

BOOK SIX

DIVERSITY AND RESOLUTION

SUMMARY OF BOOK SIX

Comparison and contrast have demonstrated certain convergences and divergences of the four apologetic systems. Rationalism, evidentialism, and presuppositionalism close ranks against subjectivism on the value and necessity of a system of apologetics. Subjectivists, with a strong personalistic orientation, are characteristically asystematic in approach, insisting on immediate divine-human encounter as the relevant issue in the discussion.

Rationalists and evidentialists accept the rules of logic as a valid application in arguing the truth of Christianity with non-Christians. This view is premised on the assumption that the unregenerate personality is able to reckon objectively with the reasons and facts that validate the Christian faith. Presuppositionalists reject this procedure because it militates against their view that the Fall has corrupted, not only the will and emotions, but also the intellect, thus disabling the unregenerate person for objective consideration of divine truth in the spheres of either general or special revelation. Rationalists and evidentialists believe in a common ground of understanding in the areas of reason and history. This commonality provides an avenue of useful discussion with the unbeliever that can lead him to acceptance of revelation. Presuppositionalists deny the existence of such common ground, maintaining that the only area of shared experience lies in the sensus deitatis which effects true knowledge of God in the unbeliever. However, this knowledge is so morally repugnant to the natural man's assumption of autonomy that the

knowledge of God is suppressed and rejected. This results in suppression of all reason and evidence that would support Christian truth about anything.

There are differences between rationalists and evidentialists on the degree of acceptance to which their arguments may lead. Prominent rationalists, such as Geisler, believe that properly reasoned argument can and should lead to knowledge of God that is undeniable but falls short of apodictic certainty. This knowledge, however, does not attain to the certitude which is the result of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Evidentialists, such as Montgomery, expect only a high degree of probability as the result of setting forth historical and other evidentiary data that prove the truth of Christianity. This procedure prepares the way for the response of faith. Presuppositionalists, such as Van Til, maintain that settling for "probability" is an evasion of the legitimate claims of God on the conscience to believe absolutely what He has perspicuously revealed.

Rationalists, evidentialists, and presuppositionalists emphasize the propositional and cognitive aspects of truth, while subjectivists emphasize the personal and noncognitive. It is proposed herein that a more complete apologetic approach would recognize and employ the personal and noncognitive along with the propositional and cognitive aspects of truth. Each of the four apologetic systems reflects a different aspect of biblical truth. Thus, an effective apologist will be sensitive, not only to propositional and presuppositional factors, but also to the personal and predispositional factors in an individual's life.

CHAPTER 1

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST OF THE FOUR APOLOGETIC SYSTEMS

Books two, three, four, and five concluded by considering the major distinguishing features of the apologetic method of a prominent representative of each of the four Christian apologetic systems of rationalism, evidentialism, presuppositionalism, and subjectivism. This was done by relating their work to the ten leading issues listed in Bernard Ramm's Varieties of Christian Apologetics.¹ Other apologists like Robert L. Reymond, Gordon R. Lewis, and Frederic R. Howe affirm the centrality of these issues in Christian apologetics.²

The four apologetic systems will now be compared and contrasted with respect to these ten issues. Particular emphasis will be placed on the work of Geisler (rationalism), Montgomery (evidentialism), Van Til (presuppositionalism), and Kierkegaard (subjectivism). Additional perspectives from other representatives of these systems will also be added.

¹Bernard Ramm, Varieties of Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), pp. 17-27.

²Robert L. Reymond, The Justification of Knowledge (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976), p. 8; Gordon R. Lewis, Testing Christianity's Truth Claims (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 287-95; Frederic R. Howe, Challenge and Response (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).

The Relationship Between Philosophy and Christianity

Proponents of the rationalistic method in Christian apologetics believe that the tools of philosophy can and should be applied to Christian theology. They acknowledge that there are many philosophers who are outspoken in their antagonism toward Christianity, but they distinguish specific philosophical perspectives and presuppositions from philosophy in the generic sense. The latter is not inimical to Christianity and does not nullify the possibility of divine revelation.³ Geisler believes that philosophy can serve as a tool in the construction and expression of the Christian system and that it is necessary to the refutation of alternative world views. Philosophical argumentation can be effective in enabling a person to critically assess his or her own metaphysical paradigms vis-à-vis Christian theism.

Most rationalistic apologists would agree with Holmes that there is no one Christian philosophy "in the sense of one uniform and necessary position on every philosophical question."⁴ Christian theism has certain philosophical distinctives like creation ex nihilo and the imago Dei in man, but these can be expressed through different philosophical models.

Evidentialists agree that philosophy is not in itself inhospitable to Christian theology but differ from rationalists in the extent to which they believe

³Mark M. Hanna, Crucial Questions in Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 33.

it can be used as an apologetic tool. Montgomery claims that the conclusions reached by any philosophical inquiry that is uninformed by revelation are at best tentative in nature. For him, philosophy only makes a negative contribution insofar as it can be used by the Christian to expose the logical inconsistencies of nontheistic world views. Thus, he uses philosophical and logical argumentation to refute pantheism and humanism, but turns from philosophy to an appeal to "common facts" in his positive case for biblical Christianity.

Not all evidentialists accept Montgomery's position that there are an infinite number of possible alternative world views, but they agree that the best defense for the truth of Christianity is an appeal to its uniqueness and its historical fulfillment. The miracle of the resurrection and its attendant implications regarding Christ's absolute claims provide a more substantive case for the veracity of Christianity than philosophical argumentation.

Presuppositionalists generally differ with rationalists and evidentialists on the relationship between philosophy and Christianity. They maintain that biblical revelation carries a very specific philosophical system which entails its own approach to metaphysics, epistemology, and morality. Van Til states that the conception of reality which is based upon Scripture "goes counter to every

⁴Arthur F. Holmes, Philosophy: A Christian Perspective (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1963), p. 41.

theory of reality that the history of philosophy affords."⁵ The contrast between the ultimate being of the "Eternal One-and-Many" and the created being of the temporal one-and-many provides the foundation for the presuppositionalist's conception of metaphysics. The biblical revelation of the self-attesting God generates a philosophy of life which provides comprehensive answers to the metaphysical and epistemological problems of philosophy. Presuppositionalists claim that there can be no epistemological neutrality since a philosophy is derived either from the authority of revelation or from the assumption of human autonomy.

Subjectivists are opposed to the attempts of rationalistic apologists to bring philosophy into the realm of ultimate or religious truth. Kierkegaard argued that Christianity cannot be made compatible with any rational philosophic system. Philosophy has validity within its proper bounds, but the transcendence and personhood of God negates the validity of any effort to objectively rationalize the absolute. Subjectivists embrace a more personalistic model of philosophy which incorporates the dimensions of self-transcendence, artistic imagination, moral resolve, and creative action.⁶

The Value of Theistic Proofs

⁵Cornelius Van Til, The Defense of the Faith, 3rd ed. rev. (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1967), p. 30.

⁶Holmes, Philosophy, pp. 49-50.

In general, rationalists are more favorably disposed to theistic argumentation than are evidentialists, presuppositionalists, and subjectivists. This does not mean, however, that they all find one or more of the theistic proofs convincing. Writers like Bernard Ramm and Basil Mitchell explore the typical objections to the theistic proofs and maintain that there is no unequivocal, rationalistic proof for God's existence.⁷ However, they do not believe that this renders theistic argumentation useless, because it contributes to a "cumulative case" that Christian theism makes better sense of the totality of evidence than any alternative world view.⁸ Writing from this perspective, Holmes assesses theistic proofs in this way:

As rationalistic proofs they are, I believe, inconclusive, but as attempts to show how theistic categories fit the facts they are more impressive. They show that the overall scheme is coherent because our understanding of man and nature is one with our understanding of God. Belief in the existence of God is not an isolated metaphysical assertion but a world-view that coheres around the concept of god as creator and lord of all.⁹

Other rationalistic apologists, on the other hand, are convinced that one or more of the theistic proofs can be stated in a way that is logically compelling and overcomes the standard objections to theistic argumentation. William Lane Craig, for example, in The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe,

⁷Bernard L. Ramm, A Christian Appeal to Reason (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1972), pp. 94-99; Basil Mitchell, The Justification of Religious Belief (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), pp. 7-57.

⁸Mitchell, Justification, pp. 39-40.

offers two philosophical and two scientific arguments that he believes confirm the existence of an eternal being who created the universe.¹⁰ Geisler belongs to this group because of his revised version of the cosmological argument. He carefully examines the philosophical objections to the ontological, teleological, cosmological, and moral arguments for God's existence and restates the cosmological argument in a form that he believes is undeniable because it is based on existential causality, not the law of sufficient reason. Stuart C. Hackett in The Resurrection of Theism also claims that natural revelation is a sufficient basis for the demonstration of God's existence.¹¹

Evidentialists usually hold that natural theology is inherently limited. Even Joseph Butler who stressed natural theology and sought to ground religion in brute empirical fact concluded that the force of his analogical arguments led to highly probable rather than unequivocal results.¹² Arlie J. Hoover, another evidentialist, states that "Somewhere between being totally worthless and being

⁹Arthur F. Holmes, Faith Seeks Understanding (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 58.

¹⁰William Lane Craig, The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe (San Bernardino, California: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1979), pp. 37-69. A number of process theologians also take the position that natural theology can produce convincing results, e.g., John B. Cobb, A Christian Natural Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965).

¹¹Stuart C. Hackett, The Resurrection of Theism, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), pp. 242, 365.

¹²Joseph Butler, The Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature, 23rd ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1900 [1736]).

deductively certain the theistic proofs stand."¹³ Evidentialists believe that natural theology always falls short of establishing the existence of the God of Scripture.

This position does not prevent evidentialists from using theistic argumentation, but those who do so do regard it as an adjunct to their case for Christianity rather than a central pillar. It is in this way that Montgomery makes use of the cosmological implications of the second law of thermodynamics to establish an a posteriori theistic argument from contingency.

Presuppositionalists and subjectivists take a far more negative view of natural theology and theistic proofs than rationalists and evidentialists. Presuppositionalists like Clark and Henry argue that while there is general revelation in nature, it is unreliable and insufficient to bring man to God because of the noetic effects of sin. For them, the ontological proof is invalid, and the remaining theistic proofs are based on the formal fallacies inherent in inductive argumentation. Clark adds that even if such proofs were valid, they would not lead to the God of Christian theism.¹⁴ Henry rejects natural theology "because of

¹³Arlie J. Hoover, The Case for Christian Theism (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 114.

¹⁴Gordon H. Clark, Religion, Reason and Revelation (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1961), pp. 35-43.

the express nature of supernatural revelation, because of man's epistemic nature and because of the invalidity of empirically based arguments for theism."¹⁵

However, some presuppositionalists engage in an indirect form of theistic argumentation. Though he never mentions the traditional proofs of the existence of God, in He Is There and He Is Not Silent, Schaeffer uses what has been called a "tripartite argument from design."¹⁶ While Schaeffer does not explicitly identify his apologetic as a teleological argument, he attempts to show that the complexity of the universe and the personality of man establish the philosophic necessity of the infinite-personal God and argues that "all men constantly and consistently act as though Christianity is true."¹⁷ Even a more strict presuppositionalist like Van Til uses an aprioristic "epistemic argument" for the necessity of God's existence. He does not agree with the theistic proofs as traditionally formulated and asserts that it is wrong to defend theism philosophically and then turn to Scripture. He believes that the ontological Trinity of Scripture must be presupposed in order to give meaning to human predication. But this in itself forms the basis for his basic theistic proof that "unless this God, the God of the Bible, the ultimate being, the Creator, the

¹⁵Carl F. H. Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6 vols. (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1976-83), 2:123.

¹⁶Thomas V. Morris, Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics: A Critique (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 22.

¹⁷Francis A. Schaeffer, He Is There and He Is Not Silent (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), p. 70.

controller of the universe, be presupposed as the foundation of human experience, this experience operates in a void."¹⁸

Of the four apologetic types presented in this study, subjectivists are the most opposed to theistic proofs. Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Brunner regarded them as an offense because they do not lead to the knowledge of the living God. God is Subject and is known by subjectivity in inwardness, not by objective rationality or empiricism. Subjectivists stress the knowledge and reality of God, not the verification of God's existence. God is known in the risk of faith, in personal encounter, and in the decision prompted by the experience of the kerygma.

The Theory of Truth

Rationalists emphasize that a theory of truth is necessary in order to test the validity of the claims of conflicting world views. Knowledge is a prerequisite to assent and commitment, and faith in the fundamental propositions of Christianity must be grounded in the verification of those propositions. Rationalists recognize that argument alone does not create conviction, but they add that lack of argument debilitates belief. The specific criteria of verification vary somewhat among these apologists, but they all affirm the practical necessity of the laws of identity and noncontradiction. The epistemological justification of belief depends on rational consistency and logical

¹⁸Cornelius Van Til, Common Grace and the Gospel (Nutley, New

coherence. David L. Wolfe adds comprehensiveness (applicability of the interpretive scheme to all experience) and congruity (appropriateness of the interpretive scheme to the experiences it covers) to the criteria of consistency (freedom from contradiction within the interpretive scheme) and coherence (internal relatedness of the statements within the interpretive scheme).¹⁹ This is essentially the same as Carnell's criterion of "systematic consistency" which incorporates "horizontal self-consistency" and "vertical fitting of the facts."²⁰

Geisler uses Carnell's test of systematic consistency, but unlike most who subscribe to the rationalistic method of Christian apologetics, he limits this test to the adjudication of conflicting truth claims only within the theistic world view. He uses the negative and positive tests of unaffirmability and undeniability when judging between theism and alternative world views.

Evidentialists focus on a posteriori rather than a priori criteria of verification. Their apologetic method depends on the empirical validation of Christianity's claims to historicity. This involves a compilation and presentation of the historical fulfillment of miracles (especially the resurrection) and prophecies, as well as the vindication of the integrity and accuracy of the Scriptures as primary historical documents. Montgomery argues that the

Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1972), p. 192.

¹⁹David L. Wolfe, Epistemology: The Justification of Belief (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1982), p. 55.

assumptions of the empirical method are less problematic than those of rationalistic approaches because they are more methodological and scientific than substantive. He also maintains that the objective events of history carry their own interpretation with them. For him, empirical investigation is the only realistic method of attaining objective verification of specific truth claims.

Presuppositionalists differ strongly with evidentialists on the issue of verification and repeatedly seek to refute empirical epistemologies. This is one of the primary thrusts of Gordon H. Clark's books. Presuppositionalists also criticize rationalistic apologetic methodology (often lumping rationalism and evidentialism together in what they call "traditional apologetics"), but some incorporate rationalistic elements within their presuppositional framework. Clark, for example, begins with the axiom of revelation but makes frequent use of the law of noncontradiction as a test for truth.

Strict presuppositionalists like Van Til are critical of any attempt to test biblical truth claims prior to acceptance, and regard this as an immoral act of self-autonomy. Scripture must be regarded as a self-attesting authority and not as a source or a hypothesis which must be tested by rationalistic or empirical criteria. Van Til makes an absolute distinction between nontheistic and theistic epistemology. He sharply opposes any epistemology which is not grounded in the self-contained ontological Trinity of Scripture. He maintains that on its own

²⁰Edward John Carnell, [An Introduction to Christian Apologetics](#)

ground, nontheistic knowledge is self-contradictory, and its conception of contradiction must in fact logically presuppose the truth of Christian theism.²¹

Subjectivists are also critical of the theory of truth employed in rationalist and evidentialist apologetics, but for different reasons than those expressed by presuppositionalists. For them, ultimate truth cannot be based upon the veridical criteria of historical knowledge or objective rationality. Kierkegaard believed that because of the absolute transcendence of God, religious truth could only be known in the passionate inwardness of objective uncertainty. Religious truth is known in subjective encounter and the existential transformation produced by that encounter.

The Noetic Effects of Sin

All Christian apologists agree that the human race is in need of redemption because of its fallen condition. They also agree that the problem of sin has had a profound effect on human personality. Disagreements arise, however, over the extent of this effect, particularly as it relates to the cognitive process and the ability to perceive spiritual truth. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a series of disputes between Thomists and Calvinists over the

(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), pp. 56-64.

²¹Cornelius Van Til, A Survey of Christian Epistemology (Nutley, New Jersey: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1969), pp. 222-23.

noetic effects of sin and the degree to which faith must precede understanding.²² In a milder form, the debate continues today. Presuppositionalists and subjectivists place a greater stress on the epistemological effects of sin than do rationalists and evidentialists. While the latter acknowledge the doctrine of human depravity or fallenness, they argue that it does not eliminate the significance of the doctrine of the imago Dei.²³ They disagree with the position held by some presuppositionalists (notably Clark) that knowledge is possible only on the basis of special revelation. Concerning the image of God in man, Mark M. Hanna writes, "On the one hand, it should not be rendered totally inoperative, and, on the other hand, it should not be invested with exaggerated powers."²⁴

Rationalists and evidentialists acknowledge that no one makes cognitive judgments with the kind of detached objectivity that stems from axiomatic truths or hard empirical data; preconceptions are unavoidable and affect the way people approach particular issues. But while presuppositionalists like Dooyeweerd, Van Til, and Schaeffer make the underlying perspective or world view the all-consuming difference, rationalists and evidentialists believe

²²Nicholas Wolterstorff, Reason Within the Bounds of Religion (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 27, 108.

²³Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 56.

²⁴Ibid.

that this excessively minimizes other epistemological factors.²⁵ Apologists like Holmes and Sproul argue that error stems not only from moral causes but also from natural causes, e.g., formal errors in reasoning and factual errors in empirical investigation.²⁶ Because there are a variety of formative factors, it is possible to critically evaluate opposing positions without being completely bound by one's preconceptions. Thus Geisler maintains that the fall has not distorted human reasoning to the extent that people are incapable of responding to general revelation. For him, the rational process of existential causality can be used to establish the truth of God's existence.

Similarly, evidentialists like Montgomery believe that in spite of the effects of sin, people still have the capacity to examine the evidence for and against Christianity and draw valid conclusions. Evidentialists and rationalists generally agree with Carnell's statement that "The truly peccant part of man is his will, not his intellect. The intellect is not corrupt until it is made a servant of depraved affections."²⁷ The locus of spiritual rebellion is in the will, and these apologists acknowledge that this willful rebellion often prevents people from responding to the truth even when it is correctly perceived by the mind. They

²⁵Arthur F. Holmes, All Truth Is God's Truth (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 64.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 49-66; R. C. Sproul, The Psychology of Atheism (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), pp. 32-40.

²⁷Edward John Carnell, Christian Commitment: An Apologetic (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957), p. 198.

affirm that the grace of God and the internal witness of the Spirit are necessary to genuine conversion and response to the person of Christ.

Presuppositionalists are much more emphatic concerning the noetic effects of sin and the need for the testimonium spiritus sancti.²⁸ Apologists in the Reformed tradition like Herman Dooyeweerd and Cornelius Van Til agree with Calvin that human depravity renders general revelation inadequate in creating a true knowledge of God. Only special revelation coupled with the witness of the Spirit can overcome the spiritual ignorance caused by sin.

Van Til maintains that the fall led to profound though not complete distortions in the human personality. According to Henry, "The fall conditions man's will more pervasively than his reason,"²⁹ and Clark adds that the image of God in man consists chiefly in rationality.³⁰ There still remains a sensus deitatis such that awareness of God is suppressed but cannot be eradicated.

Most presuppositionalists agree that the fundamental effect of sin on human consciousness is man's "attempt to do without God in every respect."³¹

²⁸Bernard Ramm, The Witness of the Spirit (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959).

²⁹Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:226.

³⁰Gordon H. Clark, "The Axiom of Revelation," in The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968), pp. 57-92; Three Types of Religious Philosophy (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 116.

³¹Cornelius Van Til, "Apologetics" (class syllabus, Westminster Theological Seminary, n.d.), p. 15.

