

BOTH/AND APOLOGETICS: BUILDING ON  
THE STRENGTHS OF PRESUPPOSITIONALISM AND EVIDENTIALISM

by

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: THE CHALLENGES TO BE OVERCOME

Apologetics embraces the basic idea of presenting and defending the truths of the Christian faith, or as noted in the foreword to *To Everyone An Answer*, it is “opening the door, and clearing the rubble, and getting rid of the hurdles so that people can come to Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Most definitions of apologetics would usually also include the idea that apologetics has value for both the unbeliever and the believer. For the unbeliever, the purpose and value of apologetics consists of its use in evangelism, or as some might prefer to label it, pre-evangelism.<sup>2</sup> In this task, the apologist is striving toward the goal of overcoming obstacles to faith in the mind of the unbeliever so that he/she might come to trust Jesus Christ as Savior. The value of apologetics, then, lies in helping the unbeliever see that the Christian message is true, and that any supposed problems in the mind of the unbeliever for accepting this truth claim are not, in fact, legitimate and should be discarded.

For the believer, the value of apologetics lies in the sense that a greater understanding of the Christian message can help believers become increasingly confident in the message they have already committed themselves to. Through apologetics, the believer can find answers to questions that may seem to cause a level of intellectual conflict. Perhaps that believer does have genuine trust that the Bible is true, but he hears certain claims that contradict his understanding of the Bible and cause him to experience

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Beckwith, William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds., *To Everyone An Answer* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Grover Gunn, “A Short Explanation and Defense of Presuppositional Apologetics,” <<http://capo.org/cpc/apolo00.htm>>, accessed on July 9, 2007, 1.

a lack of full confidence. Apologetics can have value, then, for this kind of person due to the fact that a growing sense of confidence can help to embolden the believer in following and serving Christ. As Josh McDowell worded it, “Personally, my heart cannot rejoice in what my mind reject.”<sup>3</sup> His point is valid: it will be hard to fully embrace any claim if that claim appears logically impossible, self contradicting, or fully against all rationality. The goal, then, would be to help Christians understand the reasons why they should embrace every biblical truth claim without reservation.<sup>4</sup>

### *Purpose of the Study*

This study will focus on the debate that often takes place between people who embrace two different methods of apologetics. These two methods of apologetics are called Presuppositional Apologetics (PA) and Evidential Apologetics (EA), which for the purposes of this paper will embrace the idea of both Evidential Apologetics and Classical Apologetics.

By and large, the issue in this debate should never be seen as one that is between an orthodox, historic Christian tradition and something that is otherwise. Although there may be some from one camp or the other who might step outside the bounds of traditional Christianity in certain statements, this really is not the issue of this debate. This disclaimer is necessary at this point, however, due to the fact that some of the writers on this topic (usually coming from those who are strongly committed to PA)

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<sup>3</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict, Vol. 1* (San Bernardino: Here’s Life, 1972), 3.

<sup>4</sup> J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 12. Moreland also makes note about the way that apologetics can “contribute to health in the culture at large” due to the fact that apologetics by nature involves the application of Christian truth to society.

make it appear as though anyone who does not fully embrace every aspect of their apologetical system is not being “biblical” in their methods. Cowan notes that in his early exposure to these two forms of apologetics, some were telling him to beware of “this bogeyman called ‘presuppositionalism.’”<sup>5</sup> A large part of the purpose of this paper is to explore whether or not these kinds of claims from either side are justified. Certainly there are more than one from the Reformed and presuppositional perspective who see much value in PA, but also recognize some of its weaknesses.

Krabbendam reflects on how Van Til introduced him to apologetics in 1960 and how three major Van Til concepts stood out to him: (1) the importance of a presuppositional approach, (2) the importance of the Trinity as an ontological foundation for all reality, and (3) Van Til’s strong resistance to any dialectical thinking that gravitated toward rationalism, irrationalism, or any combination thereof.<sup>6</sup> Thirty five years later Krabbendam writes that even though he can endorse PA, “this is not to say that Van Til has spoken the final apologetical word so as to exclude the need for any expansion, or even revision of his thinking. In fact, there seem to be two areas in Van Til’s apologetics that could stand revision.”<sup>7</sup>

In view of the preceding comments, this paper will examine whether it is possible to identify particular strengths in each apologetical system that might complement each other. This paper will explore whether these strengths might be combined in such a way that strengths of each system might be magnified and any potential weaknesses might be

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Krabbendam, “Cornelius Van Til: The Methodological Objective of a Biblical Apologetics,” *WTJ* 57:1 (Spring 1995): 125.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

identified and minimized. If this kind of both/and apologetical methodology is possible without ceasing to be “biblical,” then the apologist might find himself much better equipped for accomplishing the kinds of apologetical purposes noted at the beginning of this introduction. Ronald Mayers has done a fine job of presenting this kind of approach in his book *Balanced Apologetics*.<sup>8</sup> This study will seek to build on his work (particularly in the summary portion of this paper), and a variety of other resources as well, to develop a both/and apologetic that employs the strengths of each system.

#### The Stated Mandate for Apologetics

There is good biblical support for the idea that Christians have a mandate to practice apologetics. Many people rightly appeal to 1 Peter 3:15 which tells Christians that they are to always be ready to “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (NASB).<sup>9</sup> The English word “apologetics” comes from the Greek term *apologia* (ἀπολογία), a term which carries the connotation of “defense” (as it is rendered in the NASB of 1 Pet. 3:15) or “answer,” such as in the light of questioning or examination.<sup>10</sup> The New Testament uses the term eight times with a fairly consistent meaning. Usage suggests that the idea of answering questions and defending are central to the term ἀπολογία.

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<sup>8</sup> Ronald B. Mayers, *Balanced Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> The NASB will be used for all Bible citations unless otherwise noted.

<sup>10</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 227-228. Hiebert notes that the term “was used in connection with a formal defense” as it can be seen in certain uses by Paul, but it was also used of “more private and informal utterances,” too, and that it would be arbitrary to limit the term to formal judicial examinations. Hiebert says that a broader picture shows that Christians were being told to be ready to give a defense of their faith in any and every circumstance where it might become necessary.

Luke uses the term in Acts 22:1 to show how Paul had to make a “defense” at Caesarea before the Jews who were accusing him of crimes against Jewish law.<sup>11</sup> Paul was under attack and the way to respond was to make a “defense.” Similarly, Paul uses the term again in 1 Corinthians 9:3 to speak about the fact that he had to “defend” himself from the attacks of personal critics. In 2 Corinthians 7:11 Paul uses the term to talk about how the Corinthians’ repentance and change of conduct was providing a “defense” for them against the shameful conduct of their former sins. The two uses in Philippians are particularly relevant for the technical sense that this paper is dealing with. In 1:7 Paul speaks about the way his apostolic ministry includes “the defense and confirmation of the gospel.” The latter term connotes the idea of making something sure and certain while the former (ἀπολογία) once again speaks about the idea of answering accusations and giving reasons (i.e., defending). In 1:16 Paul uses the term again talking about the fact that as an apostle he has been “appointed for the defense of the gospel.” These expressions show that a significant aspect of Paul’s apostolic role was declaring the Christian faith and defending it to an unbelieving world so that men might come to see the truthfulness of the message and believe it. The eighth use is in 1 Peter where Peter commands the Christian that to be ready to “make a defense” to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that the Christian holds.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The term is used several times in the Bible in legal contexts with reference to one making a defense before accusers (Acts 22:1; 25:16; 2 Tim. 4:16).

<sup>12</sup> The context of 1 Peter in general and this verse in particular seems to deal with a hostile unbelieving world that is constantly making verbal accusations against the Christian faith and Christians as individuals. Special Introduction suggests that this book was written before widespread physical persecutions had broken out in the Roman Empire, but early church history strongly shows that the unbelieving world was quite antagonistic against the faith. To this extent, the message about giving a defense of the faith to a hostile world is directly applicable to present times as well.



Beyond focusing only on the term ἀπολογία itself, one should also take into account other direct commands of the New Testament to proclaim the truths of the gospel to the surrounding world. For example, the Great Commission gives an explicit command to make disciples (learners) by proclaiming the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20). One can also see how Paul commands Timothy to be tireless in proclaiming the gospel and preaching the word (2 Tim. 4:2). In this passage, Paul also tells Timothy that he is to do the best he can to patiently and gently strive at “correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Perhaps even more than 1 Peter 3:15, this text is showing the church that it has an obligation to strive with those who are in error so that God might use those efforts to bring them to saving faith. Certainly the sovereignty of God in granting grace is the ultimate basis for this salvation, but this text explicitly shows that God (the Spirit) works through the instrumentality of clearly taught Christian truth.

This entire endeavor is a two-fold task—negative and positive. The positive side is declaration of Christian truth. The negative side is showing where someone is embracing error (e.g., 2 Tim. 2:25: “correcting those who are in opposition”). As the Bible shows, the skill of an elder must include this two-fold ability. He must be holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching so that he may be able both “to exhort in sound doctrine” and (2) “refute those who contradict” (Tit. 1:9).

The key point that cannot be ignored at this early stage in this study is the fact that the Bible does, in fact, command the church to proclaim the truths of Scripture, defend the truths of Scripture, and patiently strive with those who are opposed to these

truths so that God might use these efforts to open eyes and bring men to believe the truth. This is the task called apologetics.

#### Apologetics Throughout Church History

Church history shows that from time to time the method of apologetics would become a point of controversy. Sproul makes mention, for example, of Henry Dodwell whose 1740 work *Christianity Not Founded On Argument* was a book that argued that Christianity is a religion based on “faith,” and not a religion based on “reason.”<sup>13</sup> Dodwell apparently objected to the idea that one should supply reasons for faith.

Regardless of debates in methodology, it is clear that there is a task to perform and that this task can include a variety of means. Both testaments of the Bible (particularly the NT) show the reader that a follower of God is supposed to proclaim a message of truth, and both testaments also show that it is not against the Bible for one to give reasons why someone should believe what God has spoken. God Himself appeals to His own fulfilled prophecies as firm evidence for why the people of Israel should believe Him (e.g., Is. 46:8-11). The OT shows the reader appeals to evidence; the NT shows appeals to evidence (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-3); church history provides countless illustrations of those who not only proclaimed biblical truth, but also defended that truth and provided reasons why others should accept and believe their message. This does not mean that these evangelists (“apologists”) held a view that God is not trustworthy unless one provides proof. What this history does demonstrate, though, is that Christians have

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<sup>13</sup> R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 13.

historically felt the liberty to defend the Christian faith against attacks and this defense has often consisted in showing logical reasons why the faith should be believed.

### The Rise of Presuppositional Apologetics

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a philosophy of apologetics arose whose proponents began to seriously call into question the idea of using evidence and reason in presenting and defending the faith. This philosophy of apologetics has been built on the teachings of men in the Dutch Reformed tradition like Groen Van Prinster and Abraham Kuyper, but especially on the teaching ministry and writings of Cornelius Van Til.<sup>14</sup> Van Til received his Ph. D. from Princeton University and became a professor of apologetics at Westminster Seminary where he taught for over 40 years. Over the years to come, Van Til's landmark book on apologetics *The Defense of the Faith* (published in 1955) would become a huge influence in the field of apologetics.<sup>15</sup>

The teaching and writing ministry of Van Til, with his “presuppositional” style of apologetics, (an expression that he himself tried to shun),<sup>16</sup> would convince many that a presuppositional method of apologetics is really the only proper way to practice apologetics, and any deviation from this method is a deviation from being biblical. For Van Tilians, the conviction is that Christ “must be offered without compromise.”<sup>17</sup> In the eyes of Van Til, any time the apologist is not challenging a man to “make his every

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<sup>14</sup> William Edgar, “Without Apology: Why I Am A Presuppositionalist,” *WTJ* 58:1 (Spring 1996): 18.

<sup>15</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955).

<sup>16</sup> John Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” <[http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame\\_articles/2005Presuppositional.htm](http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/2005Presuppositional.htm)>, accessed on July 8, 2007, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 3.

thought captive to the obedience of Christ,” that apologist is becoming guilty of compromise—a compromise that is basically Roman Catholic in origin and nature.<sup>18</sup>

These are serious accusations against the non-presuppositionalist apologist.<sup>19</sup>

Over the next several decades, the disciples of Van Til studied his philosophy of apologetics, rearticulated his philosophy of apologetics, and promoted it as being the best way of practicing apologetics. The serious claims and accusations of these proponents need to be analyzed for validity.<sup>20</sup> As part of this study, this paper will consider whether or not the presuppositional method is the best method of apologetics, the only method of apologetics, a helpful method to be selectively employed, or none of the above.

