

REVIEW ARTICLE

Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense

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Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics, by R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984. Pp. 364. \$12.95.

It is increasingly rare these days to find a book in which the contents really correspond to its title. However, this volume is indeed both a presentation and defense of "classical" apologetics and a critique of presuppositionalism. Furthermore, it is well written (especially in those difficult portions dealing with sophisticated philosophical interactions) and fairly well organized. However, the format employing endnotes is inconvenient.

The greatest asset of Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley's argumentation is at one and the same time this volume's greatest deficit—an *uncompromising* defense of traditional apologetics. They certainly cannot be charged with ambivalence, but they frequently may be perceived by the reader as being arrogantly dogmatic. Consider, for example, the following excerpts:

If there is no reasoned defense for the Christian faith there can be no sound Christianity [p. 97]. . . . At their classical best, the theistic proofs are not merely probable but demonstrative [p. 101]. . . . We have endeavored to update the traditional theistic arguments, trying to show that when properly formulated they are compelling certainties and not merely suggestive possibilities [p. 136]. . . . Miracles are visible and external and perceivable by both converted and unconverted alike, carrying with them the power to convince, if not to convert [p. 145]. . . . Aquinas, Edwards, Butler, Reid, Warfield, Beattie, Orr, and others . . . were assuming, *rightly we believe* [italics added], that the mind as a faculty or power remained and functioned as it was intended to do. Therefore, it can and does survey the evidence and it can and does draw proper conclusions, with detachment and neutrality [p. 258]. . . . We have seen that the traditional view sees natural man as capable of understanding not only the world but the Bible itself. The unregenerate need no supernatural, spiritual, illumination to understand anything of which the human mind is capable . . . [p. 298]; [etc.].

From this inflexible perspective they often criticize such apologetical 'compromisers' as Geisler, Montgomery, Pinnock, and others (cf. pp. 125-26, 148)!

Nothing interrupts the authors' tenacity to traditionism. They are not deterred by the reservations of their verificationist contemporaries, nor by the *balanced* arguments of Augustine, Luther and Calvin, and most unfortunately, not even by exegetical theology. Historical tradition, auspiciously labeled by them as "classical" and "Reformed" (e.g., pp. 296, 319, etc.), is their ultimate yardstick. This becomes most conspicuous in their critique of presuppositionalism:

Presuppositionalism has become the majority report today among Reformed theologians, although it cannot even be called a minority report of church history. If Charles Hodge is right [for them this is a Class I assumption], that what is new is not true and what is true is not new, presuppositionalism, being new, falls of its own weight [p. 183]. . . . We will show that this new apologetic was virtually unheard of for eighteen centuries, only coming into its own in this one [p. 188].

Besides reminding the authors that justification by faith did not "come into its own" until the sixteenth century, it must be said that their classical position has a massive Romanist footing and foundation. In the volume they skillfully circumvented this fact with only one passing paragraph (p. 210). Consequently, for these reasons and more importantly exegetical ones the following statement by the authors should be no cause of embarrassment to the presuppositionalist: "But, we hope . . . that presuppositionalists and other fideists [sic] think wishfully that the traditional position supports them will grant that it does not" (p. 211).

Undoubtedly, the greatest shortcoming of this treatise is its detachment from the moorings of biblical exegesis. Although the authors are long on polemical engagements with Van Til and others in the philosophical arena in which they sometimes prove themselves as victors, they forfeit many battles in the arena of theological exegesis. This charge will be substantiated specifically in the following pages of this review; however, a preliminary criticism needs to be made in reference to one assumption which permeates their whole argument. This assumption is that there is a dichotomy between "mind" and "heart" (cf. pp. ix, 21, 219, 243, 297, etc.). However, if one conducts a careful investigation of *לֵב* / *καρδία* (i.e., the seat of *both* rational *and* volitional functions) in anthropologically and hamartiologically significant contexts, the endeavor yields more than sufficient evidence to render their above assumption a biblically false dichotomy. Not so incidentally, it is in this area of theological exegesis that presuppositionalism displays its *preeminent* attribute: "Thus, for the presuppositionalist, theology and apologetics are inseparable. A sound theology is essential for a sound apologetic" (p. 187).