This is manifested in a false ideal of knowledge and an attitude of self-sufficiency and autonomy in enmity against God. The noetic effect of sin is the consciousness which blinds man to his creaturehood and causes him to suppress God's revelation and interpret everything without reference to God. Accordingly, presuppositionalists insist that the unregenerate cannot be reasoned into a neutral frame of mind. John C. Whitcomb, Jr. concludes that "God never intended that Christians should win the lost through purely philosophical and academic arguments or even that they should by this means remove the mental/spiritual obstacles within unbelievers so that the Word of God might penetrate their hearts."³²

Although some subjectivists reinterpret the fall in psychological terms, they speak of the impact of sin on human cognition and morality. Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Brunner were critical of speculative efforts to arrive at religious truth. The distortion of sin becomes more profound as the center of existence is approached. The knowledge of God is found in personal encounter, not in rational speculation.

The Character of Revelation

As a rule, rationalistic apologists believe in the perspicuity of general revelation and the ability of man as a receptor of this revelation to arrive at valid

³²John C. Whitcomb, Jr., "Contemporary Apologetics and the Christian Faith," in "Christian Evidences and Apologetics" (class syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary, n.d.), p. 9.

conclusions about the existence and certain attributes of God. Geisler exemplifies this position in his argument that basic theistic truths can be derived from general revelation, but that beyond this level special revelation is necessary.

Evidentialists also recognize the validity of general revelation, but usually make this a very small aspect of their overall apologetic approach. Montgomery believes that the knowledge of God which can be derived from creation is limited to the extent that one cannot be sure that the evidence points to the infinite and personal God of theism. It is his contention that, apart from special revelation, any number of conclusions could be reached about the nature of ultimate reality. He therefore centers his apologetic effort on the authentication of the Bible as a special revelation from God. Alan Richardson holds a similar perspective on the relationship of general to special revelation:

Although all that we have said about the necessity and value of general revelation is true, it is also true that apart from faith in Christ there is no undistorted knowledge of God or of truth at all. Thus, special revelation is not a concrete illustration of general revelation, but a correction and transvaluation of it.³³

Presuppositionalists agree with rationalists on the perspicuity of general and special revelation, but disagree on the ability of the natural mind to receive and respond to this revelation. The knowledge of God that is manifested in nature and in the conscience, as well as the far greater knowledge that is available in Scripture, cannot be acknowledged by the unregenerate

consciousness apart from both the common and special grace of God. Without this grace, the natural man suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18) and asserts his own autonomy. According to Van Til, the authority of Scripture must be presupposed: "we cannot subject the authoritative pronouncements of Scripture about reality to the scrutiny of reason because it is reason itself that learns its proper function from Scripture."³⁴

Generally speaking, subjectivists stand apart from other apologists on the character of revelation.³⁵ A number of them do not perceive general and special revelation as sources of objective knowledge of God, particularly because of their emphasis on the personal rather than the propositional. Kierkegaard and Brunner stressed subjective immediacy and truth as encounter; they understood revelation as an event or an encounter which occurs between two subjects, God and man. This perspective is reflected in the neoorthodox position that the Bible is more of a potential revelation than an intrinsic revelation. The Bible becomes the special revelation or word of God when it is accompanied by illumination.

Rationalists, evidentialists, and presuppositionalists are critical of this disjunction between propositional and personal revelation. Most of these

³³Alan Richardson, Christian Apologetics (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1947), p. 130.

³⁴Van Til, "Apologetics," p. 67.

³⁵This is not true of all who use subjective apologetic methods, because many who appeal primarily to subjective experience, especially on the popular level, also regard the Bible as an objective revelation.

apologists are united in their defense of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. For example, even though Van Til did not approve of the "traditional" apologetic method used by Benjamin B. Warfield, he wrote the introduction to a later edition of Warfield's The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in which he affirmed Warfield's arguments for biblical inerrancy and challenged the modern theory of knowledge under the influence of which the very possibility of such a revelation is widely denied.³⁶ These apologists do not all agree on the issue of inerrancy, but they do agree on the authority of Scripture in theological matters. Writers like E. J. Young and E. J. Carnell defend biblical inerrancy, while other apologists like C. S. Lewis and Alan Richardson affirm biblical authority and inspiration, but not inerrancy.³⁷

A variety of books which defend the Bible as an authoritative special revelation of God have been written in recent years by rationalist, evidentialist, and presuppositionalist apologists, and in several of these, they have combined their efforts in spite of their methodological differences. For example, The Bible--

³⁶Cornelius Van Til, Introduction to The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, by Benjamin B. Warfield. Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948.

³⁷Edward J. Young, Thy Word Is Truth (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957); Carnell, Introduction, pp. 191-210; A Philosophy of the Christian Religion (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), pp. 26-45; C. S. Lewis, Christian Reflections, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 157-66; God in the Dock, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: William B.

The Living Word of Revelation, edited by Merrill C. Tenney, includes essays by John H. Gerstner, R. Laird Harris, Kenneth S. Kantzer, John Warwick Montgomery, James I. Packer, Clark H. Pinnock, Merrill C. Tenney, John F. Walvoord, Marten H. Woudstra, and Edward J. Young.³⁸ Inerrancy, edited by Geisler, includes contributions by John W. Wenham, Edwin A. Blum, Gleason L. Archer, J. Barton Payne, Greg L. Bahnsen, James I. Packer, Gordon R. Lewis, Paul D. Feinberg, R. C. Sproul, Robert D. Preus, John H. Gerstner, and Henry Krabbendam, as well as Geisler himself.³⁹ Other examples of such collaborations by apologists of different persuasions on the defense of biblical authority are God's Inerrant Word, edited by Montgomery, The Foundation of Biblical Authority, edited by James Montgomery Boice, and Can We Trust the Bible?, edited by Earl D. Radmacher.⁴⁰

The Question of Probability Versus Certainty

Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 68-71, 184; Richardson, Apologetics, pp. 117-34.

³⁸Merrill C. Tenney, ed., The Bible--The Living Word of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968).

³⁹Norman L. Geisler, ed., Inerrancy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).

⁴⁰John Warwick Montgomery, ed., God's Inerrant Word (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974); James Montgomery Boice, ed., The Foundation of Biblical Authority (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978); Earl D. Radmacher, ed., Can We Trust the Bible? (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979).

Most rationalists and evidentialists accept the distinction between certainty, the state of coherence and evidence for a particular belief, and certitude, the degree of psychological or spiritual persuasion for a belief.⁴¹ While rationalists contend that Christian theism is a more coherent, consistent, and comprehensive world view than alternative world views like naturalism and pantheism, they do not claim that their arguments lead to apodictic certainty. It is true that Geisler contends that the existence of God can be established beyond the level of probability through his restated cosmological argument, which he believes passes the tests of affirmability and undeniability. But when it comes to the authentication of Christianity within the context of the theistic world view, Geisler admits that certainty is unattainable. This lack of certainty, however, does not mean a lack of certitude for the Christian. Psychological and spiritual certitude is given to the believer through the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. It is this inner certitude which makes unreserved commitment to the person of God possible in spite of the absence of complete certainty.⁴²

Many rationalist apologists do not directly appeal to this inner testimony of the Spirit when dealing with the problem of certainty. Carnell

⁴¹Ramm, A Christian Appeal, p. 73.

⁴²Apologists refer to biblical passages like Romans 8:15; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 2 Corinthians 3:14-17; Galatians 4:6; Colossians 2:2; 1 John 5:13 to support this concept of inner certitude.

contends that inner certitude, or what he calls "moral assurance," is not incompatible with rational probability.

Moral assurance grows out of a conviction that a proposition is coherent, not that it may be geometrically demonstrated. . . . Thus, the arguments for Christianity--though but probable in rational strength--move the Christian to act upon the supposition of the truth of the Christian faith. . . . Having no perfect system of thought while we walk by faith and not by sight, the Christian suggests that a rational man settle for that system which is attended by the fewest difficulties. The worth of a system of thought is conditioned to its ability significantly to answer those basic questions of life which all men must face.⁴³

In his essay, "On Obstinacy in Belief," C. S. Lewis took a similar position on the relationship between certainty and certitude in Christian belief:

We are speaking of belief and disbelief in the strongest degree, but not of knowledge. Belief, in this sense, seems to me to be assent to a proposition which we think so overwhelmingly probable that there is a psychological exclusion of doubt, though not a logical exclusion of dispute.

It may be asked whether belief (and of course disbelief) of this sort ever attaches to any but theological propositions. I think that many beliefs approximate to it; that is, many probabilities seem to us so strong that the absence of logical certainty does not induce in us the least shade of doubt.⁴⁴

⁴³Carnell, Introduction, pp. 117-18, 121. David Hugh Freeman concurs with this conclusion in A Philosophical Study of Religion (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1964), p. 259:

"In questions concerning matters of fact, it is not possible to give a demonstration similar to the demonstration of a theorem in geometry. The conclusion that the Christian reaches by such considerations is that the testimony for the miracles of the New Testament renders them credible, that it is more probable that such a body of testimony is true than that it is false."

Compare Wolterstorff, Reason, pp. 42-58.

⁴⁴C. S. Lewis, "On Obstinacy in Belief," in The World's Last Night and Other Essays (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1959), p. 16.

Lewis adds that assent to the propositional truth of Christianity must move from the logic of speculative thought into the logic of personal relations.⁴⁵

Evidentialists agree that absolute certainty cannot be demanded in the vindication of Christian belief. Montgomery stated that only a high degree of probability can be adduced in support of synthetic claims of religious or historical meaning: "to demand absolute certainty is to obtain pure formality and thus no knowledge of the world at all."⁴⁶ Christian belief provides the kind of certainty that is available in other judgments that involve plausible evidence. The proof never attains complete certainty, "but such proof is the basis of all our factual decisions in life and cannot be summarily dismissed just because a vital religious question is at issue."⁴⁷ Clark H. Pinnock draws the same conclusion in his book, Reason Enough:

The historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, so long as it is not ruled out from the start as inherently impossible, is impressive and solid. Of course the knowledge we arrive at through historical argumentation is only probable. That is true of all the knowledge we gain in an empirical way. It falls short of the absolute certainty of mathematics. But it is the sort of knowledge we are able to operate on in all the affairs of life, and it is

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁴⁶John Warwick Montgomery, Where Is History Going? (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1969), p. 137.

⁴⁷Idem, Faith Founded on Fact (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1978), p. 59; cf. The Shape of the Past (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975 [1962]), pp. 139, 143.

adequate to provide us with a sound basis for the trustful certainty of faith.⁴⁸ Pinnock adds, "We cannot wait until all uncertainty disappears before dealing with ultimate issues."⁴⁹ He speaks of the accumulation of "reasonable probabilities" that combine together like strands in a rope.⁵⁰

Both rationalist and evidentialist apologists maintain that while the idea of probability in common parlance is often equated with chance, this is not always accurate. In confirmation theory, probability refers to the degree of evidence for the verification of a theory.⁵¹ As Lewis observes in Miracles, there is a profound difference between raw chance in the sense of a random process and the probability associated with coherence and historicity.⁵² Thomas V. Morris suggests that "the process of coming to believe as a Christian can be described in the language of confirmation theory by a model of cumulative probability."⁵³ While Christian commitment is a step beyond the reach of the evidence, "it is a step in the direction of, and consistent with, the evidence and so

⁴⁸Clark H. Pinnock, Reason Enough (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1980), p. 88.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 120.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 18, 120. This analogy is used in contrast to those who use the analogy of combined evidences as a series of leaky buckets to criticize evidentialism.

⁵¹Ramm, A Christian Appeal, p. 71.

⁵²C. S. Lewis, Miracles: A Preliminary Study (New York: Macmillan Company, 1947), pp. 298-305.

is justified by the evidence."⁵⁴ It is in this way that logical probability leads to personal certitude.

Hoover approaches the problem of certitude in the absence of certainty in terms of both an outer and an inner witness. The former is the external evidence which, in effect, functions as a necessary but not a sufficient cause of belief. The latter is the Holy Spirit who works in conjunction with the evidence to provide the sufficient cause of belief.⁵⁵

Presuppositionalists take a very different position on the matter of probability versus certainty. Van Til criticizes the position of apologists who maintain an Arminian view of the effect of the Fall on human reason and speak in terms of the establishment of a cumulative probability for the truth claims of Christianity. Van Til claims that the unbeliever and the believer mean different things by the words "possibility" and "probability."⁵⁶ In his view, the unbeliever associates these words with the concept of random chance.

Clearly any view of probability which is based on the ultimacy of Chance cannot possibly contact reality in any way, for it can say nothing about the probability of any particular event, for all events proceed equally from the belly of Chance. Therefore a "probable" argument for any particular event is of no more value than an improbable one, for both arguments are

⁵³Morris, Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics, p. 97.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 103.

⁵⁵Hoover, Christian Theism, p. 271.

⁵⁶Van Til, "Apologetics," pp. 80, 94.

meaningless in terms of that one "event." A probable argument is not better than an improbable one if the very idea of probability is without meaning.⁵⁷ Van Til contends that the existence of God and the truth of biblical theism is "absolutely certain" because it is not based upon rationalistic or evidential argumentation but upon the self-attesting word of God. For him, presuppositional reasoning is not circular, because God's revelation must be self-authenticating. "As Christians, we maintain that certainty is of the very essence of knowledge itself."⁵⁸ One must believe in order to understand; submission to authority must precede conviction. Van Til and other presuppositionalists stress the testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti. They embrace Calvin's position that "the testimony of the Spirit is superior to all reason. For as God alone is a sufficient witness of himself in his own word, so also the word will never gain credit in the hearts of men, till it be confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit."⁵⁹

Subjectivists like Kierkegaard disagree with the position held by rationalist and evidentialist apologists and with that held by presuppositionalists as well. Faith cannot be grounded in the uncertainty of history or in the conclusions reached by rational argumentation. For Kierkegaard, certitude is

⁵⁷Idem, Response to Clark H. Pinnock, "The Philosophy of Christian Evidences," in Jerusalem and Athens, ed. E. R. Geehan (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 426-27.

⁵⁸Idem, Psychology of Religion (Nutley, New Jersey: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1971), p. 142; cf. Reymond, Justification, pp. 62-70.

only available in the inwardness of personal commitment; it results from the experience of the subjectivity of faith. Faith involves the risk of objective uncertainty, but leads to an experience of inner certitude which transcends the contingencies of history and time.

The Problem of Common Ground or Point of Contact

Apologists differ over the degree to which there is theoretical and practical common ground between Christians and non-Christians. Some presuppositionalists deny that there is any epistemological common ground because the non-Christian's perception of reality is completely colored by his world view. More rationalistically-oriented apologists believe that it is valid to appeal to reason by applying the laws of logic to critically compare Christian theism with opposing world views and to expose their implications.

Holmes holds that there are two areas of common ground which make communication possible between believers and unbelievers. One is cultural (common within a culture) and the other is generic (common to all men). The latter includes rationality and the basic laws of thought, morality and the sense of obligation to universal spheres of value, and psychological needs.⁶⁰ This common ground has been disturbed by the distorting effects of sin, but it has not been destroyed; it continues to reflect the image of God in man. Geisler, Carnell,

⁵⁹John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. John Allen, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), 1:7:4.

and other apologists who employ a rationalistic method appeal to this generic territory as the point of contact with non-Christians. Carnell maintains that on an interpersonal level, "Christian and non-Christian can enjoy common ground on every level of truth, save that of metaphysical."⁶¹ But on the system-to-system level, Carnell agrees with the presuppositionalists that there is no common ground at all. However, because of common grace, this is a theoretical and not a practical problem. In practice, the non-Christian "uses Christian presuppositions to give frame and support to his pagan ultimates."⁶² By virtue of their creaturehood, all men participate in the same moral and spiritual environment.⁶³

Some rationalists and evidentialists approach the problem of common ground by using the method of postulation and verification as the starting point. Ramm claims that "All progress in knowledge of any kind is possible only if from facts we go on to postulation, namely, suggesting some theory or hypothesis that integrates and explains the facts."⁶⁴

Montgomery believes that in addition to the laws of logic, the rules of scientific procedure constitute an effective area of common ground for use in

⁶⁰Holmes, Christianity and Philosophy, pp. 34-36.

⁶¹Carnell, Introduction, p. 217.

⁶²Ibid., p. 222.

⁶³Idem, The Case for Biblical Christianity, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 75-79.

⁶⁴Ramm, A Christian Appeal, p. 32.

Christian apologetics. He takes the position that if a non-Christian is willing to be open to the objective historical evidence for the claims and credentials of Christ, this evidence provides a significant point of contact which can be used by the apologist to help such a person consider the Christian world view. Montgomery believes that aprioristic metaphysical assumptions are an improper starting point in the practice of Christian apologetics. Such assumptions should be set aside in the examination of empirical evidence to minimize the problem of prejudgment and philosophical bias. This is especially true when considering the historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ because of the consequent philosophical implications.

Presuppositionalists, on the other hand, believe that such metaphysical and epistemological neutrality is unattainable. One's perception of logical consistency and sense experience is unavoidably influenced by his or her fundamental commitments. According to Richard L. Pratt, Jr., "We either understand the facts as Christians or we understand them as non-Christians."⁶⁵ Van Til agrees that "laws" and "facts" are not inherently neutral; they are intelligible only in light of some final reference point. He is not opposed to the use of evidences, but contends that evidences are valid only within an overall presuppositional framework. His epistemological starting point is the ontological Trinity as the ultimate point of reference for knowledge. Any other

starting point presupposes man as the final reference point in predication and denies God as the ground of all thought.⁶⁶

Van Til criticizes the evidentialist's method of comparing alternative interpretations of facts to determine which best fits reality and the rationalist's method of using the law of contradiction as the point of contact with non-Christians. It is his contention that these "traditional" apologetic methods wrongly establish criteria of truth which stand above the Scriptures. When this happens, man stands in judgment of revelation rather than revelation standing in judgment of man.

Because of the lack of epistemological neutrality, strict presuppositionalists argue that there is no common ground between the position held by the Christian and that held by the non-Christian. Nevertheless, presuppositionalists argue that because of the sensus deitatis that lies within man which cannot be completely suppressed, there is a metaphysical sense in which believers and unbelievers have "all things in common; they have God in common, they have every fact in the universe in common. . . . All men know God, the true God, the only God. They have not merely a capacity for knowing

⁶⁵Richard L. Pratt, Jr., Every Thought Captive (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1979), p. 60.

⁶⁶Van Til, Defense, pp. 72-77; cf. Rousas John Rushdoony, "The Quest for Common Ground," in Foundations of Christian Scholarship, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976), pp. 27-38; Thom Notaro, Van Til

him but actually do know him."⁶⁷ Thus, though there is no neutral ground, communication is still possible between believers and unbelievers. The point of contact is the fact that "Deep down in his mind every man knows that he is the creature of God and responsible to God. Every man, at bottom, knows that he is a covenant-breaker."⁶⁸

Subjectivists differ from rationalists and evidentialists in that they do not appeal to the laws of reason or to historical inquiry as the point of contact between believers and unbelievers. Instead of rational or empirical argumentation, they focus more on the personal dimension of truth as it relates to the psychological needs that are shared by all individuals. The Kierkegaardian phenomenology of the stages on life's way in the inner process of the actualization of the human spirit incorporates the common ground of human experience in an apologetic for true Christianity. In this way, Kierkegaard explores the psychodynamic of inwardness, contingency, humility, surrender, and responsibility.

While subjectivists are opposed to the use of natural theology as a point of contact for the gospel, they do not agree on the nature of general revelation

and the Use of Evidence (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980), pp. 78-95.

⁶⁷Van Til, Defense, p. 153; cf. Jim S. Halsey, For a Time Such as This (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 75-79.

and the imago Dei in man. This is illustrated in the controversy between Barth and Brunner over general revelation. While Barth disavowed any common ground between believer and unbeliever and rejected general revelation, Brunner argued in Revelation and Reason that general revelation is known and revolted against by man in his state of sin.⁶⁹ In both cases, however, the true point of contact is personal encounter in the event of special revelation.