### *Limitations of the Study*

Huge volumes of literature have been written on both sides of this debate over the years. This paper will restrict itself to a selected number of textbooks and journal articles from a variety of writers on both sides of the debate. This paper will present the methods of these various writers and analyze them for what this author believes are the strengths and weaknesses. From the observations out of these writings, this paper will seek to present an eclectic both/and apologetic that builds on the strengths of each system.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> In his apologetics article titled “The Defense of Christianity,” Van Til introduces a hypothetical evangelistic scenario involving an unbeliever, Mr. Black, a presuppositionalist, Mr. White, and a third party named Mr. Grey. Interestingly, Mr. Grey is not described as being an evidentialist or a classical apologist, but as an Arminian. From many angles, it would appear that Van Til was driven by the idea that anything less than his style of Presuppositional Apologetics was a form of Arminian theology or worse (“The Defense of Christianity,” <[http://www.the-highway.com/defense\\_VanTil.html](http://www.the-highway.com/defense_VanTil.html)>, accessed on July 8, 2007, 1).

<sup>20</sup> Edgar, “Without Apology: Why I Am A Presuppositionalist,” 18. Edgar says that “it is regrettable that so much polarization has occurred between various schools, which often caricature each other’s positions without doing the careful work of investigation needed in order to take a stand” (18). This writer is in full agreement here.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRESUPPOSITIONALISM AND EVIDENTIALISM IN BRIEF

As a point of priority, it will be crucial to set forth the major tenets of each apologetical method so that they reader might understand the philosophies and methods of each system. This chapter will first set forth the major tenets of PA and follow this with an explanation of the major tenets of EA.

#### *Main Tenets of Presuppositionalism*

Although different writers might emphasize the significance of different points, one might identify at least five different concepts that make up major tenets of PA.

#### A Commitment to Presuppose the Bible at all Times

The first of these major tenets is the commitment to always presuppose the Bible in any kind of apologetical situation.<sup>21</sup> The presuppositionalist says that one should always go into the apologetical situation, not only believing that the Bible is the only source of authoritative truth, but also making it clear to the unbeliever that this is so. As Edgar has put it, “Whatever else one may say about the details of presuppositionalism, this is its core. It begins and ends frankly with authority. . . . Beginning with proper biblical authority is the most reasonable move one could make.”<sup>22</sup> The apologist is strongly encouraged to state this presupposition up front and call the unbeliever to commit himself unreservedly to believe this claim. Krabbendam says that he can warmly

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<sup>21</sup> Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” 2. Frame notes that “the supernatural revelation of Scripture . . . is among the assumptions, what we may now call the presuppositions, that Christians bring to any intellectual inquiry.”

<sup>22</sup> Edgar, “Without Apology: Why I Am A Presuppositionalist,” 19.

endorse this principle of unwavering commitment to Scripture as one of the greatest strengths of presuppositional thinking.<sup>23</sup> This writer agrees with the value of this point.

Mayers notes that one of the characteristics of the PA approach is that it approaches apologetics with an a-priori versus a-posteriori theory of knowledge.<sup>24</sup> From a philosophical point of view, the significance of this choice essentially closes off certain kinds of objections that one can raise against all forms of a-posteriori arguments. A-posteriori arguments are those driven from observations, observations that can often be challenged as being adequate due to empirical limitations. In effect, the presuppositional method simply defines itself as being above challenge.

The suggested approach, then, is for the apologist to tell the unbeliever that he believes the Bible is the Word of God and that the reason why he believes this to be so is because it is true. In terms of circularity, the apologist is to readily admit the circularity of the argument. The apologist is encouraged to point out to the unbeliever that everyone has circularity in their basis of ultimate authority. Therefore, the unbeliever should not accuse the presuppositionalist of being the only one with circular reasoning, since everyone operates on the basis of circular reasoning.<sup>25</sup> The presuppositionalist looks to the Bible as the ultimate source of authority, but the unbeliever has ultimate authority too. In many cases, depending upon the claims of the unbeliever, the presuppositionalist will

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<sup>23</sup> Krabbendam, "Cornelius Van Til: The Methodological Objective of a Biblical Apologetics," 125.

<sup>24</sup> Mayers, *Both/And Apologetics*, 198. Whether or not an a-priori argument is actually credible and persuasive is an entirely different issue, though, from whether that same argument is formally valid.

<sup>25</sup> Frame, "Presuppositional Apologetics," 5. Frame makes a distinction between what he calls "narrowly" circular arguments "broadly" circular arguments. Frame sees the PA circular argument as being the latter due to the fact that "it presents more data to the non-Christian and challenges him to consider it seriously."

tell the unbeliever that his circular reasoning comes by way of the fact that he believes in his own power of human reason to accurately judge truth claims, and that this faith in self as an autonomous source authority is a circular form of reasoning.

Lorenzini discusses the significance of various levels of circular reasoning in his article “Does Presuppositional Apologetics Use Circular Reasoning?” Lorenzini writes that when “talking about an *ultimate* (emphasis original) intellectual criterion, a certain amount of circularity is unavoidable. . . . Every worldview (and every argument) must have an ultimate, unquestioned, self-authenticating starting point.”<sup>26</sup> Lorenzini (representing a PA concept) is basically correct in that sense, although one is not unjustified for adding further qualifiers to the bare statement. What Lorenzini is saying, though, is that one can either (1) let God’s spoken word be the ultimate authority or (2) let the power of empirical observation and reason be the ultimate authority.<sup>27</sup> Eve was faced with this dilemma in the Garden. She knew what God said, but the words of the serpent, combined with her empirical observations prevailed in her judgment. She trusted her own powers of observation and reason and the result was disastrous.

#### A Commitment to Presuppose Trinitarianism

Another kind of presuppositional commitment is to Trinitarian theology, in particular to the ontological and epistemological implications of Trinitarianism. In the view of Krabbendam, “Van Til’s perspective upon the doctrine of the Trinity may well be

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<sup>26</sup> Massimo Lorenzini, “Does Presuppositional Apologetics Use Circular Reasoning?” <<http://www.frontlinemin.org/apolpresupp.asp>>, accessed on July 9, 2007, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Lorenzini says that EA is circular because it begins with rationalism and also ends with rationalism, 2.

his most significant theological contribution. . . . His point of departure is the traditional view that the unity and diversity in the ontological Trinity are equally ultimate.”<sup>28</sup>

The presuppositionalist is encouraged to remind the unbeliever that apart from the reality of the Trinity, there is absolutely no basis for any being. Therefore, in a very real sense, unsaved men are living their lives on the basis of the Trinity, but they are doing so unconsciously since they are not confessing personal trust and belief in Him.

To illustrate, PA will say that the only basis for personality is due to the personality of the triune God and that the only basis for logic and rationality is due to the fact that such capacities are granted to mankind from the triune God. The presuppositionalist will say that the only basis for communication comes from the fact that there is a triune God. Furthermore, in terms of the age old philosophical dilemma of the tension between “the one and the many,” the only answer to this dilemma, says the presuppositionalists, lies in the reality of the triune God.<sup>29</sup> There is “the one” as represented by the fact that there is only one God, but there also is “the many” in that this one God exists eternally in a trinity of persons.

Schaeffer comments on this philosophical dilemma by noting that “if man starts with himself alone . . . he never comes to a universal, only to particulars and mechanics. The problem can be formulated thus: how can finite man produce a unity which will cover these particulars?”<sup>30</sup> The answer to this dilemma is found in the person of God who exists eternally as One in essence yet at the same time in a triunity of personhood.

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<sup>28</sup> Krabbendam, “Cornelius Van Til: The Methodological Objective of a Biblical Apologetics,” 129.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>30</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Francis Schaeffer Trilogy: The God Who Is There* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 62.



“Biblical Christianity,” says Schaeffer, and only biblical Christianity, “has an adequate and reasonable explanation for the source and meaning of human personality. Its source is sufficient—the personal God on the high order of the Trinity.”<sup>31</sup> PA holds that in all the philosophical pondering of man, no one in all of human history has ever been able to give a satisfactory answer to these questions (like how personality could have come from impersonality) except for the Trinitarian theologian.<sup>32</sup> These are profound insights.

There are many times when the presuppositionalist will bring out these kinds of points as a presuppositional way of answering these philosophical objections. PA can be commended for the way that it applies theology and philosophy to answer some of these very difficult questions of life.

#### A Commitment to Presuppose Total Depravity

A third major presupposition deals with the doctrine of total depravity. However, one of the challenges here is to eliminate the ambiguity that arises from poor definitions of theological terms and expressions. Generally speaking, though, the doctrine of total depravity has been defined along these lines: Because of the fact that all mankind share a solidarity in Adam’s sin, all mankind has been impacted by the corrupting influence of Adam’s act. This means that every aspect of man’s constitution and nature have experienced corruption due to Adam. Van Til appeals to “the Reformed creeds” as stating that men sit in a state of total depravity and for this reason they are “dead in sin” and that “the only cure for this spiritual deadness is his regeneration by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>33</sup> Van Til, “The Defense of Christianity,” 2.

Because of sin, man's spiritual condition and relationship to God has been corrupted; his affections have been corrupted; his will has been corrupted; his emotions have been corrupted; and finally, his mind and thinking process have been corrupted.

PA strongly emphasizes the doctrine of total depravity. It strongly emphasizes the concept that men are dead in sin, and because of this spiritual deadness, all unsaved men are in a state of ongoing spiritual rebellion against God and His truth. According to PA, another spiritual effect of this condition is that unsaved men always corrupt the truth that is presented to them. PA will regularly point to the teaching of Romans 1:18ff., to support the position that unsaved men always and habitually resist and twist any truth to which they are exposed. For this cause, they reason, it is futile to try and reason with them according to EA, since their only inclination will be to judge the evidence by their false, unbelieving presuppositions.

#### A Commitment to Presuppose the Superiority of Negative Apologetics

A fourth commitment is to presuppose the superiority of negative apologetics. The reasoning is as follows. Because the unbeliever is going to inevitably reject and twist any positive evidence one may provide, the superior way to approach that person is by the means of negative apologetics. In other words, the best approach is to show how and why the unbeliever's worldview and presuppositions are false. Many from the Reformed tradition who embrace presuppositionalism affirm this approach.

For Warfield, on the other hand, apologetics was a positive and constructive science that was not simply about defense or vindication, but much more was about the

establishment of the knowledge of God.<sup>34</sup> For Warfield, apologetics should (always) consist of the positive thrust of showing to the world the truthfulness of God from a variety of angles.

According to PA, however, one should make the larger (perhaps dominant) part of the apologetic focus on bringing the unbeliever to a point where he sees the despair and futility of his present views (hence, “negative apologetics”). Francis Schaeffer, who did employ a significant amount of negative apologetics, would describe this process as tearing off the roof from the unbeliever (his teacher Van Til would sometimes describe it as tearing off the yellow colored glasses).<sup>35</sup> The point, then, is this: in PA the focus is largely based upon attacking the false suppositions of the unsaved person.

Much of this goal consists of bringing the sinner to a point of despair where he can see the emptiness of his own condition. The Christian evangelist, then, is the one who “lovingly must remove the shelter and allow the truth of the external world and of what man is to beat upon him. When the roof is off, each man must stand naked and wounded before the truth of what it is.”<sup>36</sup> By letting the avalanche of truth crash down upon their heads, the Christian evangelist does what is most loving for his unsaved

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<sup>34</sup> Paul Kjoss Helseth, “B. B. Warfield On The Apologetic Nature Of Christian Scholarship: An Analysis Of His Solution To The Problem Of The Relationship Between Christianity And Culture,” *WTJ* 62:1 (Spring 2000): 99.

<sup>35</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Francis Schaeffer Trilogy: The God Who is There*, 24, 138-142. Schaeffer, a man who was willing to strike at the heart of disbelief yet always with a heart full of compassion speaks of the need to sometimes tell people “You are separated from God if you do not accept Christ as your Savior, but at this moment you do understand something real about the universe. Though your system may say love does not exist, your own experience shows that it does” (Ibid.). Schaeffer with very skilled at speaking very directly to the heart about the things that really exposed false forms of reasoning.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 140.

neighbors: he helps them to see why they need a Savior. Skillfully used, negative apologetics can be an effective tool for this purpose.

#### A Commitment to Presuppose the Need for a Transcendental Argument

This fifth and final commitment, a commitment to the Transcendental Argument for of argumentation (TA) is somewhat related to the former point. The TA focuses on the universal convictions that all men operate on due to the fact that they are created in the image of God. For example, all men have the capacity to reason and think and use logical forms and concepts. According to the TA, this capacity to think and reason and use logic is possible only because of the reality that God exists and that God has given man these capacities. Edgar says that due to the nature of man as God created him, even a denial of God “would not be possible were it not for our knowledge and, also, because of this we have a point of contact with the unbeliever despite the great chasm between us.”<sup>37</sup>

Greg Bahnsen was one of the notable presuppositional apologists taking up Van Til’s mantle who very strongly pressed the point that the proof of God’s existence exists most strongly due to the “impossibility of the contrary.”<sup>38</sup> Through the TA (an “indirect” form of proof for God’s existence), Bahnsen stressed that the goal is to “show the non-Christian how the intelligibility of his experience, the meaningfulness of logic, and the possibility of science, proof, or interpretation can be maintained only on the basis of the Christian worldview.”<sup>39</sup> As Krabbendam puts it, Van Til’s aim was proof that was not

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<sup>37</sup> Edgar, “Without Apology: Why I Am A Presuppositionalist,” 20.