Prior to a chapter by chapter critique, a word needs to be said about the seemingly incongruous dedication of *Classical Apologetics* "to Cornelius Van Til who has taught a generation that Christ is the Alpha and Omega of thought and life." Apart from these words and one edifying paragraph (pp. 183-84), Van Til is sometimes caricatured during the authors' critique of presuppositionalism (e.g., pp. 234-39, 263, etc.). A tactic of guilt by association (especially with existential and Neoorthodox fideists) is also employed. This reviewer found such apparent innuendoes offensive.

"The Crisis of Secularism" is the topic of chap. 1. Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley draw a proper distinction between "secular" and "secularism" (along with other -isms, pp. 3-5). After some good observations relating to the meaning and impact of secularism (pp. 6-12), they attribute its epidemic to the wrong cause—the waning of traditional apologetics (p. 12).

A brief but bold definition of apologetics stands at the head of chap. 2 (i.e., "The Task of Apologetics"): "Apologetics is the reasoned defense of the Christian religion" (p. 13). It is in this chapter that the authors begin their guilt by association arguments. Anti-rationalistic existentialists are associated with theological fideists (pp. 13-17; cf. p. 33; etc.) leading to the conclusion that "presuppositionalism is orthodoxy's defense of no-reasoned defense for Christianity" (p. 16). In response to this it is their "hope" that "presuppositionalism will be giving way more and more to classical apologetics as a reasonable modern response *to reasonable modern people who want a reason why they should believe*" (p. 16, italics added). The emphasized portion of this quotation draws attention to their hamartiological deficiency which will characterize the rest of the volume. That their "hope" is naively idealistic is intimated not only by biblical theology but also by their concession on the very next page: "Sin complicates both the knowing and the object known, adding clarification to the already heavy responsibility of apologetics" (p. 17). Yet it becomes progressively obvious that the authors do not view this truth as seriously as they should.

The portion of chap. 2 dealing with "Apologetics: God's Example and Command" suffers from quantitative and qualitative deficiencies. It is far too brief to support the dogmatic conclusions postulated by the authors. Their conclusions regarding a normative methodology are in need of biblical modification in the light of prevalent scriptural evidences substantiating a presuppositional model. Also, their restriction of διαλέγομαι to a technically philosophical sphere of usage fails to understand Luke's employment of the term in its common first-century context of the Jewish synagogue (i.e., a preaching and teaching emphasis, not a polemical one; cf. Schrenk, "διαλέγομαι, διαλογίζομαι, διαλογισμός," *TDNT* 2 [1964] 94-95; and Fürst, "διαλογίζομαι," *NIDNTT* 3. 821; etc.).

"Natural Theology and Fideism" are on center stage in chap. 3. At the outset the authors call attention to some important distinctions; for example, "there is a crucial difference between natural (general) *revelation* and natural *theology*" (p. 26). After a preliminary historical survey of natural theology emphasizing the skepticism of the philosophical fideists (pp. 26-35; note the rare concession that the existential fideism of Barth was "unalloyed"; cf. p. 34 on "Barth's *type* of fideism" [italics added]), they bring forth their major contention in the section entitled "the 'Back of the Book' Method": "But the question remains: do we move from general revelation to special revelation or from special revelation to general revelation?" (p. 36). Much of the subsequent development of their treatise deals with this issue of sequential priority as it relates to the apologetical task. However, let it be said that the biblical data seems to support a both/and *perspectival* emphasis which would indicate that the data are not intended to force an issue of methodological priority. Should one feel compelled to make a decision at this juncture, Kuyper's is preferable

in the light of mankind's epistemological predicament outlined in Romans 1 and in other places (cf. also Reymond's *The Justification of Knowledge*): "According to Kuyper there is a general revelation but no correct natural theology unless and until one has the light of special revelation" (p. 38).

