL**

Pratt, Richard. *Every Thought Captive: A Study Manual for the Defense of the Truth*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980. **ALL**

Van Til, Cornelius. "My Credo." In *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan, 3-21. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980. (Available online [HERE](#))

2. Recommended but not required

Dennison, William D. *Paul's Two-Age Construction and Apologetics*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1985.

Frame, John. *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995.

Muether, John. *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008.

Moreland, J.P. *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.

Notaro, Thom. *Van Til and the Use of Evidence*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1980.

Oliphint, K. Scott. *Know Why You Believe*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017.

Sire, James. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*. 6th ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020.

Tipton, Lane G. and Waddington, Jeffrey C., eds. *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008.

C. Practical Requirements

Short Essays (20%)

You will be required to write two short essays interacting with anti-Christian worldviews. Sources for these worldviews may include internet articles, blog posts, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram or other social media videos, or other media. The purpose of this assignment is to acclimate the student to doing apologetics from a Reformed standpoint in everyday life.

A good brief essay, such as this, should include at least three elements. First, a clear statement of the person's viewpoint. Second, a brief examination of anything in the person's position that could be commended by God's common grace. Third, a critique of the argument using the presuppositional method.

Format: Please submit your essays using standard formatting (Font size 12, Times New Roman, one-inch margins). Each essay should be no more than 1500 words. **One letter grade will be deducted for 100 words exceeding the limit.**

Final Paper (40%)

The research paper for this class is an analysis and critique of Graham Oppy's assigned work. As one of the premier atheistic philosophers writing today, his book will provide ample opportunity to demonstrate the student's grasp of the presuppositional method.

Paper guidelines:

A. General guidelines

- a. You may find Oppy's argument difficult to trace out or critique. In that case, please do not hesitate to ask for help. However, students are expected to 1) offer a summary of his argument, 2) note any common grace insights and/or points of agreement with Oppy (this is what we mean by 'sympathetic-critical' engagement below), 3) detail carefully how Oppy's argument fails and 4) demonstrate how the Christian worldview answers the challenges posed by Oppy.
- b. Please include a cover page with your name, name and year of the course, word count, and professor's name.
- c. Please include this statement at the end of your paper: "I understand and have not violated the seminary's policy on plagiarism."

B. Length and format

- a. Length: No more than 3500 words, including footnotes. Again, one letter grade will be deducted for every 100 words exceeding the required word count. (The reason for the strict word count is to train the student to write clearly and well. Good writing involves knowing what to say, how to say it, and how much to say).
- b. Format: Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, 1 inch margins. All footnotes should follow Turabian style formatting.
- C. Your paper should have a clearly defined thesis statement. For example, “This paper argues,” or “The thesis of this paper is.”
- D. Students should endeavor to analyze Oppy’s argument from a sympathetically critical position. Avoid strawmen arguments, shallow analysis, and logical fallacies.
- E. Before writing your paper, students must read John Frame’s essay, “How to Write a Theological Paper.” (This piece is [linked here](#)). Students should also consult the writings of James Anderson and Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (among others) for examples of careful and outstanding theological writing.
- F. Finally, students should avoid “sermonizing.” That is, this paper should avoid colloquialisms, overly familiar language (i.e. “My friends,” “We were just chillin’,” etc.), and personal anecdotes and/or stories. Academic writing is very different than how you will speak in the pulpit or another teaching setting, but will greatly improve your communication skills if done well.

Comprehensive Final Exam (40%)

- A. The final exam will be comprehensive, covering all lecture and reading materials. Students will be asked to define terms, answer short answer questions, and write essay questions. You will have two hours to complete the exam. At the beginning of the exam, you will be asked how much of the reading you completed. If you fail to complete all the assigned reading, please indicate the percentage you completed. The amount of reading you complete will factor significantly into your final grade.
- B. Students will be provided a study guide for the final exam after the last class.
- C. **Class participation will factor significantly in your final grade.**

Late Work

Students should make every effort to turn in work on time or early. In the rare case of medical or other providential emergency, extensions and/or alternative arrangements may be granted. In most cases, late assignments will be accepted but penalized one letter grade per day. Please make these arrangements with me as soon as possible.

E. Course Outline and Assignment Schedule

Listed below are the dates and weekly assignment timetable/due dates for our course. I will also provide a student outline on Canvas, which you may download and use to take notes.

1. **Friday August 28, 6-9 PM**
2. **Saturday, August 29, 9:00 AM-4:30 PM**
3. **Friday, September 18, 6-9 PM**
4. **Saturday, September 19 9:00AM-4:30 PM**
5. **Friday, October 2, 6-9 PM**
6. **Saturday, October 3, 9:00 AM-4:30 PM**

Due Dates Summary

All assignments are due the dates posted below. Assignments received after this time will be considered late and penalized accordingly (up to 1 letter grade per day).

Assignments must *not* be emailed to me, but rather uploaded to Canvas.

1. November 13, 2026 – **Essays Due**
2. November 20, 2026 – **Paper Due**
3. November 20, 2026– **Final Exam**. All reading must be finished by the final exam.

Edited: 6/30/2026 9:10 AM



Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: ST540 Apologetics

Professor: Gabriel N.E. Fluhrer

Campus: Atlanta

Date: Fall 2026

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u> <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>		<u>Rubric</u> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
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.	Moderate	Students will learn how to express apologetic arguments, both orally and in writing, through classroom discussion and written assignments. They will also learn the practical value of apologetic arguments for preaching, teaching, and evangelism.
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.)	Strong	The course will spend multiple hours explaining key texts for a Reformed understanding of apologetics, along with careful attention to the Biblical-Theological and Systematic-Theological underpinnings of the presuppositional method.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Strong	The course will demonstrate that presuppositional apologetics is the method of defending the faith that is closest to both Scripture and the Westminster Standards. Copious use of both will feature prominently in the course.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Moderate	Since the Trinity is a key feature of Van Til's theology, the course will aim to show how a Reformed understanding of apologetics encourages and develops a warm, experimental Calvinism in the students' lives.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	Students will learn that Van Til's method calls for a radical

			conforming of all thought to the Christian worldview as the only reasonable position for a person to hold.
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.)	Strong	While the course will be taught unashamedly from a Van Tilian position, the student will also be expected to demonstrate the “humble boldness” that should be hallmark of a self-consciously Reformed apologetic.
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-Xns.	Strong	Students will learn how presuppositional apologetics a) answers their own doubts, b) offer them a method for helping those to whom they minister solid answers to questions that vex all cultures, and c) is the method of apologetics that quickly and easily leads to a presentation of the gospel, whether in formal or informal ministry settings.