<sup>38</sup> Greg Bahnsen, “The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception in Presuppositional Apologetics,” *WTJ* 57:1 (Spring 1995): 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

merely “beyond a reasonable doubt,” but “beyond the shadow of any doubt. . . . He indeed claims to furnish absolute, compelling proof to that effect.”<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately, this preoccupation with intellectualism sometimes “tends to preempt the apologist’s focus upon the pivotal need of a change of heart.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, it is interesting to see the way that the presuppositionalist often criticizes the evidentialist for an inordinate desire to prove theism, and yet the presuppositionalist will do the same thing. They will object and say that evidentialists are trying to prove only a god in concept, but that they are proving the God of the Bible. This objection is not persuasive. Besides, asks Krabbendam, is it necessary to spend inordinate amounts of energy on “discursive proof” for God’s existence in view of the fact that “God is and will continue to be universally known?”<sup>42</sup> As the Scripture shows, all men do know that He is there.

Nevertheless, this aspect of reasoning in the TA can in fact be very powerful for reminding the rebellious sinner about the unique nature of every facet of creation and life, especially the uniqueness of man as he stands in the image of God. In reality, the TA is appealing to the universal recognition that all men sense within that God exists.<sup>43</sup> This really is the presuppositional way of appealing to General Revelation as the means of bringing sinners to see the reality of the Creator. This point of contact exists in all men.

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<sup>40</sup> Krabbendam, “Cornelius Van Til: The Methodological Objective of a Biblical Apologetics,” 129.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>43</sup> Gunn points out that whether it is logic, science, ethics, or personhood, purpose or meaning, all of these realities derive from God (“A Short Explanation and Defense of Presuppositional Apologetics,” 5).

Likewise, says the TA, all men everywhere have the conviction about certain kinds of moral convictions. All men, regardless of culture, know and feel that there is such a thing as right and wrong. The TA seeks to convince men of the existence of God, for it is utterly impossible for God not to exist in view of the ethical realities that do exist.<sup>44</sup> In the mind of men like Van Til and Bahnsen, not only is this method “the most rigorous apologetical program” but its “all-or-nothing epistemological boldness” sets it apart as being the only genuinely biblical form of apologetic.<sup>45</sup>

Despite its noted strengths, it remains to be seen whether or not this kind of claim is justifiable. Frame raises certain questions about the absolute claims of the presuppositionalist who says that the TA is the best or only way to practice apologetics, suggesting to the reader that some of the claims, though having validity, may be exaggerated.<sup>46</sup> Frame basically comes to the conclusion that the apologist should recognize some of the great strengths of the TA and be willing to employ them, but also to be aware of the danger of letting the TA become too “complicated” and falling into some of the same kinds of traps as “traditional apologists” have.<sup>47</sup>

The preceding may be said to fairly represent the major positions of PA. The remainder of this chapter will consider some of the major tenets of EA.

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<sup>44</sup> The TA can be a very powerful form of apologetics in the right circumstances, especially when used with people who are very philosophically inclined. A short time before writing this paper, the author had the opportunity to share the gospel of Christ with an unsaved university philosophy professor. When presented with some of the typical philosophical objections, the author made use of the TA as a way of showing this philosophy professor that the God whom he was denying is in fact the entire basis for his own existence and capacity to practice philosophy.

<sup>45</sup> Bahnsen, “The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception in Presuppositional Apologetics,” 4.

<sup>46</sup> Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” 6-7.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

### *Main Tenets of Evidentialism*

As was the true in PA, there is also an arbitrary element here in singling out certain features of EA to call them “major tenets.” Nevertheless, one might be justified in identifying at least six concepts that represent major tenets of EA.

#### A Recognition of General Revelation

The first major tenet of EA is that it gives strong recognition to the doctrine of General Revelation. General Revelation consists of those means by which God makes Himself known to all men in all places in all ages. Theologians often describe General Revelation as coming through three channels: (1) knowledge of God through the created realm itself (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-21); (2) knowledge of God through the providential work of God to sustain and care for His creation (Acts 14:16); and (3) knowledge of God and His moral standards due to the fact that all men are created in His image (Rom. 1:19, 32; 2:14-16).

EA will usually put a strong emphasis on the validity of General Revelation and its usefulness in apologetics. The evidential apologist will often point out that even though Scripture (Special Revelation) certainly is the clearer and more thorough form of revelation, General Revelation, nevertheless, is also a source of truth. Being a source of truth about God, it is appropriate to use this source in the apologetical process.

#### A Recognition of the Value of Theistic Arguments

The concept of theistic arguments is very much related to the former point dealing with General Revelation. Theistic arguments are a series of classical arguments whose purpose is to demonstrate the proof of God’s existence. Among the more well known theistic arguments are the following: (1) The Ontological Argument, (2) the

Cosmological Argument, (3) the Teleological Argument, (4) the Anthropological Argument, and (5) the Moral Argument. With the exception of the Ontological Argument, theistic arguments, in reality, consist of the application of General Revelation in a logical and reasoned form. The evidentialist is using General Revelation to try and convince the unbeliever that there are good reasons for him to believe that God exists.

#### A Recognition of the Abiding Image Within Man

A third major tenet of EA might be called a recognition of the abiding image within man. This point was noted under the former point on General Revelation, but some additional comment is in order. EA will usually grant a stronger emphasis upon the fact that unsaved men still bear the image of God, even in their fallen condition.

It is true that the presuppositionalist will also hold this viewpoint generally speaking, but there is a difference in emphasis that results in different applications. In PA, the apologist will often lay a strong emphasis upon the doctrine of total depravity, so much so that he greatly minimizes or effectively discounts the abiding image of God within the unsaved man. In EA, however, there is usually a stronger recognition of the fact that the unsaved man still retains this image.<sup>48</sup>

The implication of this truth is that the unsaved man still has a mind with logical and rational capacities. The unbeliever still has a mind that can hear truth, analyze truth, and make judgments on truth, even correct judgments. This is not to say that an unsaved man can, in and of himself, accept those truth claims. What it is saying, though, is that the apologist must always remember that even though the unsaved human mind is

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<sup>48</sup> Schaeffer reminds the reader that because God is there and because He created man in His image there is a way for having “real ‘morals,’” and without the existence of a God who forms the foundation of moral absolutes, there can be no morals (“The God Who Is There,” 117).



corrupted and inclined against the things of God, that unsaved mind is the only faculties that the apologist can appeal to. Yes, the sinner is dead in sin; however, he still possesses a mind that is capable of reasoning and rational thinking. The evidentialist will often point to universal like “the law of non-contradiction, the law of causality and the reliability of human sense perceptions” as some of the God-given universals that one can legitimately appeal to for establishing the objective credibility of truth claims.<sup>49</sup>

The presuppositionalist may object by saying that the apologist should not “try to isolate the apologetic task from the evangelical witness and the theological context” by appealing to bare facts.<sup>50</sup> This writer agrees to a certain extent: it is not good to simply give bare, extra biblical data for the sake of apologetics. Apologetics should always, in the opinion of this writer, be considered as an integral part of the evangelical witness. In this sense, then, the evidence presented will always be tied with the theological freight of the gospel message it is accompanying.

#### A Recognition of the Role of Evidence

A fourth major tenet of EA is the way that it recognizes the role of evidence in the apologetics process. The evidentialist believes that there will usually be value in using historical and evidential arguments to help win people to faith in Christ. These evidential and historical arguments would include, for example, things like the historical evidence for God’s work within the nation of Israel, the historical accounts recorded in Scripture about God’s miracles, and arguments about the reliability of the Bible. It will also usually include a line of reasoning about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In

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<sup>49</sup> Gunn, “A Short Explanation and Defense of Presuppositional Apologetics,” 1-2.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

effect, the subject of evidence and historical arguments deals with the entire gospel message. In EA, the apologist often appeals to these historical and evidential facts as one way of seeking to bring the unbeliever to saving faith in Christ.

#### A Recognition of the Manifold Work of the Spirit

Because men are dead in sin (Eph. 2:1ff.), the fact of the matter is that the unsaved man does not (and will not) respond to the things of God (cf. Rom. 18:ff.) unless God Himself (by His Holy Spirit) takes the initiative to draw the sinner to Himself. Thus, on the one hand, the evidentialist believes that unsaved men do have a mind that can intellectually understand spiritual truth but, on the other hand, he knows that the sinner can never respond in faith to spiritual truth unless the Spirit works in the sinner's heart to draw Him to saving faith (John 3:5-8; 6:44, 63; 1 Cor. 2:14; Tit. 3:1-5).

When one surveys noted evangelical writers on both sides of the apologetical debate, it becomes clear that every mainstream apologetics writer acknowledges the need for God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. In summarizing the views of five different apologists of different convictions, Cowan notes that "all the apologists are agreed that the work of the Holy Spirit is crucial if apologetics are to succeed in convincing unbelievers of the truth of Christianity," for "human agency is not responsible for regeneration."<sup>51</sup> In PA, however, even though writers say that not "even a presuppositional apologetic is sufficient to lead one to Christ," they sometimes end up implying that their method is the means—the only means—by which one can be brought to saving faith.<sup>52</sup> In their view the use of the TA is "consistent with biblical theology,"

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<sup>51</sup> Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, 376.

<sup>52</sup> Lorenzini, "Does Presuppositional Apologetics Use Circular Reasoning?," 2.

but any other methods are unbiblical forms of spiritual compromise, for “evidentialism is inadequate and inconsistent with Scripture.”<sup>53</sup> Gunn follows suit in this wrong thinking when implies that God only works in the presence of the preached word, although it certainly is true, as Gunn has noted, that the “work of regenerating grace” never takes place apart from the message of the gospel out of Scripture.<sup>54</sup>

The immediate point that needs to be understood is the fact that EA teaches that the Holy Spirit can and does work through a myriad of truth sources. Whether it is something like sensory data, scientific knowledge or some other form of apologetical evidence, unbelievers do have an ability to gain knowledge from these sources. Furthermore, “the Holy Spirit certainly may work through the use of apologetics (as part of witnessing), not only in brining unbelievers to himself (Acts 17:1-4), but also in providing full assurance to believers.”<sup>55</sup> God the Spirit may work through any number of means to convict the unsaved and providentially work in their lives to bring them to salvation. Feinberg points out that the Holy Spirit may work in the heart of the unbeliever (1) through one of the theistic arguments, (2) through some sort of personal religious experience, (3) through the abiding moral law that resides in the heart of every

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 2-3. One can get wearied by the repeated claim that any form of apologetics other than a Transcendental Argument and full blown presuppositionalism is tantamount to granting rebellious sinners an “autonomous use of reason” (3). This is not theologically accurate and it ends up being a straw-man argument against evidentialism.

<sup>54</sup> Gunn, “A Short Explanation and Defense of Presuppositional Apologetics,” 6.

<sup>55</sup> Gary Habermas, “Evidential Apologetics,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven Cowan, ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 97.

human being, or, most especially, (4) through God's Special Revelation—the revelation that a man must have and believe in order to be saved.<sup>56</sup>

One cannot overemphasize enough the significance of the fact that God works in the lives of all kinds of people in a multitude of ways to bring them to Himself. The evidentialist readily acknowledges this fact and for this reason is not afraid to use a variety of truth sources to show men the folly of their disbelief and their need for Christ. Helseth points out that for Warfield (a staunch Princeton Calvinist), the role of positive apologetics as an evangelistic tool was to lay the groundwork for the Spirit to work saving faith from where he sovereignly chooses.<sup>57</sup> In other words, God certainly can work with things like evidence or General Revelation in His work to save His elect.

Interestingly, the presuppositionalist almost seems to fear this kind of methodology as though it might somehow rob God of His glory by not having salvation entirely dependant upon grace. This writer suggests that the presuppositionalist who thinks this way needs to understand that God's grace and the work of the Spirit takes

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<sup>56</sup> Paul Feinberg, "Cumulative Case Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, Steven Cowan, ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 160-165. The writer is reminded of a former parishioner who fled from Cuba in the late 60s as an avowed atheist. His own conversion testimony includes the experience of gazing up at the stars one night and being struck with the truth that there can be sense to life (which he did not have) if there is a God. Through that experience (which happened to be on the front steps of this author's church) this man came to church, heard the gospel, and put his trust in Christ.