The Character of Faith

Rationalists and evidentialists believe that faith is not a leap in the dark but a step taken in the direction of the light as a response to credible evidence.

Rationalists usually distinguish different senses of the words "belief" and "faith" and assert that Christian faith is more than weak belief (guesses, opinions, loosely-held convictions) or even strong belief (firmly-held convictions).⁷⁰ Faith in the biblical sense goes beyond intellectual assent; it also involves volitional response to the person of Christ. In spite of other differences, most apologists who exemplify the four methods considered in this study are unified on this point. Nevertheless, C. S. Lewis observes that there is a danger

⁶⁸Van Til, "Apologetics," p. 57; cf. Gilbert B. Weaver, "Gordon Clark: Christian Apologist," in Nash, The Philosophy, pp. 308-11.

⁶⁹Karl Barth, "Nein!" in Natural Theology, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Centenary Press, 1946), pp. 79-89; Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), p. 262.

among rationalist apologists of getting caught in the web of their own arguments and stressing intellectual encounters more than the need for personal encounter with the Reality whom they are about.⁷¹ Carnell stresses that in the defense of the propositional truth of Christian theism, the believer must be careful not to drive a wedge between the propositional and the personal in revelation.⁷² He distinguishes three kinds of truth--ontological, propositional, and volitional (what he calls "truth as personal rectitude")--and correlates three methods of knowing with the three kinds of truth: knowledge by acquaintance (direct experience), knowledge by inference, and knowledge by moral self-acceptance.⁷³ These three methods of knowing correspond in turn to three grades of spiritual perception which culminate in the moral and spiritual transformation of the individual as one moves from a knowledge of God's existence to a knowledge of God's person. Because of man's moral predicament as a sinner, the barrier to fellowship with God can only be overcome by personal faith in the redemptive work of Christ.⁷⁴

⁷⁰Richard L. Purtill, Reason to Believe (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 71-79; Freeman, A Philosophical Study, pp. 117-18.

⁷¹Lewis, God in the Dock, p. 103.

⁷²Carnell, Biblical Christianity, p. 173.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 58-64.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 65-86.

Like rationalists, evidentialists distinguish different conceptions of faith. In Faith, Facts, History, Science--and How They Fit Together, Rheinallt Nantlais Williams refutes six false conceptions of faith as inadequate from a biblical perspective: (1) faith as firm conviction, (2) faith as a receptive attitude to truth, (3) faith as a submissive attitude to a religious tradition, (4) faith as belief in a number of specific facts made known by revelation, (5) faith as a form of hope, and (6) faith as believing without evidence. For Williams, "faith is essentially a response to the challenge of a revolutionary fact."⁷⁵ Faith involves the elements of response, trust, and commitment. Empirically oriented apologists acknowledge that historical evidence does not in itself produce this response of faith. Montgomery writes,

I am not arguing . . . that empirical verifiability of the historical and scientific content of Scripture automatically produces subjective commitment to the truth of its religious claims. The Pharisees could (and doubtless many of them did) refuse to believe that Jesus was able to forgive sin even after he had healed the palsied man. However, only where objective verifiability is present can genuine faith be distinguished from blind faith.⁷⁶

He adds that Christian apologetics should function as a ground for faith, not as a rational substitute for faith. While it does not provide absolute proof or dispell

⁷⁵Rheinallt Nantlais Williams, Faith, Facts, History, Science--and How They Fit Together (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1973), pp. 14-17.

⁷⁶John Warwick Montgomery, "Biblical Authority," in The Suicide of Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1970), p. 355.

all doubt, apologetics can be used by the Spirit of God who alone can convict people of the truth of the gospel and bring about the response of faith.⁷⁷

Presuppositionalists also speak of faith as a response, but place more stress on the sovereign election of God. It is the special grace of God that produces regenerative faith. In the final analysis, no one comes to Christ without first being drawn: "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). Presuppositional apologetics involves the proclamation and confrontation of the word of God in dependence upon the convicting work of the Spirit of God.⁷⁸

Subjectivists are most emphatic about the personal response dimension of faith. Without personal transformation, true faith does not exist. Generally, subjectivists relate faith not only to the will but also to the emotions, especially because it involves uncertainty rather than objective security. For Kierkegaard, faith has nothing to do with objective evidence or rational argumentation; it is existential, not propositional, and it is appropriated in the passion of inwardness.

The Status of Christian Evidences

Rationalistically oriented apologists usually regard evidences in a supplementary light as a subdivision of apologetics. Evidences must be placed

⁷⁷Idem, Faith Founded, pp. 39-40; cf. Ramm, A Christian Appeal, pp. 73-74.

⁷⁸Whitcomb, "Christian Evidences," pp. 10-20.

in the larger context of philosophical positions.⁷⁹ A materialist or a naturalist perceives the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus from an entirely different perspective than a person who acknowledges the existence of the supernatural. Aprioristic antisupernatural assumptions derived from a nontheistic world view eliminate the possibility of miracles from the outset, so that a consistent naturalist would be impervious to an evidential defense of miracles. Geisler believes that Christian evidences have real value, but only within the context of a theistic world view. Carnell also affirms the use of evidences but adds that they accomplish nothing without the dimension of personal response and conviction:

Once apologetics has shown that the claims of Christ are continuous with truth, it is at the end of its tether. It cannot, even as it would not want to, encroach on the preaching ministry of the church. God is a living person, not a metaphysical principle. Evidences may point to God, but God himself must be encountered in the dynamic of personal fellowship. Only the Holy Spirit can illuminate the evidences.⁸⁰

For the sake of the apologetic task, evidentialists often present Christianity in terms of a network of hypotheses and use evidences in a cumulative way to support the validity of this conceptual network. As such, the defense of Christianity "can be likened to the interweaving of evidences by a skillful lawyer to show that the hypothesis suggested cannot be denied with

⁷⁹Bernard Ramm, Protestant Christian Evidences (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953), pp. 32-33.

⁸⁰Carnell, Christian Commitment, p. 302.

prudence."⁸¹ Evidentialists appeal to biblical examples of empirical verification through cumulative evidence (e.g., the miracles publicly performed by Christ). They differ from rationalists in that they are more inclined to believe that evidences can be seen for what they are regardless of philosophical bias, provided that one is willing to openly consider them. Montgomery emphasizes the public nature of the historical evidence for the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth and claims that these empirical evidences inherently have sufficient power to bring people who are willing to consider them to the point of a volitional confrontation with Jesus as redeemer.⁸² Theological truth is bound up with historical, empirical truth; to separate the two would render it meaningless because it would be divorced from empirical verifiability.⁸³

Presuppositionalists affirm Calvin's position that evidences by themselves cannot overcome the problem of human depravity; arguments and evidences will not prevail over the noetic blindness caused by sin and enable an unbeliever to submit to the authority of Scripture. Faith must precede understanding. Only in the context of the faith produced by the sovereign work of the Spirit of God will evidences have any merit:

⁸¹Ramm, Christian Evidences, p. 36; cf. Irwin H. Linton, A Lawyer Examines the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1943), pp. 193-95.

⁸²John Warwick Montgomery, "Clark's Philosophy of History," in Nash, The Philosophy, p. 390.

⁸³Montgomery, The Suicide, pp. 346-47; cf. Colin Brown, ed., History, Criticism and Faith (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976), pp. 30-31.

Wherefore the Scripture will then only be effectual to produce the saving knowledge of God, when the certainty of it shall be founded on the internal persuasion of the Holy Spirit. Thus those human testimonies, which contribute to its confirmation, will not be useless, if they follow that first and principal proof, as secondary aids to our imbecility. But those persons betray great folly, who wish it to be demonstrated to infidels that the Scripture is the word of God, which cannot be known without faith. Augustine therefore justly observes, that piety and peace of mind ought to precede, in order that a man may understand somewhat of such great subjects.⁸⁴

Abraham Kuyper agreed that because of human depravity, evidences cannot get through to those who are outside of the faith; all such appeals are futile. It is the witness of the Spirit that authenticates the authority of Scripture in the miracle of palingenesis.⁸⁵

Clark repeatedly argues against evidential apologetics. He denies the validity of empirical argumentation in scientific inquiry and historiography and contends that a historical demonstration of the resurrection would not in itself verify the theological claims associated by Christians with this event.⁸⁶ For Clark, the only valid use of evidences is as an ad hominem tactic to show that

⁸⁴Calvin, Institutes, 1:8:13.

⁸⁵Abraham Kuyper, Principles of Sacred Theology, trans. J. Hendrik DeVries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), pp. 243, 558.

⁸⁶Gordon H. Clark, A Christian Philosophy of Education (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946), p. 35; cf. A Christian View of Men and Things (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), pp. 197-228.

"the principles our opponents use destroy their own conclusions" and lead to self-contradiction.⁸⁷

Like other presuppositionalists, John C. Whitcomb, Jr. maintains that logical, philosophical, historical, archaeological, and scientific arguments "fail to penetrate the heart of the unbeliever."⁸⁸ Because of the inherent rebellion of man against God, "he is shielded by a built-in wall of defense against God's truth and God's claims upon him."⁸⁹ Whitcomb distinguishes Christian evidences from Christian apologetics, saying that the former refers to the presentation of those aspects of Christianity that are particularly impressive to the rational mind, while the latter refers to the defense of those aspects of Christianity that tend to offend the rational mind.⁹⁰ Evidences can be used to arouse interest and hold the attention of the unbeliever, but they cannot create, sustain, or increase Christian faith.⁹¹

Van Til also distinguishes Christian evidences from Christian apologetics, relating the former to the historical and the latter to the

⁸⁷Idem, "Reply to George I. Mavrodes," in Nash, The Philosophy, p. 452; cf. Three Types, pp. 125-26.

⁸⁸Whitcomb, "Christian Evidences," p. 38.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 1.

⁹¹Idem, "Contemporary Apologetics," p. 32; cf. Charles A. Clough, "Giving the Answer," 2nd ed. rev. (Lubbock, Texas: Lubbock Bible Church, 1977), pp. 7-8.

philosophical aspect of the defense of Christian theism.⁹² Although he criticizes "traditional" apologists who maintain that the unregenerate intellect is capable of appreciating revelatory data, he believes that their materials have value when placed within the context of a biblical epistemology and metaphysics. Facts must be related to and interpreted in the light of the Christian-theistic universal of the triune God of Scripture.⁹³ Otherwise, even if the nontheist grants that Christ rose from the grave, "he will say that this proves nothing more than that something very unusual took place in the case of that man Jesus."⁹⁴

Subjectivists largely agree with presuppositionalists on the issue of evidences, though for different reasons. Pascal took a more moderate position on evidences than most subjectivists when he wrote that "there is both evidence and obscurity to enlighten some and confuse others. But the evidence is such that it surpasses, or at least equals, the evidence to the contrary."⁹⁵ For Pascal, evidences are not fully convincing, but it is not unreasonable to believe them.

Kierkegaard took a more radical position by contending that the quest for objective historical evidences is inimical to true faith. The dimension of

⁹²Van Til, "Apologetics," p. 2.

⁹³Idem, Christian-Theistic Evidences (Nutley, New Jersey: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1975); cf. Notaro, Van Til, pp. 8-28, 109-27.

⁹⁴Idem, Defense, p. 8; "Apologetics," pp. 95-96.

⁹⁵Blaise Pascal, Pensées, trans. W. F. Trotter (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958), No. 563.

personal encounter involves inner experience and faith, not evidential plausibility.

The Relationship Between Faith and Reason

Apologists in the rationalistic tradition do not believe that faith and reason should be placed in opposition. For them, the relationship between faith and reason can be characterized by the phrase, Intelligo ut credam, "I understand in order that I may believe."⁹⁶ This is an attribute of the Thomistic epistemology that sees reason and revelation in terms of both/and rather than either/or.⁹⁷ For Geisler, faith in the theistic world view and, more specifically, in the propositional content of the Bible can be established as the most reasonable of all intellectual positions.

Carnell maintains that faith as commitment or trust is not restricted to religious matters but extends to secular aspects of life as well. It is the foundation of all social relations and intellectual inquiry--even the philosopher and the scientist must have faith in themselves, their method, their rationality, the existence of other minds, and a variety of other givens.⁹⁸ Faith should be

⁹⁶Reymond, Justification, p. 9.

⁹⁷Etienne Gilson, Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938); The Elements of Christian Philosophy (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960).

⁹⁸Carnell, Philosophy, p. 29. Cf. Erich Frank who argues in Philosophical Understanding and Religious Truth (New York: Oxford University

placed in what reason gains. Carnell adds that reason and authority are not inimical. It is impossible not to trust in authorities, but they can be tested to show which are most reasonable to trust. "All pretenses to revelation must be put through a scrutinizing test,"⁹⁹ but this process of rational scrutiny does not thereby eliminate the authority by placing reason on a higher plane. When an authority is shown to be reasonable, faith commitment to the authority is the proper response. There is a dual sense in which one must first know in order to believe and then believe in order to know.¹⁰⁰ Contra Kierkegaard, Carnell claims that in religious matters, we need not act passionately in defiance of the report of reason: "it is not psychologically true that passionate concern increases in commensurate ratio to objective uncertainty."¹⁰¹ The relations between time and eternity need not stand outside the realm of rational coherence. Carnell proposes two axioms concerning the relationship between faith and reason:

The native person--the one unaffected by corrupting philosophic presuppositions--is at his best, and most ideally a man of faith, when he obeys, rather than defies, the report of a critically developed understanding. . . . The obligation of the will to clear with the verdict of the understanding rises in direct ratio to the importance of the value at stake.¹⁰²

Press, Inc., 1945) that rational conclusions are dependent on certain premises which reason itself is unable to prove.

⁹⁹Carnell, *Philosophy*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 515.

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 474, 494; *Biblical Christianity*, pp. 55-56.

¹⁰²Idem, *Biblical Christianity*, pp. 49-51. Italics deleted.

Basil Mitchell likewise argues that rational criticism does not destroy revelation, and uses the analogy of one person communicating to another intentions and purposes which the latter could not discover unless the former chose to reveal them. In this context, the listener should use critical judgment in order to tell whether the speaker is being deceptive, but this scrutinizing process does not mean that the listener can independently discover what the speaker alone can reveal.¹⁰³ Faith in this sense is analogous to faith in a person; though it should have a rational foundation, it nevertheless takes the believer "beyond the evidence that is ordinarily available to justify it."¹⁰⁴

C. S. Lewis adds that all our knowledge depends on the three elements of authority, reason, and experience, mixed in varying proportions. For him, the real conflict is not between faith and reason but between faith and sight.¹⁰⁵ Like Mitchell, he draws an analogy between religious faith and faith in a person:

By Faith we believe always what we hope hereafter to see always and perfectly and have already seen imperfectly and by flashes. In relation to the philosophical premises a Christian's faith is of course excessive: in relation to what is sometimes shown him, it is perhaps just as often defective. My faith even in an earthly friend goes beyond all that could be demonstratively proved; yet in another sense I may often trust him less than he deserves.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³Mitchell, Justification, pp. 145-46.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁰⁵C. S. Lewis, Christian Reflections, pp. 41-43.

¹⁰⁶Idem, God in the Dock, p. 176.

Theistic arguments can lead to intellectual assent (what Lewis calls "Faith-A") which in turn can be the basis for religious faith ("Faith-B"). While philosophical proofs do not in themselves lead to religion, Lewis asserts that "quasi-religious experiences" often work in conjunction with Faith-A to remove the inhibition which prevents the development of the proofs into Faith-B.¹⁰⁷ Lewis denies that there is demonstrative proof of Christianity but affirms that Christianity is sufficiently reasonable to warrant the step of faith in the person of God. There is, in fact, "just enough lack of demonstrative certainty to make free choice possible."¹⁰⁸

Evidentialists, like rationalists, believe that faith and reason are complementary. Reymond characterizes their position as Intelligo et credo, "I understand and I believe."¹⁰⁹ Montgomery contends that the same process of reasoning that makes sense out of the ordinary experiences of life can be applied to the truth claims of Christianity to affirm their validity. The heuristic assumptions of inductive procedures are not metaphysically colored, and the Christian apologist can share these in common with the non-Christian while challenging the latter to "compare alternative interpretations of fact and determine on the basis of the facts themselves which interpretation best fits

¹⁰⁷Ibid., pp. 173-74.

¹⁰⁸C. S. Lewis, personal letters quoted in Sheldon Vanauken, A Severe Mercy (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), pp. 92, 102.

¹⁰⁹Reymond, Justification, p. 9.

reality."¹¹⁰ While Montgomery believes that the intellectual objections to Christianity can be surmounted, he acknowledges that evidences will not in themselves overcome the volitional barrier.

Hoover distinguishes faith ("conviction based on indirect evidence") from certainty ("conviction based on direct evidence") and credulity ("conviction based on no evidence").¹¹¹ For him, faith has a dialectical nature; it must strike a balance between rationalism and fideism, reason and trust, evidence and commitment, head and heart, fact and value. On the one hand the philosophical rationalist has an impossibly high standard of proof, and on the other hand the fideist or subjectivist has too permissive a standard of proof.¹¹² Faith is a venture based on enough evidence to justify not only intellectual assent but also the decision of moving beyond this to total commitment.

Richardson maintains that reason alone is not sufficient to provide answers to the fundamental questions of life. It must be supplemented by a "faith-principle" which will enhance the believer's understanding of the world and his experiences in it. Only in this way will the twin extremes of rationalism and fideism be avoided.

The general paralysis of metaphysical speculation in an age like our own in which philosophers are reluctant to believe in anything at all or to make

¹¹⁰Montgomery, Faith Founded, p. 122.

¹¹¹Hoover, Christian Theism, p. 27.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 37; cf. Williams, Faith, Facts, pp. 46-47.

any kind of venture of faith is the unwitting endorsement on the part of modern skepticism itself of the truth of the Christian view that reason is blind until faith takes it by the hand. The adequacy of any particular "faith-principle" must be judged by its ability to order the whole range of data supplied by the empirical sciences (including theology) in a rational and coherent philosophy of life and the world.¹¹³

Presuppositionalism follows the Augustinian way of Credo ut intelligam, "I believe in order to understand." Henry accepts the position held by Augustine, Luther, and Calvin that "the revelation of the living God is the precondition and starting point for human understanding; it supplies the framework and corrective for natural reason. . . . Not only is divine revelation rational, but it is, in Christian purview, the ground of all rationality."¹¹⁴

Clark, in Religion, Reason and Revelation, criticizes philosophical rationalism and empiricism which place reason above faith, and modern irrationalism which places reason in opposition to faith. His position, like Henry's, is that on pain of skepticism one's epistemology must be based on the acknowledgement of a propositional revelation of fixed truth from God.

Van Til and Whitcomb agree with Henry and Clark that the presupposition of revelation is the foundation of all rationality, but go further, at least on a theoretical level, in their rejection of any common ground between the autonomous thinking of the non-Christian and the theonomous thinking of the Christian. For them, faith is indeed reasonable, but only in terms of a rationality

¹¹³Richardson, Christian Apologetics, p. 231.

¹¹⁴Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:183, 196.

derived from the self-contained triune God of Scripture, and not in terms of a rationality derived from any other world view. This position is reflected in Van Til's apologetic method of assuming for the sake of argument the presuppositions held by the non-Christian and carrying them to their logical conclusions to show that they are epistemologically self-defeating.

Van Til argues that "the Christian position is the only position that does not destroy reason itself."¹¹⁵ But he also states that within the Christian revelation, conceptual antinomies are present, including the nature of the Trinity, divine sovereignty versus human responsibility, and God's relation to time and space. The Scriptures speak of matters that cannot be resolved by human reason, but Van Til is quick to add that this does not render Christianity irrational; these antinomies are only apparently contradictory, not ultimately contradictory. The ontological Trinity is incomprehensible, but nothing is incomprehensible or absurd to God.¹¹⁶

Most apologists are in agreement with Van Til's position on antinomies, or what Hanna calls aporiae. Hanna states that penultimate aporiae are problems that are irresolvable in this life alone, while ultimate aporiae are

¹¹⁵Van Til, Common Grace, p. 10.