<sup>57</sup> Helseth, "B. B. Warfield On The Apologetic Nature Of Christian Scholarship: An Analysis Of His Solution To The Problem Of The Relationship Between Christianity And Culture," 100. Kuyper, on the other hand, was much more oriented toward a negative form of methodology. Although both of these Reformed theologians preceded Van Til, it was Kuyper who would come to be the significant influence on Van Til and his apologetical methodology; Frame suggests that two of the big influences on Van Til were Abraham Kuyper and J. Gresham Machen. The latter's influence was especially in seeing how antithetical and incompatible orthodox Christianity and liberalism are. The former's influence was in the area of antithesis with regard to issues of grace. The end result of these kinds of influences was that Van Til ended up being quite extreme and excessive in his articulations (John M. Frame, "Van Til on Antithesis," *WTJ* 57:1 [Spring 1995]: 81). Frame asks whether in our time with the changes in our world that do not have the same kinds of liberal influences as before, "Is it possible, even necessary to maintain Van Til's emphasis in our time and to repudiate all these tendencies toward accommodation? Or is the truth to be found somewhere between these two evaluations?"

place in a number of ways. The salvation of the sinner *never* happens until faith in the gospel takes place (Rom. 10:14, 17), but in that process God uses many means in the work of bringing men to Himself.

#### A Recognition of the Need for Patient Evangelism

One final aspect of EA should be mentioned. This would be the fact that EA may tend to place more of an emphasis upon the need for patience when reaching out to the unsaved man. EA encourages the apologist to answer the questions of the unsaved man and show him why it is important for him to trust in Christ and why that person should be willing to trust the truth claims of Scripture. This is not to say that an apologist who holds to PA is not necessarily going to be impatient with the unbeliever, but it is saying that the very nature of EA tends to put more emphasis on being patient in the process of answering questions and showing reasons for faith.

Having looked at the basic tenets of each method of apologetics, this paper will now consider the strengths of each method.

## CHAPTER 3

### GLEANNING STRENGTHS FROM EACH APOLOGETIC METHOD

This chapter will build on the last chapter by suggesting a list of commendable strengths from both PA and EA.

#### *The Strengths of Presuppositionalism*

One might identify at least three particular qualities of PA that should be singled out as being commendable strengths for building a both/and apologetic.

#### A Proper Emphasis on Relying on Special Revelation

The first strength of PA that one should recognize and employ in building a both/and apologetic is the way that PA places such high value on the place of Special Revelation in Holy Scripture. For Van Til, the Bible is the only place to find “absolute certainty,” for if one is looking at judgments of historical particulars, he will never be able to rise above “rational probability” since he will always be constrained by the limits of empirical investigation.<sup>58</sup> Van Til is correct: there will always be limits of certainty from claims of historical observation and reasoning by empirical investigation. This does not mean that one cannot look at the forensic value of historical evidence and draw strong conclusions from it. The fact is that one can and should be willing to rely upon well-founded historical events. People live every day of their lives on the basis of such reasoning, and there is no reason why such reasoning should not be allowed for religious history as well. Nevertheless, Van Til’s point is to remind the apologist that the

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<sup>58</sup> Van Til, “The Defense of Christianity,” 12.

Scripture, when looked upon as truth from God, does provide a source of certain truth. The Christian apologist does well to base his whole epistemology on this conviction.

An error arises, though, due to the extreme position that Van Til takes in this regard. For example, in his article “The Defense of Christianity,” Van Til says that the evidentialist (whom he calls Mr. Arminian) also uses the Bible, but errs since he also uses “experience, reason, [and] logic as equally independent sources of information.”<sup>59</sup> Van Til finds fault with this saying that the apologist who appeals to any form of evidence without first “dealing with the very idea of fact and with the idea of logic in terms of the Scripture” will become guilty of setting up other sources of data as being equally valid in the mind of the unbeliever.<sup>60</sup> In other words, to use any kind of evidence, historical or otherwise, in calling people to faith without first showing from the Bible why this evidence is biblical makes one guilty of establishing the sinner as an autonomous source of authority. This simply is a false logic leap that this writer cannot accept.

John Frame, who studied under Van Til, makes note of the fact that “there are some kinds of assumptions we usually consider immune from revision. Among these are basic laws of logic.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, says Frame, to use with the unbeliever something like basic logic or basic sensory experience does not automatically mean that one is

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<sup>59</sup> Van Til, “The Defense of Christianity,” 2.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. This is one of the major points that one needs to examine in terms of validity. Is one, in fact, granting autonomy to the unbeliever simply because he appeals to an extra biblical fact without having first prefaced that statement to show what the Bible says about it? Apologists should put Van Til on the defensive to justify this kind of claim. This writer has no objection to Van Til’s assertion that the apologist should utilize reason and history “only as they are to be seen in the light of the Bible,” but in terms of methodology this writer sees no theological conflict if this is not explicitly stated to the unbeliever.

<sup>61</sup> Frame, “Presuppositional Apologetics,” 1.

establishing the unbeliever in autonomy. This writer agrees with this corrective that Frame, a professed presuppositionalist, provides.

In terms of a high emphasis on Scripture, there are a number of good reasons for placing such a high emphasis on the Bible. One reason is due to the psychological reality that it can give the apologist a higher sense of confidence. This is not to say that an evidentialist does not believe the Bible or have confidence in it, but the very nature of EA tends to reinforce the idea that the unbeliever should be given reasons why they ought to believe. The presuppositionalist always comes with and conveys confidence.

By way of analogy, when a salesman has great confidence in his product, he speaks and reasons with a great sense of authority. The natural effect of such confident authority is persuasiveness. This same principle can apply to evangelization. If the Christian is unsure of his authority, he probably will not speak with the same level of confidence. This lack of confidence may be misread by the unbeliever as indicating a lack of certainty, causing him to hesitate in accepting the truth claims of the Bible. One should not misread these statements by overemphasizing the point. However, this kind of situation is a reality about the way that people think. If the unbeliever senses a high trust by the apologist in the Bible, he will probably give greater attention to the messenger.

Interestingly, one can also take notice how what a strong emphasis the NT, especially the Book of Acts, puts on the importance of Spirit generated confidence and boldness in carrying out Great Commission evangelism. In Luke 24:49 Jesus told the disciples to wait to evangelize until they receive power from the Holy Spirit, a promise repeated in Acts 1:8. In Acts 2:29 Peter began this bold proclamation saying, “I may confidently say . . .” In Acts 4:13 Luke describes the fact that they Sanhedrin could see



the confidence of Peter and John in proclaiming the gospel. In Acts 4:29, Peter prays that all of God's people would speak God's word with confidence and, as the Spirit filled them with power, they, in fact did speak with boldness. Finally, in the last verse of Acts (28:31) Luke describes the way that Paul continued "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness ("boldness"), unhindered." The crucial point to note is the fact that Spirit-filled Christians can and should carry out the task of evangelism with confidence in God's message. In PA, the apologist is often encouraged to speak with such confidence.

#### A Proper Emphasis on Not Granting Theological Neutrality

PA often makes a strong emphasis on the idea that the apologist should not grant unbelievers a position of theological neutrality. This idea would be related to the former point to a certain degree. The presuppositional apologist will often say that any attempt to reason with the unbeliever with evidence is in effect conceding that the unbeliever has a capacity to make correct spiritual judgments from his own spiritual capacities. Because of the fact that PA puts such a strong emphasis on total depravity and the noetic effects of sin, there is also a very strong emphasis on the fact that unbelievers will always be hostile toward the gospel and completely disinclined to properly judge the message. In other words, they will never be neutral to the Bible. Based on Romans 1:18ff., one can say that there certainly is a biblical basis for this concept to one degree or another.

If the apologist is coming with a high amount of confidence in the Bible, as noted in the former point, he will also recognize the theological reality that all unbelievers (apart from the gracious work of God) are sitting in a state of spiritual hostility toward God. Having this presupposition in clear perspective can help to keep the apologist from

trying to reason with a person in a way that is dominated by the false presuppositions and inclinations of the unbeliever. To this extent, an application of this concept can be helpful in the apologetical process.

Schaeffer reminds the reader, though, that although unsaved men sit in this condition of spiritual lostness, they also do so in a way that is somewhat illogical. This is so because of the fact that the unsaved man does not “live logically according to his own non-Christian presuppositions.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, even though he rejects God’s truth and is hostile to the things of God, he still lives in the same real world as everyone else and still plays by the same basic rules of existence—rules that come from and belong to God. Schaeffer says that this inconsistency can be an excellent way for the apologist to “try to move him in the natural direction of his presuppositions.”<sup>63</sup> In other words, the presuppositionalist will often be well served by helping the unbeliever recognize the futility and emptiness of his own worldview, or as Schaeffer words it, “push the man off his balance.”<sup>64</sup> The unsaved sinner is hostile toward God and not neutral toward God’s truth, (cf. Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:1-3) and the wise and compassionate apologist will seize on this truth to lovingly work at showing the unbeliever that God has provided a solution to it all through the cross of Jesus Christ.

#### A Proper Emphasis on Striking at the Heart of Disbelief

A third strength of PA is the way that it focuses on the spiritual problems of disbelief. This is not to say that evidentialism does not address the problem of sin and the

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<sup>62</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 137.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

need for repentance. The fact is that all mainstream apologetics recognize the need for addressing the issue of salvation through faith in Christ. In a certain sense, though, PA tends to focus more narrowly than EA upon sin issues of the heart, with EA sometimes placing more focus on external issues such as evidence and historical arguments and theistic arguments. On the other hand, presuppositionalism will often show more of a concern “to go on to the heart. Thus presuppositional apologetics is penetrating.”<sup>65</sup>

One sees this, for example, in the way that PA emphasizes to unbelievers that they are dead in sin, cut off from God, and in need of regeneration through repentance from sin and faith in Christ. This emphasis on the sin problem of the unbeliever is a healthy focus. In the TA, the unbeliever is regularly brought face to face with the reality that he knows certain things to be true (e.g., his own personal conviction of universal morals), and thus PA can be commended for the way that it focuses on heart issues—issues like sin and spiritual denial—or as Edgar puts it, by focusing on “identifying the driving motives. . . . Rather than treat people as ideas with feet, it considers the issues of motivation, doubt and certainty, spiritual hunger and the like, to be as important as the use of logic.”<sup>66</sup>

### *The Strengths of Evidentialism*

This section will discuss four particular strengths of EA that are worthy of note in establishing a both/and apologetic.

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<sup>65</sup> Edgar, “Without Apology: Why I Am A Presuppositionalist,” 21.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

### A Proper Use of General Revelation

The evidentialist does not hesitate to make use of the truths that come from General. As noted earlier, the evidentialist will often appeal to facts of creation that reveal the Creator to His creation. The evidentialist believes that it is wrong to make a division of truth by discounting the value of truth from General Revelation. The Bible (Special Revelation) is a source of God's truth, and as such it has authority (supreme authority). Likewise, General Revelation is a source of God's truth, and as such it, too, has authority. For this reason the apologist is entirely justified in appealing to this truth when calling the unbeliever to repentance from sin and faith in Christ.

### A Proper Emphasis on the Value of Giving Reasons

Evidentialists also feel the liberty to patiently answer the questions of unbelievers so as to supply reasons for faith in Christ. Contrary to any objections from PA, there is nothing wrong with showing people reasons why they should hold a conviction. Edgar (a presuppositionalist) comments on the way that many were attracted to Marxism because on the one hand they were being told things like "religion is the opiate of the people" while on the other hand the spiritual beliefs of the people "were held without any real concern for whether the issue was true or false."<sup>67</sup> In other words, admits Edgar, it is good for people to know why they believe what they say they believe.

In commenting on the flaws of Existentialism and Neo Orthodoxy, Schaeffer notes that there is a "fatal flaw" in these kinds of theologies. He says that it consists of the fact that such theology "may dress up its positions with all kinds of clothes, but it remains irrational and what it is talking about can never really be discussed, because it is

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 22.

no longer open to verification.”<sup>68</sup> At this point the reader needs to recognize that a degree of parallel exists between something like Neo Orthodoxy and PA. In them all there is in effect a call to exercise faith before objective knowledge. In PA, the apologist often asserts that there can be no discussion about objective reasons or evidence because the unbeliever has no basis for examining the evidential claims. The unbeliever is simply told that he needs to repent of his bad (autonomous) epistemology and believe the Bible. To this extent, PA is guilty of the very thing that Schaeffer one must not do.

The evangelistic/apologetical process may start at some point beside the narrow message of the cross itself. As a matter of fact, for most unbelievers it will probably be best to not start the evangelistic process (which the writer is overlapping with the apologetical process) immediately at the cross. Due to a lack of biblical worldview, most people need to be given a theological context before the message of the cross will be intelligible: (1) they need to know that there is a sovereign God who created all things (e.g., Acts 17:24), (2) they need to know that He alone is the sovereign who rules all things (e.g., Acts 17:25), (3) they need to know that all humanity exists in solidarity as the crown of God’s creation, but also that sin has left man in a state of spiritual death and alienation from God (e.g., Acts 17:27, 30-31), (4) finally, they also need to know that God has provided a means of redemption through the saving work of His Son who conquered the curse of sin and death (e.g., Acts 17:31-32).

All of the former points are in a real sense the apologist’s way of giving reasons for faith. Much of what was spoken above is nothing more than the gospel in a wider sense, but it also makes up a body of reasons why the unbeliever should repent and

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<sup>68</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 101.

believe.<sup>69</sup> This process of explanation will surely elicit questions as well. It will elicit questions about how and when these historical events took place and whether or not the message is factual and credible. At this point, the evidentialist should patiently engage the unbeliever in a form of dialogue to answer the questions and objections that he may have about the message. This does not mean that one is declaring the unbeliever to be an autonomous judge of truth who is capable, in and of himself, of making proper spiritual judgments. All this is doing is granting the fact that the process of evangelism includes declaration, explanation, clarification, and justification. There is no theological error in answering questions and giving people explanations and reasons of why they should repent of their sin and trust in Christ.

#### A Proper Allowance for Human Rational Faculties

A third strength of EA (closely related to the former points) is the fact that EA makes a proper allowance for the rational faculties of mankind, even that of unsaved men. This is not to say that the evidentialist does not believe in the doctrine of total depravity or the noetic effect of sin. The traditional evidentialist does, in fact, believe these doctrines. The important point in this debate is to make sure that one is using a proper definition of this doctrine that is fully defensible from the Bible.

The error to be avoided is that of mis-defining total depravity to mean that unsaved men have no capacity for rational thinking, especially with reference to spiritual

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<sup>69</sup> Gordon Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (Lanham: University, 1990), 221-22. Lewis has explained the essentials as follows: "Christianity's primary proposals for acceptance and action may be more precisely delineated. Christianity claims: (1) that an all-wise, all-good, all-powerful God who is distinct from the world actively sustains and rules the world, (2) that the eternal Word (*logos*) of God became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, died for our sins, and rose again from the grave, (3) that God expressed His redemptive purposes through prophetic and apostolic spokesmen in Scripture, and (4) that people who are not what they ought to be may be forgiven and regenerated by repenting of their sin and trusting Christ's redemption."

issues. To help clarify and prevent confusion on the issue, Schaeffer notes the distinction between “rational” and “rationalism.” He says, “The Judeo Christian position is rational, but it is the very antithesis of rationalism.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, it is not wrong to speak and reason with men on the basis of rational thinking. Because Christianity is based on rational thinking, the apologist should employ rational thinking and logic and reason as part of his apologetics. The unsaved man can think rationally.

The evidentialist believes that sin has so corrupted the minds of unsaved men so that they (apart from God’s gracious intervention) are incapable of receiving spiritual truth in the sense of faith unto salvation (1 Cor. 2:14).<sup>71</sup> Paul is not simply saying that an unbeliever cannot rationally comprehend these truths, but specifically that he cannot accept that message in saving faith unless the Holy Spirit opens the heart to believe that message. In this sense, then, unsaved man can “know the formal content of God’s special revelation” yet still not “believe” it to the level of saving faith.<sup>72</sup>

The evidentialist thus recognizes that unsaved men do still possess their God-given rational faculties, and also that these rational faculties are the means by which men receive and process information for decision making. To appeal to the unsaved man, then, by means of knowledge, logic and reason does not mean, as Gunn suggests, that the apologist is catering to the illusions of the unsaved man by “telling him he has the

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<sup>70</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Francis Schaeffer Trilogy: God Who Is There*, 9. “A Rationalist,” says Schaeffer, “is someone who thinks man can begin with himself and his reason plus what he observes, without information from any other source, and come to final answers in regard to truth, ethics and reality,” 183. The operative principle would be the focus on final answers that are being held to come only from personal intuition and observation.

<sup>71</sup> One must note that Paul use the word that means to “accept” (i.e., “receive”; Gk. δέχομαι).

<sup>72</sup> Gunn, “A Short Explanation and Defense of Presuppositional Apologetics,” 4.

authority and ability to weigh the truth of God in the scales of autonomous reason.”<sup>73</sup> To make this claim is a straw-man argument. Just because men do suffer from the noetic effects of sin, this does not mean that the use of evidence, logic, or reason makes the evidentialist guilty of catering to his illusions.

In summary, the apologist is encouraged to make a proper allowance for the rational faculties within man, since these are the only faculties the apologist can deal with. To do so is in no wise some type of theological compromise. As a final qualifier and corrective, though, the presuppositionalist may have a point when they warn the apologist not to present evidence in so in such a way that it is divorced from its theological context. Doing this may lead one into a situation where he is in fact granting the unbeliever some kind of false sense of autonomy.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER 4

### IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL WEAKNESSES OF EACH METHOD

Having identified various strengths of each apologetical method, it is also appropriate to make note of certain potential weaknesses of each method.

#### *The Weaknesses of Presuppositionalism*

This paper recognizes that there is a degree of subjectivity in pointing out what shall be called weaknesses. This paper also recognizes, though, that sometimes errors in methods arise due to overemphases on certain points, especially when such overemphases take place at the expense of other complementary truths. Given this disclaimer, the reader is encouraged to consider six potential weaknesses of PA.

#### A Misdefinition of Total Depravity/Noetic Effects of Sin

In the view of this writer, one of the major errors of PA is that it usually ends up with a practical definition of total depravity that goes beyond the traditional, historical definition. Grudem describes the condition as primarily being “unable to do spiritual good before God.”<sup>74</sup> This does not mean, says Grudem, that “human beings are all as bad as they could be,”<sup>75</sup> nor that human conscience does not “provide restraining influences on the sinful tendencies in our hearts.”<sup>76</sup> Clearly, says Grudem, God’s common grace enables the mass of unsaved humanity to continue to be able

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<sup>74</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 497.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 496.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 497.

to do much good in the areas of education, the development of civilization, scientific and technological progress, the development of beauty and skill in the arts, the development of just laws, and general acts of human benevolence and kindness to others.<sup>77</sup>

In other words, total depravity does not mean an obliteration and annihilation of rational faculties. One of the common errors of some PA is in the way its practitioners often end up with a practical definition of total depravity that says that the unsaved man cannot even intellectually understand spiritual issues. Grudem's definition of total depravity rightly makes the real focus on the fact that in the end only God can give the "ability to repent and desire to trust in God."<sup>78</sup>

There are times, it would appear, that practitioners of PA are more concerned with "guarding against attack" by pulling up the castle "drawbridge" of airtight apologetical arguments and embracing a "you cannot reach me here" attitude rather than doing what they can to reach the heart of the unsaved.<sup>79</sup> Schaeffer's concern, and rightly so, is that apologetics might remain an academic enterprise whose objective is to "win an argument" rather than win a soul.<sup>80</sup>

Of course the unsaved man is corrupted by the fall and dead in sin. This does not mean, however, that he is the enemy. Rather, he is the mission field. A misdefinition of total depravity (or overemphasis on that point) sometimes almost becomes an excuse for the apologist on why he need not strive with that sinner to see him come to Christ.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 498.

<sup>79</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 152.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 153.

To summarize, because total depravity and the noetic effects of sin do not mean that men no longer have rational faculties for receiving and processing spiritual knowledge, the apologist should not deal with the unbeliever in such a way that acts as though he does not have such faculties. The apologist must remember that “the biblical emphasis that knowledge is needed prior to salvation will influence us in attaining that knowledge which is needed to communicate the gospel.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, the invitation to faith in Christ comes after “an adequate basis for knowledge has been given” whether this knowledge has come from the biblical record of God’s historical work or otherwise.<sup>82</sup>

#### A Confusion in Issues of Ontology and Epistemology

A second, but related, weakness in PA is the confusion that takes place in issues of ontology and epistemology. Ontologically, the unsaved man is separated from God and hostile in mind toward God and His truth (Eph. 2:1-3). For this reason, no man can embrace the message of truth unless God graciously acts to make him spiritually alive (1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:5) and changes his heart toward a willingness to believe.

In terms of epistemology, though, the unsaved man, even in his unsaved condition, still lives in the same world as the believer. They both operate with the same kind of rational faculties.<sup>83</sup> They both live in and observe the same created world God has made. They both have the natural ability to receive facts through their senses of observation. All men live and function in the same world. Gaffin, however, shows how PA teaches differently on this issue when he writes, “believers and unbelievers belong to

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 153-154.

<sup>83</sup> Although this does not deny that the unsaved man has a natural inclination against repentance.

two different worlds; they exist in not only separate but antithetical ‘universes of discourse.’”<sup>84</sup> Thus, with this kind of viewpoint, one is going to see communication with the unsaved person as being virtually impossible due to these totally different ways of thinking, a gap so wide that “there is no point of contact epistemologically between believers and unbelievers.”<sup>85</sup>

These extreme views come by virtue of the writings of Van Til. John Frame comments on these excesses when he says that Van Til’s position was that it “leaves us with a choice between that system (Van Tilian Reformed Christianity) and rank unbelief with a great gulf in between.”<sup>86</sup> Having studied under Van Til, Frame would know as good as anyone how Van Til drew lines in the sand. This writer, however, cannot accept the extreme views as being biblically acceptable.

As evident here, this kind of thinking is quite common in PA. This tendency often becomes a misplaced focus on trying to prove epistemology rather than on seeing how one might effectively bring the unsaved person to repent of sin and trust in Christ. Practically speaking, the presuppositionalist often makes the focus on trying to show the unbeliever why his epistemology is wrong, why he is not justified in holding the thoughts he holds, and why he is inconsistent for even the true convictions he does hold. By doing this, PA often turns the problem of salvation (an ontological problem) into a debate about epistemology. Granted, the effect of sin has created epistemological problems for the

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<sup>84</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, “Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6-16,” *WTJ* 57:1 (Spring 1995): 110.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>86</sup> Frame, “Van Til on Antithesis,” 82.

sinner, but the real problem is not merely a matter of preferring a misguided epistemology.<sup>87</sup>

A couple of comments are in order. First, PA is not entirely wrong by pointing out that the unsaved man needs to bring his way of thinking in line with the God who created him. In itself, this is fine. The problem is that PA in effect makes a bad epistemology the focus of what man needs to be saved from rather than sin and its consequences. Certainly self-centered, autonomous thinking is part of the sin problem, but PA is very myopic in its focus on epistemology as the heart of the problem, and simply is wrong for their view that if the apologist gives “secular (=autonomous) reason an inch it will not rest content until it controls everything.”<sup>88</sup>

In summary, the real problem for the unsaved man is not that he needs to repent of a wrong epistemology, but that he come to recognize that his sins are separating him from God (Is. 59:1), and that he is sitting under the wrath of God (John 3:36), and that he needs to repent of these sins and trust in Christ for forgiveness. The real issue is a state of separation from God, not a wrong philosophy.

#### A Failure to Recognize the Biblical Significance of General Revelation

Another common error in PA is that its practitioners often minimize or deny the legitimacy of General Revelation. In this, there is a huge inconsistency in their method. For example, the presuppositionalist will use logic and reasoning to try and persuade the unbeliever that he needs to repent of his misplaced trust in himself as an autonomous

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<sup>87</sup> Lorenzini says that “it has to do with repenting of autonomous use of reason and submitting one’s thinking to God. One must repent not only of the content of what one believes, but also of the method by which one thinks. . . . At issue here is one’s epistemology” (“Does Presuppositional Apologetics Use Circular Reasoning,” 2).

<sup>88</sup> Gaffin, “Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6-16,” 119.

judge of truth. On the other hand, this same apologist will say that the evidentialist is in error for using logic and reason in presenting the truths of General Revelation.

In this error, the presuppositionalist is in effect making a very unhealthy division in knowledge. He is, in effect, saying that there is no knowledge apart from faith in the message of Special Revelation. In its more extreme expressions, this is the kind of error that takes place in both Existentialism (e.g., a “leap of faith” kind of thinking) and Neo Orthodoxy (i.e., there is no objective revelation until one encounters God in a faith experience).<sup>89</sup> The presuppositionalist, unwittingly, is guilty in kind of this same kind of error: he is making a false dichotomy in knowledge by saying that there is no objective knowledge or truth for that unbeliever until he exercises faith in Special Revelation. This is a significant and common methodological error of PA.

Schaeffer, who himself was a presuppositionalist trained by Van Til (although Van Til accused Schaeffer of being inconsistent in following presuppositionalism),<sup>90</sup> points out that this kind of division of knowledge is very harmful. He notes that “With Hegel and Kierkegaard, people gave up the concept of a rational, unified field of knowledge and accepted instead the idea of a leap of faith.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 15-19.

<sup>90</sup> William Edgar, “Two Christian Warriors: Cornelius Van Til and Francis A. Schaeffer,” *WTJ* 57:1 (Spring 1995): 58. When asked in one large gathering whether he was a presuppositionalist or an evidentialist, Schaeffer said “I’m neither. . . . I’m not an academic, scholastic apologist. My interest is in evangelism.” This is a very well stated point. The apologist needs to remember that none of these disciplines are to be done for the sake of academia. The purpose is to see a working out of the Great Commission.