¹¹⁶Compare G. K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy, Image Books (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959 [1903]), pp. 81-82. Chesterton writes that "Christianity is a superhuman paradox whereby two opposite passions may blaze beside each other" (p. 147). Cf. Kenneth Boa, God, I Don't Understand (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1975).

problems that are intrinsically irresolvable in this life and in the eternal state.¹¹⁷

Geisler also acknowledges the existence of these incomprehensibles, but calls them mysteries rather than antinomies to avoid any association with Kant's use of this term.

The evidentialist Floyd E. Hamilton adds that once the mind weighs the evidence and determines that God has indeed given man a supernatural revelation, reason must then submit to the authority of the revelation as such. At that point,

. . . [the mind] has no right to set itself up as a judge to decide what things embodied in this revelation are reasonable, for in the nature of things, if there has been a revelation from God, it will concern those things which cannot be discovered by the unaided human reason. Since the mind has no actual experience with things which do not come to it through the senses, it has no right to deny truth which comes through revelation from a realm where sense perception is impossible. In regard to revelation, the legitimate sphere of the human reason is to investigate the evidence in support of such revelation and then to decide as to the meaning of that revelation.¹¹⁸

Subjectivistic apologetics, especially as approached by Kierkegaard and the dialectical and existential theologians of the twentieth century, can generally be characterized by the Tertullian way of Credo quia absurdum est, "I believe because it is absurd."¹¹⁹ Reymond portrays this approach to apologetics as stressing "the inward religious experience as the foundation of the theological

¹¹⁷Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 89; cf. Purtill, Reason, pp. 128-36.

¹¹⁸Floyd E. Hamilton, The Basis of Christian Faith (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927), p. 28.

structure ('theological positivism'--Cobb, 'new modernism'--Van Til, 'irrationalism'--Clark, 'upper-story systems'--Schaeffer).¹²⁰ Subjectivism in its most radical form is exemplified by Kierkegaard who repeatedly alluded to "the absolute paradox" of the incarnation as the affront of Christianity to speculative philosophy and rationalism.

Speculative philosophy is objective, and objectively there is no truth for existing individuals, but only approximations; for the existing individual is precluded from becoming altogether objective by the fact that he exists. Christianity on the contrary is subjective; the inwardness of faith in the believer constitutes the truth's eternal decision. And objectively there is no truth; for an objective knowledge of the truth of Christianity, or of its truths, is precisely untruth. To know a confession of faith by rote is paganism, because Christianity is inwardness.¹²¹

For Kierkegaard, faith is proportionate to the risk the will must take in the leap of decision. Because of the nature of religious truth as subjectivity, knowing is at odds with believing; the Christian faith cannot be founded in objectively veracious evidences.¹²²

While not equally dialectical, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Reinhold Niebuhr were strongly influenced by Kierkegaardian thought and affirmed a dialectical tension in the divine-human encounter by maintaining a qualitative

¹¹⁹Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:182.

¹²⁰Reymond, Justification, p. 9.

¹²¹Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 201.

¹²²Carnell, Philosophy, p. 476.

distinction between the content of revelation and the content of philosophical inquiry.¹²³ Barth was opposed to the use of objective evidence or philosophical apologetics to affirm the veracity of the Christian faith. Revelation cannot be authenticated by reason or history.¹²⁴ For Brunner, the knowledge of faith is different from that of rational knowledge; "we must decide either for proof or for trust, either for rational evidence or for the evidence of personal encounter."¹²⁵ Niebuhr added that "religious faith cannot be simply subordinated to reason or made to stand under its judgement."¹²⁶

¹²³Ibid., p. 491.

¹²⁴Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4 vols., trans. G. T. Thompson, Harold Knight, et. al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-58), 2:1:8.

¹²⁵Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 179.

¹²⁶Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 2:165.

CHAPTER 2
STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE FOUR SYSTEMS
AS PERCEIVED BY REPRESENTATIVE APOLOGISTS

Proponents of all four Christian apologetic systems have directly and indirectly criticized one another's positions and argued for the merits of their own. This has often led to the charge by rationalists, evidentialists, presuppositionalists, and subjectivists that their critics frequently misunderstand their position. Indeed, much confusion has occurred because of extreme caricatures of alternative approaches as well as a resulting minimization of areas of compatibility.

In this chapter, the strengths and weaknesses of the four apologetic systems as perceived by representative proponents will be outlined, and concluding suggestions for a more comprehensive approach which could utilize, in varying combinations, positive elements of all these systems will be made.

It should be noted that the strengths of each system can contain implicit criticisms of others, and conversely, the weaknesses of each system can implicitly point to benefits of others.

Strengths of Rationalist Apologetics

Inescapability of the Fundamental Laws of Thought

Geisler observes that "Unless the law of noncontradiction holds, then there is not even the most minimal possibility of meaning nor any hope for establishing truth."¹²⁷ There can be no meaningful discourse without the fundamental laws of contradiction and identity. Apologists emphasize that adherence to these laws is not tantamount to an uncritical acceptance of Aristotelian metaphysics or epistemology. Aristotle defined but did not invent logic.¹²⁸ Sproul observes that in the twentieth century, a number of thinkers, especially existentialists, have rejected the law of contradiction on the theoretical level. But he adds that in spite of this intellectual denial, "they all live their daily lives in the tacit assumption of the validity of the law. . . . Man cannot survive or function without assuming the validity of the law of contradiction."¹²⁹

There is an a priori dimension to knowledge without which epistemological skepticism would be unavoidable. Pure empiricism leads to a cognitive cul-de-sac. Reality is intelligible and knowable because of the innate

¹²⁷Norman L. Geisler, Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 41.

¹²⁸R. C. Sproul, The Psychology of Atheism (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), pp. 28-29.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 29.

categories of thought. "There is a correspondence or adequation between the mind and being."¹³⁰

Importance of the *Imago Dei*

Rationalist apologetics stresses the biblical doctrine of the residual image of God in man, especially in terms of human rationality. This provides a basis for common ground with non-Christians, and direct communication and dialogue is possible. The Christian philosophy of life is open to verification and commends itself to reason. At the same time, apologists of this school recognize that confrontation with Christian truth requires not only an intellectual but also a volitional response. A cogent case can be made for the truth of the Christian world view, and objections can be reasonably answered. But in the final analysis, it is the non-Christian who is responsible for the decision to personally embrace or reject Christian theism.

Need for an Interpretive Framework

World views are unavoidable; "refusing to adopt an explicit world view will turn out to be itself a world view or at least a philosophic position."¹³¹ Rationalists recognize that facts are perceived in accordance with an interpretive framework, and have meaning only within the context of metaphysical models.

¹³⁰Geisler, Apologetics, p. 42.

¹³¹James W. Sire, The Universe Next Door (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 19.

It is best, therefore, for a person to be conscious and critical of the philosophy of life he or she has assumed, and to be willing to adopt a new model if it commends itself as a more reasonable alternative. Rationalist apologists encourage others to try looking at the world through theistic glasses and see what a difference it will make metaphysically, epistemologically, and morally. This is not an exercise in futility, because, as Geisler argues, "There are a limited number of mutually exclusive ways to view the whole of reality."¹³² This is the thesis of Sire's book, The Universe Next Door, which invites the reader to compare and contrast the limited number of answers to the basic questions of the nature of prime reality, man, death, morality, and the meaning of history.¹³³ This perspective was also championed by C. S. Lewis, who held that Buddhism is a simplification of Hinduism and that Islam is a simplification of Christianity. For him, the best options could be narrowed down to Hinduism and Christianity, and from there to Christianity alone because of the person and work of Christ.¹³⁴

Need for Comprehensiveness in Testing the Truth of a World View

The rationalistic approach to Christian apologetics "allows for the possibility of challenging presuppositions by logical and empirical

¹³²Geisler, Apologetics, p. 151.

¹³³Sire, The Universe, pp. 18, 207.

considerations."¹³⁵ According to this method, world views should not be fideistically presupposed but tested and verified in a way that is similar to the process used in scientific, historical, philosophical, and personal verification.¹³⁶ In general, proponents of this approach seek to be as comprehensive as possible in testing the truth of alternative philosophies of life. Carnell's apologetic system well illustrates this practice because of his fourfold verificational approach which combines empirical, axiological, psychological, and ethical evidence to demonstrate that Christian theism is more coherent and comprehensive than alternate world views.¹³⁷ Similarly, Purtill seeks to combine a variety of arguments together to establish a comprehensive case for the truth of theism. He draws an analogy between the parts of an automobile engine and apologetic combinationalism: "It is easy to show that no part of the engine taken separately

¹³⁴C. S. Lewis, letter to Sheldon Vanauken in A Severe Mercy (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), pp. 89-90.

¹³⁵Mark M. Hanna, Crucial Questions in Apologetics (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 97.

¹³⁶Colin Chapman, Christianity on Trial (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1975), pp. 23-35.

¹³⁷Edward John Carnell, An Introduction to Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948); A Philosophy of the Christian Religion (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952); Christian Commitment: An Apologetic (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957); The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960); Gordon R. Lewis, Testing Christianity's Truth Claims (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 176-283).

can move the car, but working together these parts can move the car."¹³⁸ Geisler is also a combinatorialist but differs from others who use this method in that he limits his combinatorialism to the sphere of arbitration among differing theistic religions rather than differing world views as in theism versus naturalism.¹³⁹

These apologists employ specific criteria to choose among the limited number of basic world views that are available. Sire offers inner intellectual coherence, comprehensiveness of the data of reality, explanatory power, and subjective satisfaction of personal needs as his criteria for discerning the validity of world views,¹⁴⁰ and these are essentially the same as those used by Carnell. For these apologists, logical consistency and empirical fit must operate together. As stressed earlier, most of them are not pure rationalists in the traditional epistemological sense of this word, but they utilize the rationalistic apologetic method which was defined in this study as a system which builds a rational case for Christian theism by demonstrating how it conforms to criteria used to evaluate the truth claims of competing world views. Consequently, they seek to combine both facts and reason. "Divorced from facts, which are themselves not discoverable by reason, reason must lose her power. On the other hand, without

¹³⁸Richard L. Purtill, Reason to Believe (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 80.

¹³⁹Geisler, Apologetics, pp. 128-31, 145.

¹⁴⁰Sire, The Universe, pp. 208-12. Arlie J. Hoover, who uses elements of both rationalist and evidentialist apologetics in The Case for Christian Theism,

reason, facts themselves lose their significance."¹⁴¹ As Holmes argues, all truth is God's truth, and this emphasis on the unity of truth overcomes epistemological skepticism.¹⁴²

suggests nine guidelines for evaluating and choosing world views (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 47-53.

¹⁴¹Rheinallt Nantlais Williams, Faith, Facts, History, Science--and How They Fit Together (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1973), pp. 49-50.

¹⁴²Arthur F. Holmes, All Truth Is God's Truth (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977).

The Coherence of Faith and Reason

Rationalist apologists argue that "reason must judge the credentials of any alleged revelation."¹⁴³ While they acknowledge that faith cannot be constructed out of reason, their perspective on the unity of truth leads them to stress the integrity of faith and understanding. According to Stephen Neill,

Reason is not the affirmation of the arrogant autonomy of man, fashioning a universe according to his own ideas. It is that faculty in man which makes it possible for him to receive the revelation of God, to receive revelation in the form of the Word of God. But, to receive it, he must be humble, and ready to listen to God, whenever and however He speaks.¹⁴⁴ Unlike presuppositionalists who emphasize the self-authenticating nature of Scripture, rationalists believe that one is responsible to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). In doing so, these apologists do not believe that this is a manifestation of human autonomy in which the mind is elevated as the final authority for truth. Rather, just as it is reasonable for one to look for credentials before submitting to a human authority in any given field, so the authority of revelation can be submitted to, once shown to be well-founded on the basis of God-given rationality. As Gordon R. Lewis argues,

To be responsible before the Bible, the unbeliever must have enough judgment to know why he should determine his lifestyle by Scripture rather than the Koran or the Book of Mormon. The use of systematic

¹⁴³Purtill, Reason, p. 119.

¹⁴⁴Stephen Neill, Anglicanism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 123.

consistency to distinguish the Bible from the Koran in no way detracts from the Bible's authority. It verifies the Bible's claim above all competitors.¹⁴⁵

Weaknesses of Rationalist Apologetics

Inadequacies of Pure Rationalism

Although most rationalist apologists do not exclusively rely upon aprioristic reasoning, they use this epistemological approach more than other apologists. To the extent to which they do so, their apologetic method has been subject to criticism on several levels.

As Holmes has observed, the law of contradiction is practically necessary but cannot be demonstrated to be logically necessary. Deductive reasoning is not autonomous.¹⁴⁶ The axiomatic principles of rationalism cannot be rationally proved. "One cannot legitimately argue that the law of noncontradiction is valid because it is contradictory to deny it. For in that case he is using the law of noncontradiction as the basis of his proof of the law, which begs the whole question."¹⁴⁷

In addition, the premises used in aprioristic reasoning are derived from nondeductive sources, whether assumptions, authority, or experience.¹⁴⁸ Without these imported premises, rationalism could not stand, because it would

¹⁴⁵Lewis, Testing, p. 204; cf. Purtill, Reason, pp. 119-27.

¹⁴⁶Holmes, All Truth, p. 88.

¹⁴⁷Geisler, Apologetics, p. 45.

¹⁴⁸Holmes, All Truth, p. 94.

have no relation to reality; the rationally inescapable is not the real. Geisler adds that the epistemological rationalist confuses actual undeniability (e.g., I exist) with rational inescapability.¹⁴⁹

Insufficient Test for Truth

At best this method can only test the falsity of a world view, because conflicting systems can be consistent with their own presuppositions. This is Montgomery's position in Faith Founded on Fact:

Christianity does indeed offer the most comprehensive solution to the human dilemma, but apart from the marshaling of brute fact to prove this, the claim is worth no more than that of any other religion or philosophy leading to maximal comprehensiveness or coherence. And if only Christians are in a position to identify what is truly "comprehensive," "coherent," or "ultimately true," then apologetics is an exercise in perfectly circular reasoning, that is, in perfect futility.¹⁵⁰

Application of the law of contradiction in world view critiques may reveal flaws, but as Montgomery argues, "the fallaciousness of another world-view never establishes the truth of your own."¹⁵¹ The criteria of coherence and consistency may eliminate false world views, but they cannot establish the truth of one world view over all others.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹Geisler Apologetics, p. 43.

¹⁵⁰John Warwick Montgomery, Faith Founded on Fact (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1978), p. xi.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. xiv.

¹⁵²Geisler, Apologetics, pp. 45, 131.

Theistic Arguments Are Inconclusive

Natural theology has inherent limitations; it cannot offer apodictic proof of the existence of the infinite and personal God of Christian theism. Hoover adds that an excessive preoccupation with the theistic proofs actually inhibits the religious life because it can turn one away from the true personal God to a philosophical construct.¹⁵³ In Crucial Questions in Apologetics, Hanna criticizes what he calls "comprehensive verificationism" which claims demonstrability for its arguments for the existence of God:

Comprehensive verificationism does not succeed because of the unsoundness of theistic arguments. Beginning with a mere concept of God, one cannot validly infer the extraconceptual or actual existence of God. Beginning with a finite world, one cannot deductively arrive at an infinite God. In spite of the great ingenuity expended in attempting to frame a sound theistic argument, none has escaped the charge of smuggling in question-begging assumptions. Although there are recurrent attempts to rehabilitate the classic theistic arguments (e.g., the cosmological argument by Norman Geisler and other Thomists, the ontological argument by Charles Hartshorne, the teleological argument by Richard Taylor), they are rejected by most philosophers.¹⁵⁴

Concerning Geisler's revised cosmological argument, Whitcomb writes, "One must seriously question whether any sophisticated unbeliever would surrender to God after reading such an argument."¹⁵⁵ Human reason cannot establish that which by definition is outside its reach.

¹⁵³Hoover, Christian Theism, p. 116.

¹⁵⁴Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 99.

¹⁵⁵John C. Whitcomb, "Christian Evidences and Apologetics," (class syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary, n.d.), p. 13.

Lack of Universally Acceptable Criteria

Chapman maintains that pure rationalism actually leads to skepticism because it places finite human reason in the position of being the ultimate arbiter of truth.¹⁵⁶ As Williams notes, logic can be a good servant, but it is a bad master. "Reason may prejudge the results of its inquiry by taking as axiomatic that what it cannot encompass must be nonexistent."¹⁵⁷ An appeal to logical consistency and even factual comprehensiveness can be misleading because one's perspective on what is reasonable and factual is largely determined by the world view he or she has already espoused. This is why Geisler, unlike most rationalist apologists, rejects combinationalism as a test for the truth of world views. He states that "when testing world views we cannot presuppose the truth of a given context or framework, for that is precisely what is being tested. Combinationalism cannot be a test for the context (or model) by which the very facts, to which the combinationists appeal, are given meaning."¹⁵⁸ What is perceived as rationally satisfactory and empirically adequate is actually predetermined by the theistic or nontheistic model one holds. According to Geisler, "Combinationalism has no way to know whether the model fits the facts best because the facts are all prefitted by the model to give meaning to the whole from the very beginning."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶Chapman, Christianity, pp. 59-62.

¹⁵⁷Williams, Faith, Facts, pp. 51-52.

¹⁵⁸Geisler, Apologetics, p. 129. Italics deleted.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 131.

Significantly, if Geisler's restated cosmological argument is in any way invalid, his criticisms of combinationalism would actually place him in a presuppositionalist camp, because he could only presuppose the theistic world view. In a similar way, Robert L. Reymond, a presuppositionalist, criticizes Carnell's test of systematic consistency, saying that this test "is the very test devised by the apostate autonomous man to determine what can and cannot be, and what is and is not true, the very test which has for its theory of fact pure contingency and which has for its goal, at best, only probability."¹⁶⁰ Reymond charges that Carnell is inconsistent because he tries to espouse both a presuppositional "logical starting point" (the word of God as self-authenticating) and a rationalistic "synoptic starting point" (the word of God must be tested before it deserves a rational man's assent).¹⁶¹

Minimizes the Noncognitive and Personal Dimension of Truth

Thomas V. Morris contends that "no world view, and in fact no human knowledge at all, is without dependence on the nonlogical or personal contributions of the knower."¹⁶² Other apologists charge that most rationalist apologists overlook this fact and write as though people reason in a way that is

¹⁶⁰Robert L. Reymond, The Justification of Knowledge (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976), p. 133. Italics deleted.

¹⁶¹Ibid., pp. 130-36.

totally dispassionate, disinterested, nonpersonal, and mechanical.¹⁶³ When the "personal coefficients of logic"¹⁶⁴ are ignored, an apologetic system becomes abstract, theoretical, and impractical. Commitment to ultimate philosophical perspectives is not merely intellectual; it is also influenced by emotional and volitional factors. Few people can objectively put on another set of world-view glasses to see if they make more sense of the world than their own as rationalistic apologists ask them to do. Presuppositionalists argue that it is unrealistic to expect that a naturalist will be willing to make a radical cognitive shift by looking at the world through theistic glasses.

Strengths of Evidentialist Apologetics

Decisions Are Based on Probability, Not Deductive Certainty

Evidentialists readily admit that the conclusions available through the inductive process of historical inquiry are probable, not certain. But they are quick to add that no decisions in life are made on the basis of deductive certainty. The deductive process can reveal syllogistic validity, but this is not the same as

¹⁶²Thomas V. Morris, Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics: A Critique (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 52.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 53. Morris applies this criticism to the writings of Francis Schaeffer who uses rationalistic argumentation within a mild presuppositionalist framework.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

truth about the real world. Analytical propositions are tautologous, and the certainty they offer is on a theoretical, not a practical level.