<sup>91</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 43. Schaeffer recognized the danger of making this kind of division of knowledge—a division between metaphysical issues like “purpose, love and morals” and other non-metaphysical kinds of issues. In a very real sense, PA commits this kind of error when it says that unsaved men can have no knowledge until they presuppose God.

A related problem that arises in this issue is that the presuppositionalist not only minimizes the role of General Revelation, but also that he discounts the value of any sort of extra biblical knowledge. The presuppositionalist will say, for example, that the use of Christian, historical evidence makes one guilty of a form of rationalism due to the fact that the apologist is allowing that unsaved person to establish their reasoning power as the ultimate judge of truth.<sup>92</sup>

In the opinion of this writer, such statements are misleading and incorrect. The mere use of general knowledge and experience does not in itself constitute a form of rationalism. As Mayers has pointed out, just because a man is unsaved, this does not mean that he operates with a different form reasoning and logic. His unsaved condition (including a proper allowance for the full impact of total depravity) does not mean that he operates with an entirely different form of epistemology than the believer (which is in effect what PA is saying). As Mayers puts it,

All men have the same logic. There is not a believing and unbelieving, pagan and Christian, logic. Lost men are still men made in God's image with the gifts of rationality, language, creativity, personality, and moral—albeit selfish—inclinations.<sup>93</sup>

This is well stated and addresses a logical problem in PA. Just because the apologist utilizes historical evidence or logical reasoning in sharing the gospel with an unbeliever, this does not mean that he is capitulating to rationalism. True, the unsaved man is resistant to truth (Rom. 1:18ff.), but this does not mean that an apologist who uses logic or reason is guilty of granting rationalism.

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<sup>92</sup> Lorenzini, "Taking Every Thought Captive," 2.

<sup>93</sup> Mayers, *Balanced Apologetics*, 45.

The fact of the matter is that PA itself is built upon the idea of using logic and rational thinking. For example, the presuppositionalist who appeals to the unbeliever with the TA does so by using logical statements and rational forms of thinking. The presuppositionalist is appealing to certain built-in faculties in the human mind (and rightly so) as the only way of communication. Thus, it is wrong for the presuppositionalist to accuse the evidentialist of rationalism simply because the evidentialist communicates with the unbeliever using logic, evidence or reason. Schaeffer reminds the reader that “scientific proof, philosophical proof and religious proof follow the same rules.”<sup>94</sup> Mayers builds on this line of thinking, saying, “[just because] no ethically redemptive act of the will is possible for unsaved man does not mean that the unregenerate man cannot use the laws of inductive inference or the rules of deductive syllogisms correctly.”<sup>95</sup> The real problem is what man does with spiritual truth, not so much the epistemological system itself. Mayers again states it well:

The noetic, or intellectual, effect of sin is seen by the premises and presuppositions man adopts in his spiritual and ethical alienation from God and not by the structure of logic and mental activity itself. Sin certainly affects man’s psychological activity, hindering his ability to think correctly, but not the universal laws of logic themselves provided by God in creation.<sup>96</sup>

This is an excellent corrective to PA. The fall of man corrupted his entire being, but it did not destroy man’s rational powers, nor has it made any form of empirical observation

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<sup>94</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 121. Schaeffer says that these two universal rules include the idea of (1) the theory must be noncontradictory and (2) the theory must be coherent, congruent and comprehensive so that the theory matches the actual observable data that surrounds us. The writer thinks that these two simple laws of logic rightly apply everywhere because of the fact that they are grounded in the truth of God’s own nature. Thus, to use such principles in witnessing to the unbeliever, the apologist will not make himself guilty of apologetical compromise by granting the unbeliever the right to be an autonomous judge of reason.

<sup>95</sup> Mayers, *Balanced Apologetics*, 46.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*



for the unbeliever an illegitimate enterprise in the exercise of autonomy.<sup>97</sup> Thus, history can be a potential source of knowledge for empirical observation and so can revelation (whether Special or General). In terms of observation and learning from such sources, the Bible not only “presupposes that the acquisition of knowledge is possible,” but it even commands that unsaved man would gain knowledge from these sources.<sup>98</sup>

The significance of this for apologetics is the fact that the apologist can and should assume that the unbeliever does have an ability to receive the knowledge that one provides to him whether it is coming directly from the Bible as a quoted verse, from the Bible as a theological principle, from outside the Bible as a form of General Revelation, or from outside the Bible as a general empirical observation. Unbelievers can receive such knowledge and, even more, they can have an intellectual apprehension of these things. Once again, Mayers provides an excellent critique of the situation

Our conclusion is not only that empirically based knowledge is possible, but that revelatory historical events can be correctly comprehended intellectually, if not personally and existentially, by unbelievers. Immediate and empirical Christian evidence presented to first-hand witnesses cannot therefore be denied.<sup>99</sup>

In summary, the reader should be cautioned about this weakness of PA that discounts or denies the intellectual capacities of the unsaved. The problem is not the intellectual capacity itself, it is what that unsaved person does with that knowledge in terms of response. In terms of rationality itself, the apologist should not forget that “rationality is needed to open the door to a vital relationship to God” because

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 51.

communicated truth processed by rational thinking is the only way for a sinner to come to faith.<sup>100</sup>

#### A Misplaced Emphasis on Defending Theological Systems

In the opinion of this writer, there seems, at times, to be a common thread that runs throughout the philosophy and methods of PA. That common thread might be described as a misplaced emphasis on defending theological systems, in particular a misplaced emphasis on defending the Calvinism and/or the doctrines of sovereign grace.<sup>101</sup>

When it comes to evangelism, there is no necessity for the Christian evangelist/apologist to guard the doctrines of grace—certainly not to guard a theological system. Rather, the job of the Christian is to proclaim Christ as clearly as possible and then recognize that God Himself is the One who saves. There is no necessity for the apologist to construct an apologetical methodology that is designed to safeguard the doctrine of grace.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what seems to take place in PA. Presuppositional writers like Baird make the false conclusion that “the Reformed position cannot employ the classical or evidential methods of apologetics and still survive intact.”<sup>102</sup> In other

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<sup>100</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 123.

<sup>101</sup> For the sake of brevity, the writer intends to characterize this doctrine as being essentially the Reformed doctrine of soteriology. This would include the universal sinfulness of man, the full impact of total depravity as already discussed, the absolute necessity of unconditional election, the absolute necessity for the efficacious call of God by the work of the Holy Spirit, and the absolute necessity of salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

<sup>102</sup> Bryan Neal Baird, “An Apology for my Theology,” <<http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/index.html?mainframe=/apologetics/baird.html>>, accessed on July 8, 2007, 2.

words, unless one follows presuppositionalism as a system, one cannot hold to the doctrines of grace as seen in the Reformed doctrines of soteriology.

To put this into even clearer perspective, it seems that a common emphasis in PA is the need to protect what they see as consistent Calvinism. In these efforts, though, the apologists often end up going beyond biblical bounds in their apologetics to make sure (as they see it) that God gets all the credit for salvation and that man gets none.

Once again, an excellent source for verification for this line of thinking comes from the writings of Van Til himself, the father of PA. In urging the reader to follow consistent presuppositionalism, Van Til makes the statement that a failure to do so means, in effect, that the apologist is guilty of presenting “the Arminian conception of the substitutionary atonement” since, in his mind as a Calvinist, the substitutionary atonement will in EA get “discolored by the view of ‘free will.’”<sup>103</sup> Van Til goes on to say that the non-presuppositionalist is making man out as the one who has “absolute or ultimate power to accept or reject the salvation offered him. . . . It is obvious, therefore, that Arminians (i.e., the non-presuppositionalist) have taken into their Protestantism a good bit of the leaven of Roman Catholicism.”<sup>104</sup>

This writer strongly disagrees with Van Til at this point. Van Til has absolutely no biblical or theological grounds for saying that the use of historical or evidential reasoning in giving the gospel has “a good bit of leaven of Roman Catholicism.” Here is the fact of what is really taking place here. Van Til is showing a hyper-Calvinistic tendency. His compelling motivation is to defend a theological system—Calvinism—and

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<sup>103</sup> Van Til, “The Defense of Christianity,” 7.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

to defend it against what he feels is the threat of Arminianism. His zeal to defend a theological system leads him into severe misrepresentations of the real issues.

As far as Van Til's methodology, Gaffin makes note of the fact that even Van Til has admitted that there are examples of his work that "should have had much more exegesis in it," something for which Van Til conceded he had no excuse.<sup>105</sup> Gaffin goes on to note that unfortunately there are many times when Van Til talks about the Christ of the Scriptures and his uncompromising desire to let the Christ of Scriptures speak, but "his writings provide precious little, if any, argumentation based on a careful treatment of key biblical passages; his approach is assertive and dogmatizing, rather than exegetical."<sup>106</sup> These are very telling words but they truly do strike at the heart of the issue. Van Til was a philosopher/theologian, but much of his work was driven more by the system itself than by fidelity to well-exegeted Scripture. Unfortunately, although the system does contain a high degree of internal consistency, its failure to be consistently biblical leaves it with weaknesses—weaknesses that very few are willing to admit. Once again, it seems that a driving force behind it all is to champion a Calvinist system of theology that gives all the credit for salvation to God.

Certainly one would be hard pressed to find any mainline evidentialists who would disagree with the fact that "salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 3:9). As noted earlier, though, this really is not the issue. Granted, those evidentialists who come from an Arminian background will be in a degree of error in the way they understand and articulate the doctrines of soteriology. However, it is an error to say that EA is in itself a

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<sup>105</sup> Gaffin, "Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6-16," 103.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

form of Arminian theology, and it is also a methodological error for the presuppositionalist to think that he must hold to a strong form of PA or else he is not properly defending the doctrines of grace.

Van Til, commenting on the apologetical methods of the non-Arminian Edward J. Carnell and Carnell's willingness to employ evidence in his apologetics, says the following,

Here is the fundamental difference between Mr. Grey's (the Arminian who at this moment is being compared to Carnell) and Mr. White's (the presuppositionalist) approaches to Mr. Black appears. The difference lies, as before noted, in the different notions of the free will of man."<sup>107</sup>

In practice, Van Til simply will not concede the validity of any use of evidence, experience, or logic unless it has first been tied to Scripture alone. To do otherwise, says Van Til, is to tell the unbeliever that his freedom non-derivative and self dependant.<sup>108</sup>

For Van Til, any approach other than his apologetical system is tantamount to "presenting the non Christian with Arminianism rather than the Reformed faith" and that such an approach "compromises the Christian religion."<sup>109</sup>

This writer must strenuously object to these assertions. Van Til is not justified in his claims. When he makes such claims it becomes increasingly evident that the driving force in Van Til and many other presuppositionalists is the compelling desire to defend the theological systems of the Reformed faith. In the eyes of this author, this

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<sup>107</sup> Van Til, "The Defense of Christianity," 3.

<sup>108</sup> In other words, such a use of evidence makes one guilty of being Arminian in methodology and means, in effect that the sinner has a libertarian free will to govern salvation rather than the gracious work of God through unconditional, individual election. This author does affirm the doctrine of unconditional, individual election as an ultimate basis of salvation but strongly disagrees that a use of extra biblical evidence is tantamount to Arminianism.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 4.

preoccupation with defending theological systems ends up producing unhealthy imbalances of theology and methodology.

### *The Weaknesses of Evidentialism*

The final point before coming to a point of synthesis is to consider the potential weaknesses of EA. One might identify at least three weaknesses that often arise in EA.

#### An Underestimation of the Noetic Effect of Sin

The first potential weakness of EA is that its practitioners often underestimate the impact of sin upon the thought processes of sinful man. On a surface reading, one might object since this paper made the point earlier that the presuppositionalist is the one who errs in this regard. The truth is that it is possible to err in two different directions. As noted earlier, one way to err is to place so much emphasis on this doctrine (particularly on a misdefined doctrine of total depravity and the noetic effect of sin) that the unbeliever is treated as having no capacity for rational thinking when it comes to spiritual issues. This is the kind of error that is most common in PA. On the other hand, an opposite kind of error takes place when the evidentialist deals with the unbeliever as though he were totally neutral to spiritual matters. The presuppositionalist (better, the theologian who holds to a Reformed soteriology) is correct when he points out the fact that unsaved men characteristically resist spiritual truth. In practice, the evidentialist sometimes errs by wrongly granting too much to the unbeliever in terms of neutrality. This is an error that the apologist should be cognizant of and try to avoid.

### A Misplaced focus on the Value of “Proving God”

Another error that sometimes takes place in EA is that the evangelist/apologist might place an inordinate emphasis upon proving the existence of God. This kind of misplaced focus can turn the evangelistic occasion into a debate about God’s existence instead of the need for personal salvation through repentance over sin and faith in Christ.

By way of analogy from the world of sales, some salesmen commit the same kind of methodological error that the evidentialist commits when presenting too much information. The salesman, fully equipped with his canned sales presentation and a rudimentary knowledge of his product, goes after the sales prospect. The prospect actually may have some use for the products or services that the salesman has to offer, and may even sense that he has such a need, but the salesman errs in the way he deals with his customer. The salesman launches into his presentation, telling the potential customer about a myriad of product features. He goes on and on, believing that he will convince the prospect to buy if he only gives him enough reasons. The prospect, who already senses a need of these services, listens to the salesman as he provides a seemingly endless list of features. In the end, the prospective customer declines the offer and says goodbye. This is the problem: the salesman had a misplaced focus on trying to prove his product. He should have been more intent on the real heart issues of helping the prospect understand his need for the product and helping his prospect make a decision to buy.<sup>110</sup>

This writer certainly does not want to trivialize the glorious work of redemption through the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit by reducing it to a mere sales presentation,

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<sup>110</sup> Van Til, “The Defense of Christianity,” 18. Van Til puts it this way: “There is no end to the ‘exhibits’ and Mr. Black (the unsaved man who is being evangelized by the evidentialist Mr. Grey with a series of lengthy evidential arguments) shows signs of weariness. So they sit down on the bench. Will not Mr. Black now sign on the dotted line?” Van Til’s point is well taken: there is a danger in EA of placing too much emphasis on proving points with evidential reasoning.

but there is a valid principle to apply. The principle is the fact that man's real need is to recognize his sin, repent of his sin, and put his full trust in Jesus Christ. Sometimes the evidentialist spends too much time trying to "prove" God, while all the while the sinner already knows that God exists (Rom. 1:19-21). The apologist ends up with a situation in which the unbeliever sees all the "features" of Theism (i.e., God exists as is clearly seen), but then he walks away without having been asked to "buy" the product (i.e., to repent of sin and trust in Christ). The apologist, so to speak, lost the sale because he did not focus on the real heart issues.

#### A Tendency to Minimize the Use of Direct Spiritual Truths

This final point builds upon the former point. Just as it is not good to overemphasize the effort of proving God, it also is not good if one minimizes a discussion of "direct spiritual truths." By this expression, the writer is talking about the subject of sin, disbelief, and the need for regeneration. The truth is that the Bible says very little (if any) about the need or value of proving the existence of God. In light of this, the evidentialist should be warned about making proof for God's existence a major apologetical focus. As Schaeffer has put it, "He is there, and He is not silent."

A right place to focus is on the heart issues: men are sinners; they need a Savior; Jesus Christ is that Savior who conquered sin; God saves men who believe in Him. Jesus put it this way in John 16:7-11:

But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.



These verses show that the ministry of the Spirit is central to the salvation of sinners.

These verses also show that the unbeliever's greatest problem is that he remains in the guilt of his sin because of his disbelief in Christ. These verses also show that Jesus Christ is the One who made a payment for that sin since His ascension to the Father is proof that His death on the cross satisfied the righteousness of God. These verses also show that Jesus Christ is the God-appointed Judge of all evil, a truth that should urge the unbeliever to repent before he himself falls into that everlasting judgment.

These are the "direct truths" the apologist must never neglect. Contrary to the objections of the hardened presuppositionalist, it is not as though it is theologically wrong to use logic or reason or evidence when seeking to bring the sinner to repentance and faith, although it can become wrong if the focus is on proving a case with evidence to the exclusion of an emphasis on these direct spiritual truths.

## CHAPTER 5

### SYNTHESIZING THE FINDINGS AND AGREEMENTS

This final chapter will suggest a list of six different apologetical principles that come out of these two systems which should be employed in constructing a both/and apologetic. Throughout the paper, the author has made numerous comments regarding various strengths of each position, as indeed, there are many strengths from each side. Mayers offers one preliminary suggestion when he says,

The presuppositionalist is correct, as he begins a priori from the ontological perspective of creation, in having everything ultimately related to and interpreted by God's will and Word. The evidentialist is equally correct as he begins in an a posteriori fashion with the actual facts and argues epistemologically that the facts rightly interpreted have only one possible meaning, and in that sense carry their meaning with them in a self-interpreting manner.<sup>111</sup>

Mayers is correct for pointing out that these various ways of presenting and defending he Christian faith need not, and should not, be seen as mutually exclusive. Because there is a unity to all knowledge, the apologist need not fear whether he begin his task with either God or His creation. Either can be legitimate as long as it does not exclude the other.<sup>112</sup>

In closing this paper, the author will commend six implications from the preceding study as key elements of a both/and apologetic.

#### *A Call to Embrace the Implications of Total Depravity*

The first principle to employ—one that is acknowledged by both methods—is the principle of total depravity. The apologist must never forget the implications of total

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<sup>111</sup> Mayers, *Balanced Apologetics*, 198.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

depravity. At the same time, he must also guard against the possibility of erring in either of two directions.

On the one hand, the apologist must always remember that the impact of sin is universal to all men (Rom. 3:23; 5:12ff.). The apologist must never forget that all men have received the full impact of sin upon their total being. This means that sin has brought corruption to the emotions, will, and mind of the unbeliever. Because of this, the apologist should keep in mind that he will always encounter to one degree or another resistance to the truths of the gospel (Rom. 3:10).<sup>113</sup>

On the other hand, however, by virtue of God's common grace, the universal impact of sin does not mean that men are as evil as they could be, nor does it mean that the noetic effect has produced an obliteration of all rational faculties. What it does mean is that all men are spiritually corrupt in every aspect of their being, and that this corruption has made it impossible for men to be pleasing to God or to seek Him unless He produces a change in their inclinations (cf. Matt. 11:26-30; John 6:44, 63, 65).

A biblically informed apologist will always strive with the unbeliever at every point to help him see his need for Christ, but he will always remember that the unbeliever is horribly crippled by the impact of sin. The role of the evangelist and apologist is not to produce regeneration—a ministry that belongs solely to the Holy Spirit. The role of the

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<sup>113</sup> In this writer's opinion, the apologist should not feel compelled to argue with people on the basis of personal experience whether or not anyone ever seeks God. The very fact that men come to Christ shows that in the process of salvation, men do seek God. Paul's point in Romans 3:10 is to establish the fact man's sinful condition has so corrupted mankind that no man ever seeks God on his own accord. The apologist whose convictions are driven by Reformed Anthropology, Hamartiology, and Soteriology will always recognize that those who seek God do so because of the providential work of God. Sometimes this providential work of God takes place over long periods of time until at long last the sinner comes to faith in Christ. There will be little value in arguing with people who point to personal experience to as proof that men seek God. The apologist can point to the spiritual realities that make divine intervention an absolute necessity and wait for the young Christian to grow in his apprehension of these theological truths.

evangelist/apologist is to patiently bear witness to the truths of God’s redeeming work through the Lord Jesus Christ—to communicate these truths with as much clarity and persuasiveness as possible.<sup>114</sup>

In this apologetical process, the apologist can also remember that the starting place can “begin with man and what he knows about himself.”<sup>115</sup> In other words, in some situations, the apologist will be best served by talking with the sinner about who he is, what thinks, what he believes, what he believes about his own purpose, and what he thinks about his own destiny, given the fact that he is a fallen human being who stands guilty before his creator. In many situations, this kind of approach can take one very close very quickly to the real heart of where that sinner is. Men like Schaeffer have used this kind of approach with tremendous effectiveness.

#### *A Call to Embrace the Implications of an Abiding Image in Man*

A second key principle for a both/and apologetic consists of the importance in embracing the implications of God’s abiding image within all men. As noted earlier, the curse of sin and the effect of total depravity do not mean that God’s image has been obliterated.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, because the image of God still abides in man even in his fallen condition, this means that men still retain the rational constitution and faculties with which God endowed them. As Mayers has put it, “Man is also provided with the

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<sup>114</sup> One can see the passionate heart of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:20 where he says, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” The testimony of Scripture makes it patently self evident that God’s messengers were passionate and persistent in presenting spiritual truth, explaining spiritual truth, and pleading with men to embrace it.

<sup>115</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 133.

<sup>116</sup> As is widely acknowledged, several biblical texts make it clear that the fall of mankind did not cause God’s image in man to be annihilated (Gen. 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9).

possibility of meaningful linguistic communication between God and himself and among men. Man could not comprehend God's special and propositional revelation without God's endowment of logic."<sup>117</sup> In other words, not only by virtue of common grace, but more so by virtue of man's constitutional nature as bearing God's image, all men have a capacity for reason and logic. This should never be ignored.

At times even Van Til conceded this truth in his own way.<sup>118</sup> Unfortunately, these kinds of statements were usually so eclipsed by statements to the opposite effect that what he said in this regard is largely ignored by his followers.<sup>119</sup> The point to be noted, though, is that all men—even unsaved men—still have a mind that can receive and process information, whether directly spiritual or not, and it is important that the apologist not ignore or minimize this truth. Unfortunately, extreme antithetical dogmatic assertions like Van Til's sometime become very popular. For this reason, many have been led down a wrong path when it comes to this subject.

Thus, the impact of sin has changed not the constitution of man to take away cognitive faculties. The apologist must never forget that one can appeal to the mind without necessarily granting him some kind of autonomous status. The Christian apologist who employs a both/and apologetic will do all he can (1) to help the unsaved

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<sup>117</sup> Mayers, *Balanced Apologetics*, 200.

<sup>118</sup> Frame, "Van Til on Antithesis," 84. Frame notes that there are times when Van Til would defend the doctrine of common grace and point out that there is a significance of this common grace to the noetic effects of sin. Unsaved man does have knowledge, but that unsaved man is also unaware of the fact that the knowledge he does have is coming from the operation of God's grace to permit such knowledge. Despite these kinds of limited concessions, in practice, "he nevertheless often writes as though the unbeliever knows and affirms no truth at all and thus is not at all affected by common grace."

<sup>119</sup> Within this same context, Frame again points to the extreme statements of Van Til who wrote, "the reason of sinful man will invariably act wrongly. . . . The natural man will invariably employ the tool of his reason to reduce these contents to a naturalistic level" (Ibid., 85). Frame comments, saying, "On this extreme antithetical view, it would almost seem as if no unbeliever can utter a true sentence. It would also seem as if no communication is possible between believer and unbeliever."

person understand the spiritual issues at stake and (2) to help that unsaved person comprehend the horrendous results that will come upon him if he does not repent of his sin so as to trust in Christ. This is the task of the apologist.

The principle of God's abiding image includes several factors, the first of which is the fact that all men know and understand that God is the sole Creator/Sustainer of this universe (Rom. 1:19-21). The apologist should seek to bring these facts to bear upon the unbeliever, but in doing so the apologist is reminding that unbeliever of something that he already knows intuitively. Second, especially as often pointed out by the presuppositionalist, the abiding image of God is also what accounts for the reality of human personality and the universal realities of logic and rational capacity.<sup>120</sup> The apologist will sometimes find it extremely powerful to emphasize these points to the unbeliever, especially if that unbeliever is driven by philosophical reasoning against the gospel. No one can deny the universal uniqueness of human personality and man's capacity to use logic and reason such as no other creature is able. Third, and going right along with this, is the fact that God's image in man also means that all men have a certain universal knowledge and conviction about ethics and morals. All men everywhere have a sense of "ought." In other words, ethics and morals are universal to all humanity.

These universals, which are universally recognized by all men, are yet another one of the evidences that God exists and that He has created man to bear His image. The apologist can and should appeal to these universally known truths. The significance of all these factors is the reality that the Christian apologist has a universal point of contact with all men. The apologist does not need to wonder whether or not he will ever be able

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<sup>120</sup> These points are some of the major aspects of the so-called Transcendental Argument.

to find some point of contact with the unsaved man. The fact of the matter is that due to the abiding image of God in man a point of contact always exists.

*A Call to Embrace the Implications of Evidence and Theistic Arguments*

Because of the fact, as noted above, that all men have a capacity to think and reason and analyze information, the apologist should also recognize the potential usefulness of Christian evidences and theistic arguments. As Mayers has put it, “Because God has created, He also acts in the realm of nature on behalf of His people and before all men. These acts, be they the Old or New Testament record, are events *capable of universal perception if only very particular and special interpretation*” (emphasis original). Mayer’s point is that God has spoken and God has acted and that this historical testimony and evidence is available for all to see. As he puts it, “It is the empirical evidence of historical revelation that must be the content of our apology.”<sup>121</sup> Mayers is absolutely correct.