Because of the inductive leap, a posteriori proof is formally invalid. Nevertheless, historical apologists contend that the probabilistic conclusions inherent in law courts, scientific research, and everyday decisions are practical necessities and generally servicable in spite of the theoretical problems with induction. William Dyrness makes this observation about Montgomery's contribution to apologetic argument:

. . . it is inadmissible to ask more of a line of reasoning than it can possibly give. Historical judgments are based on available records. No historical data can ever be conclusive. In historical reasoning, therefore, we can expect only probability, and we must not be disappointed when we cannot have certainty. The uncertainty here is not with Christianity, but with the tenuous nature of historical argumentation.¹⁶⁵

Probability in this context is not synonymous with randomness and pure chance.

The case for Christianity as founded on factuality can be established with a sufficiently high degree of probability such that it becomes reasonable to embrace it.

Importance of the *Imago Dei*

Like rationalist apologetics, evidentialism takes the biblical doctrine of the imago Dei with complete seriousness. Evidentialists acknowledge the effects of the fall, but most relate this more to human volition than human rationality.

¹⁶⁵William Dyrness, Christian Apologetics in a World Community (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1983), p. 58.

Because of this, there is sufficient common ground to which Christian apologists can appeal when communicating with unbelievers. The non-Christian is capable of an intelligent consideration of Christian evidences, even though these evidences challenge his or her philosophical assumptions. Montgomery states that "Our apologetic should be modeled on the Christ who offered objective evidence of his power to forgive sins by healing the paralytic and who convinced unbelieving Thomas that he was God and Lord by the undeniable presence of his resurrected body."¹⁶⁶

Although evidentialists like Montgomery have been accused by presuppositionalists of minimizing the need for the work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of the unbeliever, they do take the position that evidence alone is insufficient; apologetics will fail without the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁷ They would agree with Hoover's position that the external evidence is a necessary cause of belief, but not the sufficient cause of belief. "God himself, the Holy Spirit, is the sufficient cause of belief, but he uses the evidence as he works."¹⁶⁸ The Holy Spirit alone can provide inner certainty and conviction, but this does not eliminate the reality of human responsibility.

¹⁶⁶John Warwick Montgomery, "Once Upon an A Priori," in Jerusalem and Athens, ed. E. R. Geehan (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1971), p. 390.

¹⁶⁷Idem, "Apologetics and Evangelism," in Sensible Christianity (cassette tapes, Santa Ana, California: One Way Library, 1976), vol. 1, tape 2.

¹⁶⁸Hoover, Christian Theism, p. 271.

Emphasis on the Commonality of Logic and Experience

Evidentialism "recognizes the unavoidability of making use of ordinary ways of knowing in order to become aware of God's self-revelation in Scripture."¹⁶⁹ Presuppositionalists charge that there is little or no common ground between what they call "apostate thought" and "regenerate thought," but evidentialists reply that daily communication between believers and unbelievers requires a commonly-held logic and world of experience.¹⁷⁰ Without this commonality, communication and dialogue would be impossible. It is their contention that metaphysical presuppositions can be minimized in the apologetic endeavor. "Montgomery rightly emphasizes that the historical method (the scientific method as applied to historical phenomena) assumes as little as possible and provides for the objective discovery of as much as possible."¹⁷¹ Montgomery argues that the Christian doctrine of the incarnation which teaches that God entered the human sphere in the person of the God-man repudiates any attempt to divorce "Christian facts" from secular, nonreligious facts.¹⁷² Truth must be factually based, and Christian truth can be verified by objective, public evidence.

¹⁶⁹Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 97.

¹⁷⁰David W. Diehl, "Historical Apologetics," (class syllabus, The King's College, 1974), p. 6.

¹⁷¹Martin Batts, "A Summary and Critique of the Historical Apologetic of John Warwick Montgomery" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1977), pp. 87-88.

Stress on the Historicity of Christianity

Evidentialists stress the importance of empirical content in the substantiation of the Christian world view. They focus on the historicity of Christianity and approach the Bible as a primary historical document. Montgomery has made a particularly significant contribution in this regard and Ronald H. Nash has stated that "No conservative theologian has done more to articulate the nature and importance of the relationship between Christian faith and history than John Warwick Montgomery."¹⁷³ Although Montgomery has been criticized for his anti-presuppositional stance on the one hand and his inability to avoid tacit presuppositions on the other, a number of his critics acknowledge the importance of his stress on the empirical study and investigation of history.¹⁷⁴ For Montgomery, the historical incarnation provides an answer to Flew and Wisdom's parable of the gardener, because "central to the Christian position is the historically grounded assertion that the Gardener entered the garden: God actually appeared in the empirical world in Jesus Christ

¹⁷²Montgomery, Faith Founded, pp. 33-34.

¹⁷³Ronald H. Nash, "The Use and Abuse of History in Christian Apologetics," Christian Scholars Review 1:217.

¹⁷⁴W. Stanford Reid, "Subjectivity or Objectivity in Historical Understanding?" in Geehan, Jerusalem and Athens, pp. 418-19.

and fully manifested his deity through miraculous acts in general and his resurrection from the dead in particular.¹⁷⁵

Montgomery claims that if the resurrection event is granted, it cannot be regarded as trivial because of its profound implications with regard to the universal problem of death.¹⁷⁶ The fact of the resurrection and its meaning are conjoined in the context of Christ's own claims.

. . . Christ's resurrection can be examined by non-Christians as well as by Christians. Its factual character, when considered in light of the claims of the One raised from the dead, points not to a multiplicity of equally possible interpretations, but to a single "best" interpretation (to an interpretation most consistent with the data), namely the deity of Christ (John 2:18-22).¹⁷⁷

Not all evidentialists agree with Montgomery that historical events are self-interpreting, but they agree that while facts do not create faith, they are essential for faith. Williams writes that a perceptual shift can take place in the logic of whole situation that can move a person beyond the level of fact to an illumination of the facts from a new perspective. In this sense, biblical miracles "were intended to conduct, not to compel, men to faith."¹⁷⁸ Fact does not force faith, but faith cannot be divorced from fact.

¹⁷⁵John Warwick Montgomery, "Is Man His Own God?" in The Suicide of Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1971), p. 261.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 263-64.

¹⁷⁷Montgomery, Faith Founded, p. 34.

¹⁷⁸Williams, Faith, Facts, p. 85.

External and Objective Evidence for Christian Truth Claims

Evidentialists argue that the marshaling of external evidences from archaeology, fulfilled biblical prophecy, textual analysis, and historical investigation makes it possible for the non-Christian to make an intelligent investigation of Christianity. "The Christian faith has the advantage over other religious options which appeal to inner subjective experience in that it is the only religion which purports to offer external, objective evidence of its validity."¹⁷⁹ It is not necessary to retreat to fideism or inner experience in embracing and defending the Christian world view. Instead, evidentialists invite unbelievers to consider the objective historical evidence for the veracity of Scripture, particularly insofar as this relates to the person and work of Jesus Christ. While these apologists recognize that the evidence alone will not force anyone to become a Christian,¹⁸⁰ they maintain that the historical, archaeological, and textual evidence does provide sufficient ground for testing the Christian faith on the personal and experiential level.

Weaknesses of Evidentialist Apologetics

¹⁷⁹Batts, "A Summary and Critique," p. 87.

¹⁸⁰"Of course, sinful self-interest may tempt the non-Christian to avoid the weight of evidence, just as self-interest has so frequently corrupted investigation in other purely secular matters. But selfish perversions of data or interpretation can be made plain in the area of revelational fact no less than in the nonrevelational sphere, for Christian revelation occurred in time--in the secular world. To miss this point is to miss the character of the Incarnation" (Montgomery, Faith Founded, p. 34).

Evidentialists Use Hidden Presuppositions

Critics of evidentialism observe that just as presuppositionalists postulate metaphysical assumptions as their starting point, so verificationists postulate epistemological assumptions as their starting point; the latter can only assume that there is a rational structure that is universal and correlative with reality.¹⁸¹ Despite their disclaimers, evidentialists like Montgomery cannot avoid the truth that "empiricism rests upon pre-scientific or naive views concerning reality that have come to the historian either by intuition or by authority whether human or divine."¹⁸² Montgomery cannot empirically substantiate the heuristic assumptions in his methodological starting point that knowledge is possible, that the universe is structured, and that the senses can be trusted.¹⁸³ Clark charges that Montgomery as an empiricist is as much of a "dogmatist" on sensation as the presuppositionalist is on revelation; he cannot provide any evidence for his own first principle.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 100.

¹⁸²Reid, "Subjectivity or Objectivity," p. 408. "Empiricists always operate on presuppositions which they cannot prove by their own methodology" (Carl F. H. Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6 vols. [Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1976-83], 1:231).

¹⁸³Dennis Ray Hillman, "The Use of Basic Issues in Apologetics from Selected New Testament Apologies," (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979), p. 54.

¹⁸⁴Gordon H. Clark, Three Types of Religious Philosophy (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1977), p. 117.

Montgomery admits that "a prioris must lie at the basis of every procedure," but says that "they should be kept to a minimum, and be as self-evident and beyond dispute as much as possible."¹⁸⁵ Because of this, Henry has commented that "Montgomery differs from the presuppositionalists he disowns only in the number and scope of the presuppositions he prefers for deciphering the meaning of history."¹⁸⁶

Montgomery's presuppositions are not only epistemological but also metaphysical. "Metaphysical presuppositions are implicit in every epistemology, and epistemological presuppositions are implicit in every metaphysics."¹⁸⁷ Montgomery and all evidentialists unavoidably import Christian presuppositions in their apologetic methodology.

. . . [Pinnock and Montgomery] seem unaware that they, as believers, are sitting on a gold-mine of presuppositions. In the past they have dipped into that hidden treasure most noticeably when confronted with the question of biblical inerrancy, yet without admitting the cash-value of the presuppositional method. . . . all Christian apologists presuppose certain biblical commitments, regardless of whether they are willing to call them presuppositions. The wide discrepancy between Christian apologists arises from the varying degrees of consistency with which they honor those commitments in their apologetic method.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵John Warwick Montgomery, The Shape of the Past (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975 [1962]), p. 265. Italics deleted.

¹⁸⁶Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:231.

¹⁸⁷Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 100.

¹⁸⁸Thom Notaro, Van Til and the Use of Evidence (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980), pp. 102, 105.

Evidentialists tacitly assume the validity of the theistic Weltanschauung from the beginning.¹⁸⁹

Historical Events Are Not Self-Interpreting

In Historians' Fallacies, David Hackett Fischer argues that historical phenomena do not explain themselves, but are perceived through interpretive constructs.

Historians who seek to frame factual questions and to verify factual answers almost always do so in order to elicit a historical explanation of some sort. They rarely do so for the sake of the facts themselves. A historical explanation is an attempt to relate some historical phenomenon in a functional way to other historical phenomena. Nothing is literally self-explanatory. . . . A fact becomes significant in proportion to its relevance to an explanation model. Historians actually seek to explain things by means of many different, but sometimes overlapping, explanation models."¹⁹⁰

Alan Richardson also criticizes the position that historical events are self-interpreting, even though his apologetic method is empirically and historically oriented. The principle of interpretation and meaning of history cannot be found in history.

The facts of history cannot be disentangled from the principles of interpretation by which alone they can be presented to us as history, that is, as a coherent and connected series or order of events. Christian faith

¹⁸⁹Reid, "Subjectivity or Objectivity," p. 409; Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 100. "Are these Montgomery-approved presuppositions inductively acquired, or is he not here doing secretly what he finds so objectionable when other presuppositionalists do the same thing openly, that is, begin with the validity of the Christian revelation?" (Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:231).

¹⁹⁰David Hackett Fischer, Historians' Fallacies, Harper Colophon Books (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 100.

supplies the necessary principle of interpretation by which the facts of the biblical and Christian history can be rationally seen and understood. No other principle of interpretation can give us so reasonable a view of the facts which the prophetic and apostolic witnesses record.¹⁹¹ Montgomery, on the other hand, claims that "there are objective events which do indeed carry their interpretation with them. This is true not only of the events of biblical history but of the events of history in general."¹⁹² Elsewhere he states that one must confidently endeavor to find the meaning of historical events by objective study of the events themselves.¹⁹³ Applying this principle to the person and work of Christ, he states, "When the historical facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection are allowed to speak for themselves, they lead to belief in his deity and to acceptance of his account of the total historical process."¹⁹⁴

Montgomery's critics believe that this claim is contradicted by "the paradox that historical facts which carry their own interpretation somehow give rise to alternative interpretations."¹⁹⁵ People interpret the facts of experience and of history in differing ways according to their metaphysical presuppositions.

¹⁹¹Alan Richardson, Christian Apologetics (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1947), p. 150; cf. pp. 91-99, 106-7, 118, 147, 169-72.

¹⁹²John Warwick Montgomery, Where Is History Going? (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1969), p. 203.

¹⁹³Idem, "Clark's Philosophy of History," in The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968), p. 377.

¹⁹⁴Ibid.

¹⁹⁵Hillman, "The Use," p. 54.

Geisler states that "facts and events have ultimate meaning only within and by virtue of the context of the world view in which they are conceived."¹⁹⁶

. . . evidence gains its meaning only by its immediate and overall context; and evidence as such cannot, without begging the question, be used to establish the overall context by which it obtains its very meaning as evidence. . . . it is a vicious circle to argue that a given fact (say, the resuscitation of Christ's body) is evidence of a certain truth claim (say, Christ's claim to be God), unless it can be established that the event comes in the context of a theistic universe.¹⁹⁷

Even if the resurrection of Jesus is accepted as a historical fact, this does not, in and of itself, establish the truth of the Christian world view. Van Til maintains that a pragmatist philosopher would refuse to follow the evidential line of reasoning that Christ's resurrection proves his deity. "Granted he allows that Christ actually arose from the grave, he will say that this proves nothing more than that something very unusual took place in the case of that man Jesus."¹⁹⁸

Similarly, Reymond uses Wolfhart Pannenberg's Jesus--God and Man to illustrate the fact that acceptance of Jesus' historical resurrection does not mean that one will accept his full deity, at least in terms of "Jesus' ontic preëxistence as the Second Person of orthodoxy's ontological Trinity."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶Geisler, Apologetics, p. 95.

¹⁹⁷Ibid. Italics deleted.

¹⁹⁸Cornelius Van Til, The Defense of the Faith, 3rd ed. rev. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1967), p. 8.

¹⁹⁹Reymond, Justification, pp. 152-53.

Geisler adds that meaning is not inherent in historical facts and events; meaning demands an interpretive context which is distinct from the facts and events.²⁰⁰ Factual significance is determined by this cognitive map, so that in effect, there are no brute facts, but "interprefacts." Thus, Montgomery, Pinnock, McDowell, and other evidentialists are criticized for their direct appeal to the resurrection of Christ without acknowledging in their apologetic method the theistic world view which provides the biblical context in which the resurrection takes place. Without this theistic perspective, the nontheist could say that it proves nothing more than that an unusual human resuscitation took place in the past. "The supposedly historically-validated fact of Christ's resurrection is meaningless without the presuppositional declaration of meaning given to it by the revelatory work of God."²⁰¹

In Faith Founded on Fact, Montgomery defends his thesis that facts and events are self-interpreting against Henry's charge in God, Revelation and Authority that they are not, but problems still remain.²⁰² In addition, he appears to contradict his own perspective by saying in The Shape of the Past that "The student of history needs to realize from the very outset of his work that events must never be confused with interpretations of them, and that historical truth is

²⁰⁰Geisler, Apologetics, p. 96.

²⁰¹Hillman, "The Use," p. 55.

²⁰²Montgomery, Faith Founded, pp. xvii-xxv.

not to be identified with the judgment of individual or Party."²⁰³ In the same work, he acknowledges that the historian's conception of human nature which stems in turn from his general philosophy of life has a real bearing on his interpretation of historical events.²⁰⁴ In Where Is History Going? Montgomery defends the thesis that only biblical revelation can provide answers to fundamental historical questions, including the meaning and direction of history. At this point, Montgomery would actually appear to agree with Clark's position that without the presupposition of revelation, history cannot be correctly interpreted.²⁰⁵ If he believes that certain events are self-interpreting while broad patterns are not, it would be difficult for him to establish where the line should be drawn.

Weaknesses of Inductive Argumentation

Like the law of contradiction in deductive reasoning, the practical necessity of the principle of induction can be shown, but not its logical necessity.²⁰⁶ Because "all inductive arguments are formal fallacies," Clark contends that "Historical arguments to prove the resurrection and all sensory

²⁰³Idem, The Shape, p. 9.

²⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 14-17.

²⁰⁵Gordon H. Clark, "Several Implications," in Nash, The Philosophy, p. 104.

²⁰⁶Holmes, All Truth, p. 96.

arguments to prove its significance" are invalid.²⁰⁷ The inherent limitations of the empirical method, according to Henry, are such that "it can cope with only restricted features of the Gospels and handle its basic concerns inconclusively."²⁰⁸ Henry adds that empirical evidences are "always marshaled in the interest of a given perspective."²⁰⁹ Just as there are no neutral starting points, so there are no bare or neutral facts. Sensation is not self-authenticating and cannot inherently provide true meaning or knowledge without some form of apriorism. "At most an empirical test can indicate whether religious beliefs have a perceptually discernible significance. It cannot at all decide the objective meaning or existence of the supraempirical."²¹⁰

Presuppositionalists and subjectivists also take issue with the evidential perspective on probability, arguing that probability is an inadequate basis upon which to build one's eternal destiny. Van Til and others aver that evidentialists compromise their Christian position by adopting an apologetic method that seeks to gain common ground with the unbeliever by accepting a non-Christian positivism. Such a position, they say, is "based on a view of the world in which

²⁰⁷Clark, Three Types, p. 116.

²⁰⁸Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:259.

²⁰⁹Ibid.

²¹⁰Ibid., 1:262.

Chance is ultimate."²¹¹ Van Til concludes that "A probable argument is not better than an improbable one if the very idea of probability is without meaning."²¹² While evidentialists argue for a high degree of probability for the resurrection on the basis of the historical evidence, presuppositionalists claim that this line of reasoning overlooks the fact that what a person accepts as probable depends largely on his or her initial assumptions.

In addition, Montgomery has been criticized for an unwarranted equation of historical method with scientific method. W. Stanford Reid maintains that "the historian can never be as empirical as the physical or natural scientist" because of the lack of repeatability and the fragmentary nature of historical evidence.²¹³ Montgomery's use of Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy has also been subject to criticism, not only because he inappropriately applies it to the macroscopic level when in fact it applies only to the subatomic level, but also because his utilization of this principle with respect to miracles is self-defeating. If because of this principle one should keep an open mind regarding the unique and unexpected, this would relegate the miraculous

²¹¹Cornelius Van Til, "Response" to Clark H. Pinnock, "The Philosophy of Christian Evidences," in Geehan, Jerusalem and Athens, p. 426; Charles A. Clough, Giving the Answer, 2nd ed. rev. (Lubbock, Texas: Lubbock Bible Church, 1977), pp. 15-16.

²¹²Van Til, "Response" to Clark H. Pinnock, p. 427.

²¹³Reid, "Subjectivity or Objectivity," pp. 409-10.

to the unusual in such a way that it could be placed within a naturalistic context.²¹⁴

Problematic Assumption that People Approach Evidence in an Open and Unprejudiced Way

Presuppositionalists and subjectivists often criticize "traditional" or "classical" apologists (rationalists and evidentialists) for an excessive optimism in assuming that unbelievers are willing and able to examine the evidence for Christianity in an open, honest, and unprejudiced way. Empirically-oriented apologists place too much confidence in the persuasive value of evidences and erroneously assume a stance of historical objectivity, forgetting that the significance of historical facts is, in fact, determined by one's presuppositional framework. For example, Henry declares that Pinnock's empirical method

. . . requires a herculean burden of demonstration that no evangelical theologian, however devout or brilliant, can successfully carry. For Pinnock seems to imply . . . that, without any appeal to transcendent divine revelation and by empirical considerations alone, the ordinary unregenerate man can be logically and inescapably driven to a Christian understanding of reality, and that any insistence on the invalidity of such empirical argumentation is due solely to volitional recalcitrance and not at all to empirical evidential deficiencies.²¹⁵

Christian doctrines are derived from revelation, not from rational argumentation or empirical observation.