The apologist should not confine himself, as often happens in PA, to only using Special Revelation, negative apologetics, and the TA. There can be value in using negative apologetics, but there is also tremendous value in positive apologetics that focus on the factual events of history. As Schaeffer has put it,

In Christianity the value of faith depends upon the object towards which the faith is directed. So it looks outward to the God who is there, and to the Christ who in history died upon the cross once for all, finished the work of atonement, and on the third day rose again in space and in time. This makes Christian faith open to discussion and verification.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Mayers, *Balanced Apologetics*, 202.

<sup>122</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 65.

Schaeffer, a Reformed theologian who trained under Van Til, was correct in stressing the importance of the objective nature of the Christian faith. Also, as he says, it is not wrong to allow these objective truth claims to be subject to testing and verification.<sup>123</sup>

The apologist who presents evidence and support for these things is practicing positive apologetics. Positive apologetics through the use of evidence, logic, and reason can be very effective ways of helping lead the unbeliever to the point where they see their need for faith in Christ. The presuppositionalist Krabbendam encourages the evangelist to eagerly employ the following kinds of principles: (1) make sure the task as seen as part of a discipling context, (2) make sure that the message is presented as coming with authority, (3) make sure that it is presented with a gentle spirit, (3) make sure that the message includes any form of truth that God may use to work in the mind of that unsaved person (e.g., factual evidences, genuine facts of science, prophetic Scriptures, logic, common rational sense, hard facts, personal experience, confirming evidence, and universal knowledge), and (4) make sure that all of this is presented within a presuppositional kind of framework that recognizes the supremacy of revealed truth in Scripture.<sup>124</sup> This writer strongly agrees with Krabbendam's suggested methodology.

Furthermore, another principle of using evidence is that it becomes a means of applying theology to life. Biblical theology is thus not restricted to the church and somehow placed in a unique category of special knowledge that has to be handled with

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<sup>123</sup> Schaeffer *The God Who Is There*, 151-152. As a matter of fact, says Schaeffer, "It is unreasonable to expect people of the next generation in any age to continue in the historic Christian position, unless they are helped to see where arguments and connotations directed against Christianity and against them as Christians, by their generation, are fallacious." In other words, reasons for faith are extremely important!

<sup>124</sup> Krabbendam, "Cornelius Van Til: The Methodological Objective of a Biblical Apologetics," 142-144.



its own special rules. Helseth makes note of the way that Warfield resisted the tides of his time to bend Scripture “into some sort of conciliation with the latest pronouncements of modern science, philosophy, and scholarship,” but also how at the same time he made it clear that the Christian theologian should apply theology by looking upon “the seething thought of the world from the safe standpoint of the sure word of God.”<sup>125</sup> In other words, Scripture and theology should be integrated and applied to life, but never “from the standpoint of the world’s speculations.”<sup>126</sup> The value of this approach, believed Warfield, is not only that it “encourages Christians to seek and embrace truth wherever it is found,” but also that it forbids the Christian from compromise since he is driven by Scripture. Thus, it also becomes a method that helps prevent unsaved men from erecting their false idols from modern discovery and modern thought so that they become norms of truth.<sup>127</sup> Warfield’s method is to eagerly see Scripture applied and integrated into all of life. This is a healthy methodology.

This does not mean that the apologist should downplay the potential value of using something like negative apologetics and the TA. The fact of the matter is that sometimes these approaches are the best approaches. John Frame has emphasized many times that apologetics needs to be people specific. In other words, the apologist should not try to use one canned approach when it comes to evangelism and apologetics. Each

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<sup>125</sup> Helseth, “B. B. Warfield On The Apologetic Nature Of Christian Scholarship: An Analysis Of His Solution To The Problem Of The Relationship Between Christianity And Culture,” 91.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 92. Helseth notes that the separation of the fundamentalist movement that took place in those days produced a situation where the fundamentalists came to be seen by many as irrelevant, while the fundamentalists looked at everyone else as capitulating to compromise—which, to be quite frank, was true of many groups. The point, though, is that theological isolationism can create a situation in which Christian truth is isolated in a wrong sense from the rest of culture.

person is unique in his thinking, education, and experience. For this reason, the method of discussion and reasoning will always be different to a certain degree for each person.<sup>128</sup>

The apologist should continue to remember, though, that God the Spirit uses the truths of General Revelation in His work as well.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, as appropriate, the apologist can and should use Christian evidences or theistic arguments to help the unbeliever ultimately come to the place where he recognizes the need for repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ. Doing so will not, as Van Til has put it, put one in danger of embracing a Roman Catholic kind of theology.<sup>130</sup>

*A Call to Embrace the Implications of Regeneration Through Repentance*

Once again, the apologist should be reminded that the goal in all of this is not to win an argument. The goal is not to convince the unbeliever that he needs a different epistemology. The goal of this apologetical task is the Great Commission goal of seeing unbelievers experience regeneration through repentance over sin and faith in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>128</sup> In the opinion of this writer, Frame does an excellent job of using the strengths of PA without being bound by all the excesses that Van Til says is a part of consistent presuppositionalism.

<sup>129</sup> Helseth notes that Warfield did believe that there are sources of knowledge other than the Scripture and that the Christian is justified from seeking knowledge in these various sources, but in the end the ultimate judge and authority must always be the Word of God (“B. B. Warfield On The Apologetic Nature Of Christian Scholarship: An Analysis Of His Solution To The Problem Of The Relationship Between Christianity And Culture,” 98). When it comes to General Revelation itself, Warfield did not believe that Special Revelation supplants the General Revelation, but that the Special Revelation provides the clear explication of the significance of that natural knowledge (Ibid.).

<sup>130</sup> In “The Defense of Christianity,” Van Til very wrongly says the following about any form of apologetics other than consistent presuppositionalism: “It has become even more apparent that our Reformed pastor cannot, as he defends the Christian faith, cooperate with the Arminian any more than he could cooperate with the Roman Catholic” (25). In other words, according to Van Til a failure to employ his style of apologetics—presuppositionalism—means that the apologist is in effect embracing Roman Catholic theology. Van Til is severely wrong in making these kinds of reckless accusations.

Krabbendam highlights a certain deficiency of popular apologetics when he says “No Christian apologetics that I am aware of espouses a method that consciously aims at repentance. Indeed, it seems to me that a call to repentance would be out of place in the various types of apologetics that have been practiced in the church.”<sup>131</sup> In other words, much apologetical practice seems to consist more of “an intellectual enterprise” rather than a Great Commission evangelistic enterprise, the precise aim of Scripture.<sup>132</sup>

Krabbendam is right: faith in Christ must be the driving purpose.

In terms of ultimate cause for regeneration, as noted several times throughout this paper, the debate is not about the necessity of grace. Virtually all mainstream apologists (at least those who hold a Reformed view of man, sin and salvation) hold that no salvation takes place apart from sovereign grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. No presuppositionalist would ever say that his airtight TA is going to save the sinner and likewise no evidentialist would ever make such a claim for his evidence either. As Mayers put it, “There is then sufficient evidence for faith, but also insufficient for absolute proof, and so a loophole is provided for unbelief to continue.”<sup>133</sup> Evidence by itself saves no one. Regeneration through repentance and faith are essential, but without the work of the Holy Spirit, no one gets saved, for “rational comprehension is not enough” unless it is accompanied by “Spirit-wrought conviction and regeneration.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Krabbendam, “Cornelius Van Til: The Methodological Objective of a Biblical Apologetics,” 126.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Mayers, *Balanced Apologetics*, 202.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 204.

*A Call to Embrace the Implications of Patient Evangelism*

All sinners are unique individuals with unique personalities, unique experiences, unique education, etc. For this reason and because of the fact that God's work of salvation usually involves some sort of unique process to bring men to himself, the apologist should resist the urge to feel the need for immediate decisions for Christ.

This does not mean that the Christian should not be passionate in his evangelism nor that he should not tell the sinner about the urgency of the matter. Paul, who on the one hand had a fine grasp of all the theological truths of God's sovereign grace, is at the same time the supreme example of passionate evangelism. In Romans 9:3 he speaks of his own sacrificial love for his people and how, if it were even possible, he would sacrifice himself that he might see his people saved. In Romans 10:1ff. Paul again speaks about the passionate love that he had for his own people. Clearly Paul was passionate about evangelism and this showed itself in unceasing labors (Acts 20:17-31). The same thing must be true of the apologist today, just as commanded in 2 Timothy 2:24-26:

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

The principle to be applied is this: the Christian apologist should always recognize the importance of patient evangelism. If this means answering questions, the apologist should answer questions. If this means meeting and overcoming objections, the apologist should do what he can to meet and overcome objections. As Edgar has put it, one of the qualities that should never be lacking—regardless of how skillful one is in using

apologetics to deflect objections—is “compassion for the lost.”<sup>135</sup> Edgar is right, for PA, “which is supposed to be more centered on God than others can often be practiced in a way that ignores the grace and love of God we seek to defend.”<sup>136</sup> This is an excellent statement, for it is an honest admission of the apologetical danger of arrogance and intellectual pride. All, regardless of apologetical system, are susceptible to this sin.

Certainly there are times when it becomes clear that the hardened disbeliever has no desire for spiritual truth. Paul tells Timothy that when he comes across these kinds of people he should “refuse ignorant and foolish speculations” (2 Tim. 2:23). As Jesus put it, there does come a time when one needs to stop giving holy things to dogs and to stop casting pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6). The apologist needs to make that determination on a case by case basis as to when it is time to shake the dust from the feet from those who are defiant in disbelief and move on to the next person (Matt. 10:14).

One mistake the apologist should not make, though, is the error of thinking that unsaved man cannot have knowledge due to their epistemological condition. Mayer offers another caution when he says, “The Kuyper-like Calvinist who believes man cannot comprehend anything of the gospel prior to regeneration is either wrong, or we stop preaching.”<sup>137</sup> The hyper-Calvinist is wrong should he take this position.

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<sup>135</sup> Edgar, “Without Apology: Why I Am A Presuppositionalist,” 22.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.; this writer is half pleased with the words of Gunn, who on the one hand does talk about pleading, but on the other hand makes disparaging statements about the unsaved that unfortunately seem all too often to characterize PA: “All the Christian can do is to argue from the Bible that the man who says there is no Jehovah god is truly a fool and that the forbidden fruit will indeed turn to gravel in his mouth. We plead and argue, but only God can cause the blind to see and the deaf to hear” (“A Short Explanation and Defense of Presuppositional Apologetics,” 5).

<sup>137</sup> Mayers, *Balanced Apologetics*, 207.

The unsaved man can receive knowledge and the responsibility of the Christian is to lovingly go after that unsaved man with patient evangelism. God opens hearts and this is His role, not man's, nevertheless man plays a God-given role in this entire process, and that role is taking the message so that men might hear, comprehend, and believe, for without this they cannot be saved (Rom. 10:14, 17).

*A Call to Embrace the Implications of Holy Living for a Bold Testimony*

The sixth and final principle one should employ in a both/and apologetic is the principle of Spirit-inspired boldness through holy living. As noted earlier, the Book of Acts repeatedly shows how the Spirit of God gave boldness to the church for evangelism. Obedient believers were filled with the power of God through the Spirit, and this filling produced a confidence that helped turn the world upside down.

By application, then, this entire discussion would be deficient if it did not stress the crucial importance of personal holiness for the task of apologetics, holiness not only for the sake of confidence, but also so that “talking about holiness” would not be contradicted by the absence of “the practice of holiness.”<sup>138</sup> Mayers echoes these same thoughts when he says, “The final facet of a both/and apologetic is the new birth life style that reinforces one’s testimony of being ‘born again.’ . . . Verbal testimony without a Christian life will force the on looking unbeliever to conclude that Christianity is not true.”<sup>139</sup> Mayers’ point is well taken as a final comment to close the discussion.

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<sup>138</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 197.

<sup>139</sup> Mayers, *Balanced Apologetics*, 208-209.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Through interaction with a host of writers, this study has shown that even though there has been much heated debate between the presuppositional and evidential camps, the truth is that they really are not as radically different as some might think. In reality, they are not mutually exclusive unless they set forth in extreme forms. One of the difficulties in this regard is the fact that Van Til's writings were usually quite severe, and his antithetical style often gave an "all-or-nothing" connotation. A number of his followers have commented on these excesses and have suggested that one can gain great benefits from presuppositionalism even if he does not embrace the whole package. This writer concurs with this assessment.

In closing this study, the author encourages the reader to consider the way that this paper has highlighted both the strengths and potential weaknesses of each apologetical system. This writer encourages the reader to avoid the trap of seeing either system as an all-or-nothing proposition. The reader should carefully consider the fact that every human being is a unique individual, and because of this, no single approach or line of reasoning is bound to work for everyone. The truth is that the evangelist/apologist has the huge responsibility of patiently coming beside the sinner and doing the best he can to lovingly present him with a very harsh message. God has commanded every Christian to take up this task, and God has also said that it will not be easy. His promise, though, is that He is at work to save sinners. Because God has promised to save some, the Christian can be assured that if he brings the message of truth, God will use that message to save according to His perfect purposes.

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