²¹⁴Ibid., pp. 413-15.

²¹⁵Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 1:220.

Along similar lines, evidentialists are accused of unrealistically minimizing the effect of sin upon unregenerate cognition and volition. According to critics, Montgomery and others overestimate the ability of the unbeliever to "understand the factual nature of the world and rationally interpret the data of his experience."²¹⁶ "If it is true that Van Til emphasizes too greatly the inability of man to perceive truth, then it is also true that Montgomery's approach is too greatly weighted in favor of man's ability to understand and to respond to the truth of God."²¹⁷ Some evidentialists, however, acknowledge the noetic effects of sin and appeal to the common and special grace of God in overcoming the cognitive and volitional barriers.

Evidentialism Is an Incomplete Apologetic

Evidences alone are not sufficient; they need to be grounded in an interpretive context.

Although the resurrection of Christ is central, it does not stand alone, nor is it the only element of Christian truth subject to historical investigation. Christ in fact came to fulfill Old Testament promises, and thus he cannot be isolated from these promises. Biblical revelation--the Old Testament people of Israel, the person and work of Christ, and the founding of the Christian church--makes a whole that transcends the sum of its parts. So to the

²¹⁶John Warwick Montgomery, "The Place of Reason--Part 1," His, February 1966, p. 12.

²¹⁷Hillman, "The Use," p. 55.

historical facts we need to add rational arguments to make Christian reality convincing. We need, in short, an interpretation of historical facts.²¹⁸ Christian evidences serve an important apologetic function, but they must be supplemented by philosophical and personal factors. Without these factors, an objectivistic evidential methodology may either fail to "penetrate the heart of the unbeliever,"²¹⁹ or lead to a faith in an "impersonal creed about God instead of a living faith in the Person of God himself."²²⁰

Strengths of Presuppositionalist Apologetics

Presuppositions Are Unavoidable

No person, including the agnostic, is free of metaphysical and religious presuppositions.

In the actual course of a person's life, religious assumptions are chronologically prior to theoretical concepts and definitions. The failure to distinguish logical priority from chronological sequence may result in the mistaken notion that a person can look at religion in a purely neutral and objective way, that he can form concepts and definitions without being involved in any religious assumption.²²¹

Both rationalists and presuppositionalists recognize this, but the difference is that rationalists believe that "no matter what a person's beliefs may be it is still possible for him to be objective in the sense that he is willing to examine critically

²¹⁸Dyrness, Christian Apologetics, p. 59.

²¹⁹John C. Whitcomb, "Christian Evidences and Apologetics" (class syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary, n.d.), pp. 38-40.

²²⁰Diehl, "Historical Apologetics," p. 6.

the evidence that would destroy his own beliefs as well as the evidence that would support them."²²² Presuppositionalists deny this, saying that vested interests and a sinful desire for autonomy render the unbeliever incapable of such objectivity, especially when it comes to the implications of Christian truth claims. This is why they appeal more consistently to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit than do rationalists and evidentialists.

All thought processes and perspectives are shaped by presuppositional frameworks; in the final analysis, every system is fideistic, because its determinative first principles cannot be demonstrated. Presuppositionalists claim, however, that while all reasoning in this sense is circular, the presupposition of biblical revelation encompasses the whole of reality in its circle.

Even Pinnock, who assumes an antipresuppositional stance in his verificationist position, admits that the data of the external world

. . . reaches us through the filter of the paradigm or world view that influences our perception. At certain intervals in our lives we find we have to change or exchange one paradigm for another. The purpose behind my writing this book is to call the reader to consider making a paradigm shift, specifically, to start to view reality from a new perspective, from the position of a faith-commitment to Jesus Christ.²²³

²²¹David Hugh Freeman, A Philosophical Study of Religion (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1964), p. 11.

²²²Ibid., p. 12.

²²³Clark H. Pinnock, Reason Enough (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1980), p. 121.

While he claims to show reason why such a paradigm shift should be made, presuppositionalists argue that the validity of his line of reasoning in the minds of his readers will in fact be perceived in accordance with the cognitive paradigms of which he speaks.

Emphasis on the Fact-Meaning Distinction

Presuppositionalists argue that there are no bare or "brute" facts; meaning is unavoidably assigned to all facts and evidence by prior metaphysical assumptions. Data are interpreted in light of these philosophical frameworks so that all facts are actually "interprefacts." Both Christian and non-Christians approach life with distinctive metaphysical faith-assumptions which are determinative of the meanings that are associated with given events. Presuppositionalists stress the need to spell out these assumptions from the beginning of any discussion about religious truth.

Applying the principle that "presuppositionless experience is an impossible philosophy"²²⁴ to historiography, Clark states that all historical writing depends on presuppositions. "Norms of importance govern the selection of what to include in history books. Norms of possibility must be accepted from naturalistic scientism, existential hunch, or the biblical revelation with its

²²⁴Gordon H. Clark, Historiography: Secular and Religious (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1971), p. 371.

miraculous supernaturalism."²²⁵ Even when the historicity of the New Testament is granted, an antisupernatural presupposition will lead to a radically different interpretation of the meaning of what the New Testament describes as the resurrection of Christ than a revelatory presupposition. This is why Van Til argues that an appeal to the resurrection to prove the deity of Christ is ineffective, because such an argument already presupposes the existence of God.

Consistency with Biblical Theology

Presuppositionalists claim that their method is consistent with Scripture and criticize traditionalist apologists' use of biblical prooftexts to support their rationalist and evidential method. According to John C. Whitcomb,

The biblical method of winning men (including "intellectuals" and "honest doubters") is to present the Gospel prayerfully and from the context of a godly life. Only the "living and powerful" Word of God can puncture the unbeliever's shield of defense and penetrate into his heart Once converted by God's Holy Spirit, a man will see his intellectual problems in a new and proper perspective²²⁶

Whitcomb contends that biblical passages like Acts 17:16-34; Romans 1:20; 1 Peter 3:15; 1 John 4:1 do not support a rationalistic method of apologetics in spite of claims to the contrary.²²⁷

²²⁵Ibid.

²²⁶Whitcomb, "Christian Evidences and Apologetics," p. 41.

²²⁷Ibid., pp. 41-44; "Contemporary Apologetics and the Christian Faith," in "Christian Evidences and Apologetics," pp. 17-26.

Van Til maintains that talk about the existence of God is meaningless without a biblical context of who God is and what he has done.²²⁸ God's self-revelation in Scripture as the ontological Trinity is the epistemological precondition for meaningful discourse about his person and work. Presuppositionalists believe that Christianity must be seen and defended as a whole: "We do not first defend theism philosophically by an appeal to reason and experience in order, after that, to turn to Scripture for our knowledge and defense of Christianity. We get our theism as well as our Christianity from the Bible."²²⁹ One cannot know the God of Scripture until one submits to the truth of Scripture. Though not a strict presuppositionalist, Colin Brown acknowledges that

. . . in retrospect Anselm's basic approach seems to be right. It is not a case of proving first and then believing. It is only on the basis of examining the Christian faith itself that we can see its truth. It is precisely the act of belief which puts us in a position to understand what is involved. Admittedly the outsider can see certain things, but he sees them at a distance. He may well be able to evaluate such things as differences of historical method. But in the last analysis, the subject-matter of the philosophy of the Christian religion is our relationship with God. And only those who enjoy a conscious, filial relationship with God in Christ are in a position to know at first-hand what that relationship involves.²³⁰

²²⁸Van Til, "Response" to Clark H. Pinnock, p. 427.

²²⁹Idem, Defense, p. 8. Richard L. Pratt Jr.'s Every Thought Captive (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1979), a popularized treatment in the Van Til perspective, also claims that presuppositional apologetics is based on the teaching of Scripture (pp. 69-71).

²³⁰Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1969), p. 288.

Alternative to the Deficiencies of Traditional Apologetic Methodology

The more traditional rationalist and evidentialist approaches to Christian apologetics are perceived by presuppositionalists as concessions to apostate modes of thought. As a result, such lines of argumentation do not offer a true challenge to the non-Christian, but are vulnerable to refutation because they operate on the unbeliever's ground. On the other hand, presuppositionalists claim that their method puts the non-Christian rather than the apologist on the defensive, in that it challenges the unbeliever to see that he cannot explain reality by his presuppositions as well as the Christian can by his presuppositions.²³¹ The predominant theme, for example, in Clark's Three Types of Religious Philosophy is that the only alternative to the acknowledgement of a propositional revelation of fixed truth from God is skepticism.²³² Clark's sustained internal criticism of the non-Christian alternatives has been called the towering strength of his writings.²³³ According to Henry, Clark's analysis of secular philosophy has never been answered by the professional philosophers, despite Clark's repeated assault on their positions.²³⁴

²³¹Diehl, "Historical Apologetics," pp. 9-10.

²³²Clark, Three Types, pp. 28-103.

²³³Carl F. H. Henry, "A Wide and Deep Swath," in Nash, The Philosophy, pp. 11-12.

²³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

In The Defense of the Faith, Van Til inveighs the inadequacies of the traditional method of apologetics, contending that these can only be overcome by "a distinctly Reformed apologetic," that is, presuppositionalism.²³⁵ He asserts that the traditional method "compromises the Biblical doctrine of God in not clearly distinguishing his self-existence from his relation to the world," and that it "compromises the Biblical doctrine of God and his relation to his revelation to man by not clearly insisting that man must not seek to determine the nature of God, otherwise than from his revelation."²³⁶ In addition, Van Til charges that the traditional method compromises the clarity, necessity, sufficiency, and authority of supernatural revelation, but he states elsewhere that "our aim is not to depreciate the work that has been done by believing scholars in the Arminian camp. Our aim is rather to make better use of their materials than they have done by placing underneath it an epistemology and metaphysics which makes these materials truly fruitful in discussion with non-believers."²³⁷

Recognition of the Effects of Sin in the Mind and Will

Presuppositionalists insist that the noetic effects of sin must be taken with full seriousness because they profoundly affect man's response to God. Because of the fall, the natural human state is that of rebellion against God and

²³⁵Van Til, Defense, pp. 257-59.

²³⁶Ibid., pp. 257-58.

assertion of epistemological and moral autonomy. Presuppositionalism opposes this claim to autonomy and recognizes that no one is neutral concerning ultimate truth. These apologists would agree with Etienne Gilson's statement that "There is an ethical problem at the root of our philosophical difficulties, for men are most anxious to find truth, but very reluctant to accept it. . . . Finding out truth is not so hard; what is hard is not to run away from truth once we have found it."²³⁸ This volitional and moral problem leads these apologists to stress the biblical teaching that the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable for one to have saving faith.²³⁹

Weaknesses of Presuppositionalist Apologetics

Problems with an Axiomatic Approach to Truth

Clark's form of presuppositionalism is more rationalistic than that of Van Til, and this has led to a certain amount of debate between these writers. Clark begins with the Bible as a revelation from God and uses this presupposition as an epistemological axiom. This geometrical model has been criticized for its exclusively deductive and propositional approach to reality. Arthur F. Holmes argues that the logic of actual discourse is less formal and

²³⁷Idem, "Apologetics" (class syllabus, Westminster Theological Seminary, n.d.), p. 96.

²³⁸Etienne Gilson, quoted in Williams, Faith, Facts, p. 125.

²³⁹Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 97.

more varied than Clark's geometrical ideal implies. Holmes notes that "not all revelation is propositional, nor is all Biblical revelation expressed in univocal subject-predicate statements."²⁴⁰ Logic is more than inductive and deductive; there is also an adductive logic that "explores revealed truths about unique events and persons" that can lead to "larger constructs and to categorial [sic] schemes developed as a symphonic whole."²⁴¹ Gordon R. Lewis agrees with Holmes that people know more than propositions and universals. While propositions are important for precision and communication, they do not "displace the need for experience and the testing of our propositions again by their conformity with our experience, especially of persons in their individuality."²⁴² Clark's epistemological reductionism of truth as solely propositional overlooks experiential knowledge and personal existential knowledge.²⁴³

Two additional criticisms have been made by other apologists of the axiomatic presuppositional approach taken by Clark and his followers. The first of these is that a consistent application of Clark's aprioristic and geometric model leads to cognitive sterility; upon analysis, little can be deduced about the real

²⁴⁰Arthur F. Holmes, "The Philosophical Methodology of Gordon Clark," in Nash, The Philosophy, p. 224.

²⁴¹Ibid., p. 226.

²⁴²Lewis, Testing, p. 122.

world from his axiom of revelation.²⁴⁴ His rejection of any form of empiricism, most clearly manifested in his extreme view of science as incapable of arriving at any truth about the world,²⁴⁵ would lead, if consistently applied, to a skepticism concerning what the Bible actually says, since this entails a sensory process.

The second additional criticism is that Clark's deductive test of sheer logical consistency is an inadequate test for truth. To defend his thesis that consistency is the sole test of truth-claims, he would have to show the inconsistency of every other system in the past and present. "At best, however, he can only assert that all non-Christian systems that he has canvassed are inconsistent, and to the best of his knowledge the only consistent system is Christianity."²⁴⁶ Clark's use of the law of contradiction has negative value only.

Excessive Fideism

Some apologists charge that the presuppositional method confuses apologetics with evangelism and "eliminates all rational argumentation with the

²⁴³Ronald H. Nash, "Gordon Clark's Theory of Knowledge," in Nash, The Philosophy, p. 166.

²⁴⁴George I. Mavrodes, "Revelation and Epistemology," in Nash, The Philosophy, pp. 228-36.

²⁴⁵Gordon H. Clark, A Christian View of Men and Things (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), pp. 197-228; The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1977).

²⁴⁶Lewis, Testing, p. 119.

non-Christian" by assuming rather than defending the truth of Christianity.²⁴⁷

From their perspective, the presuppositional position that the Bible is self-authenticating is a clear case of begging the question, in that it begins with its own conclusion. This practice of assuming the inspiration of Scripture from the beginning can actually breed suspicion in the minds of those the presuppositionalist is trying to convince.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷William Masselink, General Revelation and Common Grace (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 177; Gordon R. Lewis, "Van Til and Carnell--Part I," in Geehan, Jerusalem and Athens, p. 349. Charles A. Clough, himself a presuppositionalist, believes that the authoritarian apologetic strategy suffers from a lack of development and from imprecision in terminology. Because of this, he claims that other apologists (e.g., Pinnock, "The Philosophy of Christian Evidences," in Jerusalem and Athens, pp. 420-25) have falsely branded this position as fideism:

"Authoritarian apologetics seems to teach at times that because one cannot use historical facts or logical argumentation with the non-Christian, one ought just to preach the Word devoid of apologetic discussion.

"Such an impression, however, is a misunderstanding of Van Til. He has readily acknowledged that he has not developed his position philosophically, exegetically, or historically. . . . Van Til has struggled to set forth the basic idea of authoritarian strategy, and that is his grand accomplishment. It remains for other men to carry out in specific areas the implications of his central idea" (Clough, Giving the Answer, p. 27; footnote references deleted).

Van Til's terminology has led to problems in other areas as well. For example, he uses the term "analogy" to refer to the knowledge of God in a different sense than Aquinas used the term, but because he does not make this clear, his critics believe his position leads to skepticism. Clough believes that Van Til is also unclear in his discussion of paradoxes or antinomies (*ibid.*, pp. 28-30).

²⁴⁸Van A. Harvey, quoted in Colin Brown, ed., History, Criticism and Faith (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 30. Presuppositionalists respond to the charge of question-begging by saying with Trueblood that "In the end all reasoning is circular, in that we may ultimately

If, however, the doctrine of inspiration and the principle of supernatural intervention are set aside, the apologist necessarily employs the canons of those with whom he is in debate. . . . A lawyer may have faith that his client is innocent, but his arguments in court are logically independent of this trust. The lawyer will have to show why his inner trust is justified, and he will have to appeal to data and warrants that are acceptable to those who remain to be convinced.²⁴⁹

Montgomery believes that Van Til's "effort through sovereign election, bibliology, and pneumatology to preserve his Reformed position from solipsistic collapse" fails because it allows no appeal to facts without prejudging them according to a context of interpretation which already reflects the Christian world view.²⁵⁰

Van Til rejects the fact-oriented alternative, thereby eliminating in principle the possibility of his opponents' marshalling evidence against Christian claims. But the victory is entirely pyrrhic, for by accepting aprioristic circularity, he at the same time eliminates all possibility of offering a positive demonstration of the truth of the Christian view. . . . When world views collide, an appeal to common facts is the only preservative against philosophical solipsism and religious anarchy.²⁵¹

Along similar lines, Thomas V. Morris, in his critique of Francis Schaeffer's apologetics, states that the circularity of presuppositional argumentation can establish only the possibility of a position.

If a presuppositional set is being proposed for acceptance, and it can be shown, on the basis of its acceptance, that all the data to be accounted for is

justify that with which we begin. Circular reasoning is not fallacious, providing the circle is sufficiently large" (David Elton Trueblood, Philosophy of Religion [New York: Harper & Row, 1957], p. 53).

²⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 30-31.

²⁵⁰Montgomery, "Once Upon an A Priori," pp. 383-87.

²⁵¹Ibid., pp. 387-88.

in fact subsumed, and even that other presuppositional sets are not as desirable (although this is not necessary), then the presuppositional set in question is confirmed or commended as a possible position which can be held. This is the only presuppositional conclusion attainable--that of possibility.²⁵²

Presuppositionalists have also been criticized for confusing apologetics with systematic theology, in particular, Reformed theology. Montgomery charges that presuppositionalism is modeled on the deductive theology of Calvinism, and as such, is directed more to believers than to unbelievers.²⁵³

If we insist that non-Christians begin in our sphere of Christian commitment, we ask for the impossible and vitiate all opportunity of reaching them. Indeed, we devalue the very coinage of divine sovereignty that we are endeavoring to hold high, for we give the unbeliever the impression that our gospel is as aprioristically, fideistically irrational as the presuppositional claims of its competitors.²⁵⁴

Geisler also regards presuppositionalists as fideists and asserts that they

. . . fail to understand the implications of the difference between the unavoidability of and the justifiability of presuppositions. We may grant that presuppositions are unavoidable; men cannot think without epistemological and even ontological assumptions. However, the crucial question is not whether we can avoid using presuppositions but whether we can justify those we use.²⁵⁵

According to him, presuppositionalists either do not squarely face the question of how to adjudicate between conflicting truth claims or resort to a form of experientialism or pragmatism as a test for truth. While Geisler classifies Van Til

²⁵²Morris, Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics, p. 74.

²⁵³Montgomery, "Once Upon an A Priori," p. 391.

²⁵⁴Ibid.

²⁵⁵Geisler, Apologetics, p. 63.

as a fideist, he regards Schaeffer as a methodological pragmatist because of Schaeffer's repeated emphasis on the need to be able to live consistently with the logical conclusions of one's presuppositions.²⁵⁶

Unwarranted Rejection of Logical and Empirical Modes of Thought

Strict presuppositionalists are sometimes criticized for an inconsistency in their methodology in that they appear to waver between two sets of rules.

The strictest presuppositional position will be presented with the tightest logical construction. The extreme position is consistent by definition. It uses sentences, thought sequences, statements and conclusions and feels them to be binding upon the hearer. However, a grand inconsistency crops up. When a problem is thrown back to the ultimate presuppositionalist, he must hide in his first presupposition: God by definition must be the logical and necessary starting point of rational thought and communication. In one breath he will use language and logic, but in the next he may deny it or overlook it in the arguments of the non-presuppositionalist.²⁵⁷ Rationalists and evidentialists believe that the strict presuppositional position is inconsistent in that it judges other systems but retreats to its own first principles when judged by others.

The ultimate presuppositionalist is tied to a presupposition which becomes his conclusion. He is not so much tied to popular conceptions of rationality as he is to a tightly circular system. This makes his position unassailable in his own eyes, but very anemic in the eyes of some of the critics.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶Ibid., p. 110.

²⁵⁷Ricki Alan Goodin, "Ultimate Presuppositionalism and General Revelation," (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), pp. 41-42.

²⁵⁸Ibid., p. 42.

Pinnock criticizes presuppositionalists for overstressing a coherence view of truth at the cost of a correspondence view of truth. He states that

Undoubtedly there is a great deal more to Christian apologetics than merely adducing empirical proofs for this or that aspect in the gospel, but to release an invective against those who attempt to do this is biblically illegitimate. The God of Scripture has stooped to reveal himself in the empirical world of factuality, and invited sinners to find him there.²⁵⁹ He refers to the apostolic presentation of the objective fact of the resurrection as decisive validation of the claims of Christ and the truth of the gospel, and charges that Van Til by contrast "works from a logical construction to Christ and the gospel rather than starting with actual revelation."²⁶⁰

Clark is even more adamant than Van Til in his critique of sensory experience as a source of knowledge, and his antiempirical position is regarded by a number of other apologists as self-defeating. Nash observes that "If empiricism leads to skepticism (as Clark contends), then Clark's own view leads to skepticism since the only way one can come in contact with God's revelation in the Scriptures is through sensory experience."²⁶¹ Clark consistently assails empiricism and probability,²⁶² but he cannot entirely eliminate empiricism because it remains a working input that all must depend upon. The distance

²⁵⁹Pinnock, "The Philosophy of Christian Evidences," pp. 421-22.

²⁶⁰Ibid., p. 422.

²⁶¹Nash, "Gordon Clark's Theory of Knowledge," p. 174.

between one point in a city and another remains the same no matter how many times it is measured, though this cannot be formally proven. One can only know through empirical considerations that a given individual is his or her spouse, though this too cannot be formally proven. Just as Clark defends the law of contradiction on the basis of practical necessity,²⁶³ so the same argument can be used to support the empirical source of much knowledge. It is not a question of empiricism versus rationalism; both are necessary for knowledge of the real world. Holmes believes that Clark draws a false disjunction between full rationalistic knowledge and skepticism. But there is a third alternative, that of partial knowledge, "not fully demonstrated, but adequate in scope and in rational coherence to provide plausibility."²⁶⁴

Hanna argues that apologetic positions that claim that their starting point is the Bible are self-defeating.

Neither the Bible as a sensory object nor the logical and semantic principles required to identify and understand the Bible can be derived from the meaning of the statements of the Bible--for all of these must be grasped prior to the apprehension of the meaning of any statements of the Bible. . . . If anyone claims, then, that the Bible is the sole and exclusive starting point for all knowledge, he must already have knowledge of the Bible as an extrasubjective object and he must grasp the meaning of at least some of its statements in order to use it as a source for knowledge about reality. . . .

²⁶²E.g., Gordon H. Clark, Thales to Dewey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), pp. 392-94, 504-6; Religion, Reason and Revelation (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1961), pp. 54-58.

²⁶³Clark, Religion, Reason, pp. 149-50.

²⁶⁴Holmes, "The Philosophical Methodology," p. 212.

Some knowledge must be attainable prior to the apprehension of the knowledge derived from the teaching of the Bible.²⁶⁵ Mavrodes agrees that some form of empiricism is unavoidable: "Whenever the Bible forms a link in an epistemological chain, then sensory contact with the Bible must form the very next link."²⁶⁶ Thus, as Hanna remarks, "Presuppositionalism can never be pure, for it operates with a principle of adequacy that is logically prior to the apprehension and utilization of biblical statements."²⁶⁷

Apologists who agree with Carnell's distinction between the logical and synoptic starting points believe that presuppositionalists falsely charge that this makes "the rational man stand above revelation in autonomous freedom."²⁶⁸ According to them, presuppositionalists ignore the shift of authority which occurs when the Bible becomes authoritative for rationalists and evidentialists.

²⁶⁵Hanna, Crucial Questions, pp. 75-76.

²⁶⁶Mavrodes, "Revelation and Epistemology," p. 247. Montgomery builds on this theme and applies it to historical method:

"Christian revelation is irreducibly historical, and its fortunes are thus (for good or for ill) bound up with the fortunes of history. Ironically, therefore, any attempts to reduce historical objectivity in the interests of revelational truth always and by logical necessity boomerang: they eliminate the possibility of all significant talk about revelation itself. For Professor Clark, who has cut himself off from all empirical avenues to truth, the result is even more disastrous. With the collapse of meaningful talk about the axiom of revelation, only solipsism remains" (Where Is History Going?, p. 175).

²⁶⁷Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 98.

²⁶⁸Lewis, "Van Til and Carnell--Part I," p. 356. E.g., Cornelius Van Til, The Case for Calvinism (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), p. 80; Reymond, Justification, p. 94.

Lewis notes that the Bible is just as authoritative for Carnell as it is for Van Til.

The difference lies in this analogy:

For Van Til the physician's claims to be a physician are self-authenticating, regardless of logic or fact. Carnell, on the other hand, thinks a layman can and must intelligently decide between the list of alleged physicians and quacks. Only when the physician's credentials are authentic will Carnell submit to his prescriptions and surgery. When the doctor's authenticity is substantiated by sufficient evidence the final authority is the doctor, not the layman.²⁶⁹

Just as the apostle Paul's credentials needed to be checked before submitting to his apostolic authority (1 Cor. 9:1-23; 2 Cor. 10-13), so those who submit to the authority of Scripture after examining its credentials are not operating on the basis of "apostate human reason" in doing so.

Minimizes Common Ground Between Christians and Non-Christians

Rationalists and evidentialists believe that presuppositionalists like Clark, Van Til, Dooyeweerd, and others go too far in making Christian and non-Christian thought mutually exclusive. Holmes writes that "The Christian doctrine of providence and of common grace imply that we have a great deal to be thankful for and to learn from non-Christian thought."²⁷⁰ He argues that all truth is God's truth, and that the providence of God in restraining the noetic effects of sin needs to be recognized. Holmes also believes that contrary to the position of strict presuppositionalists, not all error is rooted in the difference

²⁶⁹Lewis, "Van Til and Carnell--Part I," p. 357.

²⁷⁰Holmes, "The Philosophical Methodology," p. 214.

between believing and apostate thought. Many a person has honest problems about the truth of Christianity, and these problems are not always due to moral turpitude or willful rebellion against God, but sometimes have more to do with limited access to evidence and arguments. Christians themselves have disagreements on a variety of issues, but this does not mean that this is due to a sin problem or rebellion. Just as moral causes and natural causes can be identified in the problem of evil, so in the problem of error the moral causes of error should be distinguished from the natural causes. "Sin and unbelief are involved at least in some human error, to be sure, but we must also take account of the natural effects of human finiteness."²⁷¹

Strict presuppositionalists deny the existence of any metaphysical common ground between the regenerate and the unregenerate, while limited presuppositionalists like Schaeffer believe that this is not a practical problem, because no one is completely consistent in applying his or her presuppositions.²⁷² In practice, common ground does exist in spite of the position taken by strict presuppositionalism, and this inconsistency is a product of common grace.

Critics of strict presuppositionalism also argue that a complete lack of common ground between Christians and non-Christians would mean that there

²⁷¹Idem, All Truth, p. 52.

would be no criteria by which the latter could be shown rationally the inadequacy of their position.²⁷³ Montgomery asks Van Til how an imaginary but consistent world view could be distinguished from reality. ". . . if everyone without exception has colored glasses cemented to his face, no one can criticize another person's spectacles, or indeed the 'spectacle' of another world view."²⁷⁴ Pinnock agrees with presuppositionalists on the point that reality would be unintelligible if God did not exist, but states that "it is the fact of his existence, and not assent to it, which provides valid common ground."²⁷⁵ He adds that "Just as the Spirit can create comprehension in the reading of Scripture, so the Spirit can create comprehension in the reading of Christian evidences. Faith is created by the Holy Spirit acting upon good and sufficient evidences."²⁷⁶

Impracticality of Presuppositionalism

It has been objected that consistent presuppositionalism is unlivable, in that people tend to evaluate options more from the Carnellian synoptic starting point than from the logical starting point of the ontological Trinity of

²⁷²Kenneth C. Harper, "Francis A. Schaeffer: An Evaluation," Bibliotheca Sacra 133 (April 1976):138.

²⁷³Diehl, "Historical Apologetics," p. 10.

²⁷⁴Montgomery, "Once Upon an A Priori," pp. 382-83.

²⁷⁵Pinnock, "The Philosophy of Christian Evidences," p. 424.

²⁷⁶Ibid.

Scripture.²⁷⁷ Van Til states that "The natural man is mercilessly consistent,"²⁷⁸ and that he will pick up any concessions to his position (either starting point or method). But few people think in such tightly reasoned modes. Holmes notes that philosophical positions are made of several elements: perennial problems, historical periods, scientific models, different philosophical methods, and underlying perspective or world view. He states that writers like Dooyeweerd, Van Til, and Schaeffer tend to make the last of these

. . . the all-consuming difference and so underestimate the other differentiating factors. Undoubtedly this factor holds more religious interest than the others and undoubtedly it is related to the others. But it does not by itself explain all the disagreements, for Christian philosophers as well as others hold a variety of positions.²⁷⁹

Hillman claims that in contrast to Van Til's indirect apologetic method, the apostle Paul's apologetic method in Acts 14 and 17 is direct. The difference between the two approaches, he says, "should point toward the need for an apologetic modeled upon the principles of Biblical Theology rather than Systematic Theology."²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷Goodin, "Ultimate Presuppositionalism," p. 43.

²⁷⁸Van Til, "Apologetics," p. 70. Elsewhere, however, Van Til acknowledges that the unregenerate, because of common grace and the imago Dei, are not this consistent.

²⁷⁹Holmes, All Truth, p. 64.

²⁸⁰Hillman, "The Use," p. 21. G. C. Berkouwer also criticizes Van Til for his overemphasis on Reformed dogmatics, confessions, and traditions and lack of emphasis on Scripture ("The Authority of Scripture [A Responsible Confession]," in Geehan, Jerusalem and Athens, pp. 200-203).

. . . Van Til professes to rely solely upon the Scriptures, but is really heavily dependent upon Reformed theology's interpretation of the Scriptures. This explains why Van Til cannot allow for the fact that Paul could simply appeal to evidence that he felt men could perceive. Paul does not erase the antinomy between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility by fortifying himself in the Calvinistic armory. He appeals to man's responsibility and allows the Spirit of God to do His work.²⁸¹

Strengths of Subjectivist Apologetics

Stresses the Uniqueness of Each Individual

Holmes believes that Kierkegaard was correct in his position that one cannot draw logical conclusions from what is unique rather than universally alike. Because of the uniqueness of each human individual and his decisions,

. . . no complete system of syllogisms that covers all existence can ever be constructed, unless perhaps by an omniscient God. Abstract logical systems are possible, says Kierkegaard--many alternative systems indeed are possible--but an existential system that embraces all the unique aspects of our existence is humanly impossible.²⁸²

In this connection, Diehl observes that "The subjectivist method is to argue from man's basic existential needs to Christianity as the fulfillment of those needs, and to show that non-Christian philosophies are inadequate in this regard."²⁸³ The subjectivist approach to Christian apologetics emphasizes the uniqueness of each person and the specific way in which Christianity can affect one's life on a practical and personal level. Kierkegaard was particularly adept at

²⁸¹Hillman, "The Use," p. 30.

²⁸²Holmes, All Truth, p. 91.

²⁸³Diehl, "Historical Apologetics," p. 7.

psychologically analyzing human existence and showing how Christianity provides an answer to the human predicament. According to Diehl,

Subjectivism is constructive in reminding us that true religion must be that which fulfills the needs of man in his here-and-now, personal situation. It is also commendable in its emphasis on the need for faith and divine revelation in Christ as the key to understanding Christianity.²⁸⁴

Involves the Whole Person

Subjectivists claim that the transcendent God of Christian theism cannot be logically demonstrated or rationally comprehended. Even Geisler acknowledges that "God is beyond reason's futile attempt to grasp him completely and with logical necessity. . . . God's nature cannot be understood in purely mathematical terms nor can his existence be demonstrated with mathematical certainty."²⁸⁵ Neither rational argumentation nor empirical evidences provide a sufficient basis for the religious response of personal commitment to God. By itself, apologetics cannot produce Christian faith. Morris states that "predispositions as well as presuppositions must be taken into account," and that "the transition from one basic interpretive framework or set of presuppositions to another involves an irreversible process composed of personal, as well as propositional or formal, elements."²⁸⁶ Os Guinness also observes that "Becoming a Christian is an authentic choice of a whole man; it

²⁸⁴Ibid.

²⁸⁵Geisler, Apologetics, p. 59.

involves his reason, his emotions, and his will; it is in this sense that faith is more than rational."²⁸⁷ Subjectivists underscore the fact that Christian faith is volitional, not merely intellectual; it engages the heart as well as the head.

The personal and nonlogical dimension of truth is just as real and significant as the more purely cognitive aspects of truth. There can be no human knowledge without this personal coefficient.²⁸⁸ Rudolf Otto affirmed this truth when he wrote that in the cross of Christ,

. . . rational are enfolded with non-rational elements, the revealed commingled with the unrevealed, the most exalted love with the most awe-inspiring "wrath" of the numen, and therefore, in applying to the Cross of Christ the category "holy," Christian religious feeling has given birth to a religious intuition profounder and more vital than any to be found in the whole history of religion.²⁸⁹

The subjectivist stress on the intuitive, noncognitive, and personal dimensions of truth is an important contribution to the practice of Christian apologetics.

Recognizes the Moral and Spiritual Environment

In his Christian Commitment: An Apologetic, Carnell maintains that neither rationalism nor empiricism in and of themselves can lead one into the

²⁸⁶Morris, Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics, p. 83.

²⁸⁷Os Guinness, The Dust of Death (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 358.

²⁸⁸Morris, Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics, pp. 52-53.

²⁸⁹Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923 [1917]), p. 173.

moral and spiritual environment.²⁹⁰ While scientific method clarifies the physical environment and philosophical method clarifies the rational environment, Carnell argues that there must be a third method of knowing to clarify the moral and spiritual environment.²⁹¹ This third method is what he calls knowledge by moral self-acceptance. "The content of the imperative essence cannot be apprehended until one is spiritually transformed by the sum of those duties which already hold him."²⁹² Similarly, Kierkegaard and other subjectivists have stressed that moral and religious knowledge are not attainable by objective rational and empirical means, but require personal involvement, rectitude, and responsibility.

Kierkegaard often gave the impression that the real man was the ethical man. But he did not reach his highest understanding of the relation between ethics and human nature until he recognized that love is the fulfillment of law, and that the ethical self falls short of its duties until it performs works of love.²⁹³

The existential realization of the imperative essence and the consequent recognition that one falls short of the duties of love leads to the rejection of self-sufficiency and to radical dependence on the God of love. Despair in this way gives birth to hope, and hope to works of love. Thus, the moral and spiritual

²⁹⁰Carnell, Christian Commitment, pp. 83-84.

²⁹¹Ibid., pp. x, 10-30.

²⁹²Ibid., p. 22.

²⁹³Idem, The Burden of Soren Kierkegaard (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 167.

environment is not external but internal, and the prerequisite for entrance is not merely a cognitive construct but a personal response.

Emphasis on the Experiential Knowledge of God

Subjectivists are often characterized by a vital and personal conception of God because of their emphasis on God as a person to be known rather than an object to be studied. Biblical revelation "is not the revelation of an object to a subject, but a revelation from subject to subject, a revelation of mind to mind."²⁹⁴ This entails not merely conceptual knowledge, but knowledge by acquaintance. "God does not give us information by communication; He gives us Himself in communion."²⁹⁵

Religious truth must be grounded in personal experience. In a real sense, direct experience is the final court of appeal. Theoretical constructs are inadequate, because assertions and conceptions about God must ultimately be grounded in an awareness and consciousness of God. Meaningful religious expression requires primary religious experience. Because of this, Otto holds that "There can naturally be no defence of the worth and validity of such

²⁹⁴John Baillie, The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 24.

²⁹⁵Ibid., p. 47. Baillie adds that the fullness of revelation can be given only in the life of a person. In the personal revelation of Christ, "all other revelation is comprehended and summed up" (ibid., p. 80).

religious intuitions of pure feeling that will convince a person who is not prepared to take the religious consciousness itself for granted."²⁹⁶

The Need for Complete Commitment

Subjectivists are particularly opposed to religious pretense and externalism. Pascal and Kierkegaard courageously spoke against the hypocrisy and indifference they saw around them, and sought to show that "nothing less than the assurance of eternal happiness could appease the human breast."²⁹⁷

A wise and consistent Christian will give an absolute devotion to an absolute telos, and a relative devotion to a relative telos. To reverse the elements in this teleology by giving absolute devotion to the relative and relative devotion to the absolute, is sin at its worst. In other words, this world deserves, and thus should receive, no more than relative passion; while the world above--and this includes everything which pertains to both the life and will of God--deserves, and thus should receive, absolute passion. Kierkegaard associated this balance of devotion with wisdom, and the Old Testament books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes do the same.²⁹⁸

Subjectivists stress the need for absolute devotion and total dependence upon God. Christian faith requires more than notitia or assensus; it goes beyond intellectual understanding and assent to fiducia, which entails a volitional response of complete trust in the person and work of Christ.

Weaknesses of Subjectivist Apologetics

²⁹⁶Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 173.

²⁹⁷Carnell, The Burden, p. 166.

²⁹⁸Ibid.

Minimizes External Verification

Subjectivism, in its strongest form, rules out the possibility of any kind of scientific or historical verification. Kierkegaard, Barth, and Brunner are opposed to the traditional rationalistic and evidential approaches to Christian apologetics, and contend that Christianity cannot be verified by such external means. Colin Brown objects that if this line of reasoning is taken to its logical conclusion, "there can be no rational grounds for preferring belief to unbelief, and objective knowledge of God must be replaced by subjective knowledge of the human condition."²⁹⁹

From Ramm's point of view, religious liberalism has no real doctrine of Christian evidences because "it makes religion essentially the function of man's religious nature," and has "no need for the supernatural nor for the relevance of religion to concrete fact."³⁰⁰

. . . religious liberalism, though fond of ridiculing Christian evidences, has failed to see that in the measure that religion is isolated from fact, it by the same measure is removed from reality. Thus, religious liberalism tends to be a system of religious beliefs based essentially upon a philosophy or psychology or history of religion, but not on concrete data.³⁰¹
Clearly, not all subjectivists are religious liberals (Ramm applies this statement to Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Troeltsch, and Harnack). But Ramm and other apologists believe that the subjectivist methodology is often associated with

²⁹⁹Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith, p. 132.

³⁰⁰Bernard Ramm, Protestant Christian Evidences (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953), p. 14.

religious liberalism, particularly insofar as it places the objective and the subjective in an antithetical relationship. Because of this antithesis, personal faith is cut off from factuality and public confirmation and thus becomes unverifiable and immune from proof. Under these conditions, Christianity is no longer subject to rational investigation. Hanna believes that this is too great a price to pay, because it includes

. . . the loss of truth and knowledge, both theologically and nontheologically, and the loss of the right to criticize. Every claim reduces to an opinion. Every cognition dissolves into a belief. Every view, irrespective of its absurdities, is on the same epistemological footing with every other view. The demarcation between fact and fiction vanishes, and everyone finds refuge in the inviolable sanctity of his own experience and his own choice.³⁰²

Unnecessary Breach Between Faith and Reason

Many apologists believe that writers like Kierkegaard, Barth, and Brunner promoted an undue separation between faith and reason. Carnell writes that Kierkegaard "started off with a false prejudice in supposing that inwardness is jeopardized when the mind is satisfied with the consistency of objective evidences."³⁰³ Faith does not need to act in passionate opposition to the report of reason. Instead, "The native person--the one unaffected by corrupting

³⁰¹Ibid.

³⁰²Hanna, Crucial Questions, pp. 17-18. Italics deleted.

³⁰³Carnell, A Philosophy, p. 494; The Burden, pp. 169-70.

philosophic presuppositions--is at his best, and is most ideally a man of faith, when he obeys, rather than defies, the report of a critically developed understanding."³⁰⁴ Objectivity in faith does not mean lack of healthy subjectivity.

Carnell and Clark agree that Kierkegaardian existentialism leads to epistemological nihilism. "There is no convincing reason why time-eternity relations should stand outside of the conventional connections of rational coherence."³⁰⁵ According to Clark, Kierkegaard's concept of the Absolute Paradox leads irrevocably to irrationalism because it entails an ultimate contradiction. Although Barth uses more ambiguous language than Kierkegaard and avoids an outright assertion or denial of contradiction, Clark insists that Barth's work is also founded on a basic irrationalism to the degree that he makes use of Kierkegaard's paradoxical approach.³⁰⁶ Concerning Brunner, Clark writes that he is more "vigorously irrational" than Barth: "He holds that God can speak his word to a man even in false propositions. He holds that the Bible is consistently inconsistent."³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴Idem, The Case for Biblical Christianity, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 49-50. Italics deleted.

³⁰⁵Idem, A Philosophy, p. 494; Clark, Three Types, pp. 93-98.

³⁰⁶Clark, Three Types, pp. 96-97.

³⁰⁷Ibid., p. 98.

Brunner also abolishes the distinction between truth and falsity. First, he refers to a kind of 'truth' that cannot be expressed in words or grasped in intellectual concepts. What the truth is no one can say. Second, the words, sentences and intellectual content that point to this hidden truth may or may not be true. God can reveal himself through false propositions as well as through true ones. We cannot be sure, therefore, that what God tells us is true. Falsehood and truth have equal value.³⁰⁸

Pascal, on the other hand, is more rational than Kierkegaard, Barth, or Brunner because he does not advocate belief in two contradictory propositions at the same time.³⁰⁹

In The Possibility of Religious Knowledge, Jerry H. Gill contends that "both contemporary philosophy and theology are characterized by a stalemate between two equally important, but mutually exclusive, points of view: positivism and existentialism."³¹⁰ The former stresses the priority of cognition over valuation, and the latter does the opposite. In neoorthodox and existentialist theology, a dichotomy exists between knowledge and faith: "there is an unbridgeable gap between those aspects of experience and reality known as the cognitive and the valuational."³¹¹ This has led to an intellectual schizophrenia and an epistemological dualism. Religious knowledge needs to be built on a more holistic base since both the cognitive and factual as well as the

³⁰⁸Idem, in Carl F. H. Henry, ed., Revelation and the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), p. 36.

³⁰⁹Ibid., p. 99.

³¹⁰Jerry H. Gill, The Possibility of Religious Knowledge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 43.

³¹¹Ibid.

noncognitive and valuational are important.³¹² Dyrness argues that just as no reasoning process is totally objective, so human faith need not be totally subjective; faith and reason possess both objective and subjective components.³¹³ For Carnell, the radical polarity between objective certainty and subjective faith is unnecessary; faith need not choose in defiance of the intellect.³¹⁴

The Limitations of Experience

To the extent that subjectivists appeal to religious experience and feeling as a test for truth, rationalists, evidentialists, and presuppositionalists are united in their response that experience is not self-authenticating, because it provides no inherent criteria by which one can determine whether a religious feeling is valid or invalid. Geisler argues that it is a confusion of categories to speak of a true experience, because experience in the primary sense is neither true nor false.³¹⁵ An experience cannot be used to prove the truth about itself without begging the question; truth is rooted in primary experience but not substantiated by it. Experiences are capable of being interpreted in a variety of ways, and this is conditioned by the world view or cognitive framework that one has already embraced. Even to speak meaningfully about an experience requires

³¹²Ibid., p. 87.

³¹³Dyrness, Christian Apologetics, p. 44.

³¹⁴Carnell, Christian Commitment, pp. 75-78.

³¹⁵Geisler, Apologetics, p. 77.

a set of intellectual categories that is at least formally independent of the experience. Geisler concludes that "no religious experience as such is either understandable or justifiable apart from some truth framework independent or separate from the experience itself."³¹⁶ Holmes agrees that experience alone cannot lead one to truth because it is limited in scope, selective, relative, and subject to interpretation. Without rational inquiry, experience alone is not enough to determine what is true.³¹⁷ Without a way of testing a system for error, one cannot validate it, "for he never knows but that his very claim to truth might be an instance of the error which his methods cannot test."³¹⁸

Carnell states that "What the modernist calls 'feeling' neo-orthodoxy calls 'crisis' (Karl Barth), 'divine-human encounter' (Emil Brunner), or 'dialectical tension' (Reinhold Niebuhr)."³¹⁹ Because these writers do not affirm the objective historical veracity of Scripture, Carnell believes that they are left with an epistemology that cannot test for error. Neoorthodoxy "can no more recognize a valid crisis experience than the modernist can recognize a valid religious feeling."³²⁰

³¹⁶Ibid., p. 81.

³¹⁷Holmes, All Truth, pp. 80-83.

³¹⁸Carnell, The Case, p. 52.

³¹⁹Ibid.

³²⁰Ibid., p. 54.

Reduces the Factual Content of Scripture and History

Although this is not true of all apologists who are subjectively oriented in their methodology (e.g., Earl E. Barrett and Warren C. Young), a number of subjectivists are criticized by other apologists for advocating a compromised view of biblical inspiration and historical objectivity. For instance, Colin Brown believes that Kierkegaard at times seems to miss the point of the Christian gospel because of his attempt to reduce without remainder the apostolic kerygma to the paradoxical story of an alleged incarnation.³²¹

A gospel story without the resurrection of Jesus is the melancholy tale of a dead Christ who is helpless to save. The absolute antithesis which Kierkegaard draws between the objective and the subjective is one which no biblical writer or speaker ever drew. The biblical writers summon men to faith not because it is absurd but because there are good grounds for committing oneself to Christ. These occur, for example, in the signs he performed and the fact that God raised him from the dead.³²²

Carnell criticizes neoorthodox theologians (most of whom are subjectivistic in their apologetic method) for their attempt to separate salvation-history in the Bible from ordinary history.³²³ He contends that the Bible claims to be divinely inspired on both counts, and that there is no hint that the biblical writers made such a distinction or shifted in their claims to authority. Van Til makes the same point in his epistemological appraisal of the dialectical theology

³²¹Brown, Philosophy, p. 131.

³²²Ibid. Footnote reference deleted.

³²³Carnell, The Case, p. 53.

of Barth and Brunner in The New Modernism.³²⁴ When revelation is reduced to a process in which objective content is minimized or stripped away as in the case of Bultmann, the object of faith becomes ambiguous and skepticism sets in.³²⁵

False Disjunction Between the Personal and the Propositional

Hanna declares that when the Christian faith is reduced to mysticism, encounter, or experience, the basis for apologetics is thereby removed.

Dialectical theologians have tended to deplore apologetics precisely because of their propensity to eliminate propositional content from divine revelation. Not only does the deletion of propositional information undermine the viability of apologetics, however, it also destroys the identity of the Christian faith.³²⁶

Geisler agrees that contra Kierkegaard and Barth, there is no reason that divine revelation cannot be at once personal and propositional.³²⁷ The disjunction between the personal and the propositional is not only epistemologically unnecessary, but also practically unrealistic.

The Bible claims to be a propositional revelation, that is, a revelation in and through words. Indeed, it is difficult to understand any meaningful sense of the words know or understand as applied to the person of God unless they have some cognitive content that is expressible in words or propositions. Surely the object of religious faith is a Person (God), but there

³²⁴Van Til, The New Modernism, 3rd ed. (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1972).

³²⁵Brown, History, Criticism, pp. 186-94.

³²⁶Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 57.

³²⁷Norman L. Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions of Biblical Errancy," in Norman L. Geisler, ed., Inerrancy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 330; Apologetics, pp. 62-63.

is no way to rule out of hand that propositions can be uttered about that person.³²⁸

Hanna adds that the affirmation of propositional revelation does not mean that it is ontologically elevated over the incarnate Son of God. In fact, "The recognition of the ontological preeminence of divine revelation in the incarnate Son is possible only because of the availability of propositional knowledge."³²⁹ The contextual framework of revelatory events must be propositional in order for them to signify divine self-disclosure.

³²⁸Geisler, *Apologetics*, pp. 62-63.

³²⁹Hanna, *Crucial Questions*, p. 79.

CHAPTER 3
TOWARD AN EFFECTIVE SYNTHESIS

The Dilemma

This study has underscored the fact that apologetic methodology is profoundly affected by theological perspective. Many Reformed apologists, for instance, believe that presuppositionalism is the only apologetic system that properly reflects Reformed theology. Reymond, an advocate of presuppositionalism, states that "if the Reformed faith, in very fact, is the faith taught in Scripture, it is incumbent upon the apologist to develop and be guided by a Reformed apologetic, that is, a Reformed method of defending the faith."³³⁰ This is an apologetic not only of Christian theism, but of the whole Reformed system of thought:

The Reformed apologist . . . is not interested in defending merely what might be called the "central core" or "common faith" of Christianity. He is convinced that the Bible teaches a great deal more, indeed, a total theism which demands to be viewed and to be proclaimed as a system of truth touching upon all of life. He believes, too, that it is this system in its unitary whole that must be defended.³³¹

Van Til concurs with this position and contrasts his Reformed method of apologetics with what he calls Arminian and Roman Catholic apologetics.³³²

³³⁰Reymond, Justification, p. 3.

³³¹Ibid., p. 11.

³³²Van Til, "Apologetics," pp. 9-22.

Not all Reformed thinkers would go as far as Reymond and Van Til, and many apologists believe that strict presuppositionalists are trying to prove too much, especially when they seek to persuade non-Christians to embrace the totality of Reformed theology. In addition, the choice is not necessarily between five-point Calvinism on the one hand and full-blown Arminianism on the other. There is a continuum between these two ends of the theological spectrum, and it is incorrect to assume that one is an Arminian if he or she does not accept all aspects of Reformed theology. Calvinism stresses the biblical truth of divine sovereignty, while Arminianism stresses the biblical truth of human responsibility. The Bible does not teach one of these truths in exclusion to the other, but repeatedly presents both. This is a both/and situation rather than an either/or, and the proper response for those who acknowledge biblical authority is to hold both truths in tension rather than attempt to resolve the tension by neglecting or rejecting one truth and exalting the other. From a human standpoint, the reality of both divine sovereignty and human responsibility cannot be fully comprehended. Like the biblical teaching on the Trinity and the God-man, it is relatively but not absolutely mysterious, because there are no antinomies in the mind of God.

The Synthesis

This provides a theological basis for employing various elements of all four Christian apologetic systems without ultimate contradiction. In general,

rationalism and evidentialism emphasize the dimension of human responsibility, while presuppositionalism and subjectivism emphasize the dimension of divine sovereignty. If these are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin, there is justification for using aspects of each of these apologetic systems.³³³ Additionally, this has relevance to the issue of faith preceding reason versus reason preceding faith, because the former relates more to divine sovereignty while the latter relates more to human responsibility. Once again, there can be a both/and relationship rather than an either/or.

In the final analysis, some form of presuppositionalism is unavoidable as the starting point for Christian apologetics. But as Ronald B. Mayers notes, the presuppositional position of Scripture as self-authenticating need not necessitate a fideism which says that the concept and content of Scripture is incomprehensible prior to regeneration.

. . . we can affirm an intrinsic and ultimate self-authentication without making Scripture totally irrational for unbelievers . . . Faith, then, refers to both the objective factual evidence that can be only probable and is the object of belief (*fides*) and the subjective response of the person who reaches out in trust (*fiducia*), leaving behind a self-willed egoism by means of a new and provided love of God, a return to theonomy from autonomy. While objective belief can only be probable, subjective affirmation is sealed

³³³Not only the divine sovereignty/human responsibility mystery, but also the imminence/transcendence mystery has a bearing on apologetic systems. Apologetic rationalists and evidentialists tend to stress the former, and presuppositionalists and subjectivists tend to stress the latter. Compare Montgomery's criticism of Kierkegaard's, Otto's, and Barth's emphasis on God as wholly transcendent (Montgomery, *Suicide*, p. 84) and Otto's criticism of empirical apologetics (Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 222-24).

in the certitude of the Holy Spirit. . . . Biblical faith is thus both belief and trust, both objective and subjective, both rationally propositional and existentially personal.³³⁴

Mayers observes that Augustine actually balanced the two sides of faith in that he not only said, "I believe in order to understand," but also, "I would understand in order that I may believe."³³⁵

Rationalists, evidentialists, and presuppositionalists emphasize the propositional and cognitive aspects of truth while subjectivists emphasize the personal and noncognitive aspects of truth. A more complete apologetic approach would recognize and utilize both the propositional and the personal. Some individuals are more cognitive, rational, and objective, while others are more intuitive, kinesthetic, and subjective. But no one is exclusively cognitive or noncognitive. Major decisions in life (e.g., the purchase of a home) inevitably involve aspects of both in varying combinations. Morris states that a

³³⁴Ronald B. Mayers, "Both/And: The Uncomfortable Apologetic," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 23 (September 1980):236-37.

³³⁵Mayers quotes three Augustinian passages that support this point including this passage from Sermon 43:

"Nevertheless unless they understand what I am saying they cannot believe. Hence what he says is in some part true, 'I would understand in order that I may believe.' And I, too, am right when I say, as does the prophet, 'Nay, believe in order that thou mayest understand.' We both speak the truth: We are in agreement. Therefore, understand in order to believe; believe in order to understand. Here is a brief statement of how we can accept both without controversy. Understand in order that you may believe my word; believe in order that you may understand the word of God" (ibid., p. 237).

comprehensive Christian apologetic must speak to more than one area of a person's life. This requires two major elements:

First, we must proclaim and describe the relevance of biblical truth for every realm of life. We must also show forth in our own lives that relevance. This is not usually considered to be a part of apologetic method, but it is. Only by both hearing and seeing how specifically Christian beliefs can be related consistently to the whole of a belief-set can a man come to understand fully how he might believe such claims consistently. . . . Second, we must challenge all the major beliefs that a man holds which are inconsistent with Christian claims. In short, when we engage in formal apologetic argumentation we must use the double strategies of overwhelming and undermining. We must try to present an overwhelmingly credible case for the truth of Christian claims and we must challenge or undermine any beliefs which would block the acceptance of those claims, presenting through our words and our lives alternative Christian beliefs.³³⁶

Thus, an effective apologist will be sensitive not only to propositional and presuppositional factors, but also to the personal and predispositional factors in an individual's life. The "Copernican revolution" or paradigm shift from a non-Christian to a Christian world view always involves both. As Morris writes, "the attainment of a full Christian belief-set is a major conversion experience involving the totality of the human personality."³³⁷

Each of the four apologetic systems reflects different aspects of biblical truth. Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, for example, not only appeals to fulfilled prophecy, the supernatural character of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and miracles (the events which had just occurred that

³³⁶Morris, Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics, pp. 112-13.

³³⁷Ibid., p. 119.

day), but also assumes the authority of Scripture and calls for a subjective response on the part of the hearers.³³⁸ As this chapter indicates, no single system has all the strengths and advantages. Because man is a rational being, a valuing being, and an agent who acts, there is a need for rational coherence, empirical adequacy, and human relevance in justifying the Christian world view.³³⁹ Elements of all four systems can be used in different combinations which are adapted to the personality, circumstances, needs, interests, background, education, beliefs, and predispositions of the non-Christian.

Recommendations for Further Study

1. *A wholistic approach to Christian apologetics.* This would involve work on a broad framework that deliberately utilizes the best elements of each of the apologetic methods, recognizing that no single method is appropriate to every person and situation. Such an approach would be adaptable to the needs of each individual and integrate different kinds of knowledge (metaphysical, moral, religious, aesthetic, historical, scientific, and personal).³⁴⁰

³³⁸Cf. Austin E. Robertson, "Apologetics Defensively and Offensively Stated" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1961), pp. 39-49.

³³⁹Holmes, All Truth, pp. 102-22. Pinnock, though an evidentialist, seeks to combine aspects of rationalism, evidentialism, and subjectivism in his five circles of evidence to form a "comprehensive evidential picture" consisting of existential needs, religious intuitions, rational scrutiny, historical evidence, and moral necessities (Reason Enough).

³⁴⁰Arthur F. Holmes, Faith Seeks Understanding (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971).

2. *The relationship of personal knowledge to apologetic method.* The contribution of personal and non-cognitive elements in argument perception and evaluation should be more extensively considered in Christian apologetics. Subjective variables often play a more determinative role in persuasion than objective factors.³⁴¹ Factual and valuational judgments need not be separated,³⁴² since non-cognitive factors are a normal part of the belief and knowing process.³⁴³ Subjective reason holds an important place in the structure of personality.³⁴⁴ People do not respond in a uniform way to argumentation; coming to believe involves a personal, nonlogical step.³⁴⁵ "A purely rational man is an abstraction; he is never found in real life."³⁴⁶

3. *Additional consideration of predispositional factors in the choice of world views.*³⁴⁷ Personality, temperament, background, and preconditioning are often

³⁴¹Hanna, Crucial Questions, p. 51; Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), and The Tacit Dimension (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966).

³⁴²Gill, The Possibility, pp. 91-163.

³⁴³Holmes, All Truth, pp. 103-23; Faith Seeks Understanding, pp. 115-33.

³⁴⁴Gordon W. Allport, The Individual and His Religion (New York: Macmillan Company, 1950).

³⁴⁵Morris, Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics, pp. 105-8.

³⁴⁶Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, trans. Willard R. Trask, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959), p. 209.

³⁴⁷Morris, Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics, pp. 109-21.

overlooked in the praxis of apologetics. A rationalistic approach which may be effective with an objective, logical thinker would not be as effective with one who is more intuitively and aesthetically oriented.

4. *A comparison of large-scale secular systems of belief with religious faith.*³⁴⁸

There is no neutrality with respect to ultimate truth.³⁴⁹ Further work with disclosure situations, the reciprocal relationship of awareness and activity, and paradigm shifts would provide additional insight into the contribution of cognitive and non-cognitive factors to world-view shifts.³⁵⁰

5. *The use of imagination in the communication of religious truth.* While imaginative thinking is needed in apologetics as much as analytic thinking, the former is often eclipsed by the latter in apologetic literature. This study would include the apologetic implications of metaphors and images in poetry, art, literature, and film. "Truth can come into the soul through a number of doors. Existentially. Mystically. Metaphorically. Rationally. Or through any combination of them."³⁵¹

³⁴⁸Basil Mitchell, The Justification of Religious Belief (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), pp. 95, 134, 137.

³⁴⁹Williams, Faith, Facts, pp. 125-27.

³⁵⁰Gill, The Possibility, p. 188; Harold B. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, vol. 2, no. 2, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 111-35.

³⁵¹Bernard Ramm, letter to Radix Magazine, November/December, 1980, p. 31.

6. *Development of a set of transcultural apologetic principles.* This would involve an analysis of the most effective apologetic literature throughout church history to find apologetic principles that can be applied to different cultures and contexts. One such principle which was aptly illustrated in the apologetic writings of C. S. Lewis is the need to learn the language of the audience and translate into the vernacular.³⁵²

³⁵²C. S. Lewis, God in the Dock, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 98-103.