Chap. 4, "The Biblical Evidence Confirming Natural Theology," is the most exegetically oriented chapter in the book. However, some of the most crucial scriptural data were either not mentioned or not stressed. Concerning Romans 1, the authors made several good points, e.g., "suppression of the truth is at the heart of Paul's indictment of paganism" (p. 42). They also mentioned the significance of God's nature being "clearly perceived" in natural revelation (p. 43); nevertheless, their case could have been strengthened all the more by some significant observations on the force of καθοράω. An extremely significant conclusion arises from this: "In Romans 1:20, Paul is affirming that humans can in fact move from the phenomenal realm to the noumenal realm, making the dispute with Kant all the more vivid" (p. 44). Their point is well taken; however, one must never forget the undergirding context of Rom 1:18-3:20 (e.g., mankind's suppression of truth and God's judicial abandonment of the race). The authors are certainly justified in criticizing those who water down the teaching of Rom 1:19-20 (cf. pp. 48-49), but they appropriately concede the enormous difficulty anyone encounters in trying to systematize an epistemology based upon the exegetical data of Romans 1 (p. 50; cf. David L. Turner, "Cornelius Van Til and Romans 1:18-21," *GTJ* 2 [1981] 45-58).

"There are those who argue that the objective general revelation is there for all to see, but that because of the fall into sin and especially because of the influence of sin on the mind (the noetic effects of sin) the objective revelation never gets through, it is not subjectively appropriated" (p. 47). Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley fail to heed the exegetical and theological evidence that motivates this conclusion. Although the authors mention Rom 1:21b and 1:28 (cf. pp. 52-56), they refuse to accept the practical epistemological implications of mankind's futility in reference to his reasonings (διαλογισμοῦς), his darkened mind (ἀσύνετος καρδία; cf. 1 Cl 36:2), and God's giving them over to an unapproved, depraved mind (ἀδόκιμος νοῦς). This and other biblical data stand conspicuously opposed to their bold conclusions (cf. their assertions 7-9 on p. 62). In addition, their apologetical mandate "to establish once again a sound natural theology" (p. 63) is an exercise in futility in the light of mankind's moral and noetic predicament (cf. Gen 6:5; 8:21; Mark 7:20-23; Eph 4:17-19; etc.).

Chap. 5 dealing with method is a strange admixture of dogmatism and reservation (contra their reprimand of compromisers mentioned at the outset of this review). The strongest point of this chapter is its periodic appeal to pragmatic argumentation. For example, they commendably expose dialectical gibberish (a la Barth, *et al.*): "Talking in contradictions is nonsense, regardless of how transcendently profound it may sound" (p. 76). Concerning "the Law of Noncontradiction as a Universal Prerequisite for Life" (pp. 80-82), the authors astutely remark, "All people hold to it in *fact*, though some do deny it" (p. 80). Additionally, in reference to the "law of causality," it is observed that "it too may be denied by the mouth but not by the life" (p. 84). One

could wish that this refreshing practicality would infiltrate some of their errant extrapolations.

Some key reservations which *they* honestly acknowledge need to be pointed out. Of significance is the affirmation that "variant epistemologies produce variant conclusions" (p. 67). They also acknowledge that "logical errors occur in the application of the law of causality. The fallacies of faulty causal generalization and of false cause are perils to the application of the law" (p. 83). In other places the following cautions are posted:

Because our senses are fallible and limited we speak of *basic* or *rudimentary* reliability of sense perception rather than *total*, *perfect*, or *infallible* reliability. . . . The barrier to achieving perfect universality of classification is not merely the weakness of our sensory equipment or apparatus but the limits of the *scope* of our investigation, limits that are imposed by space and time. . . . It is because of this problem of the relationship between induction and certainty that many Christian apologists have sought to avoid any dependence on empirical data for building a case for the existence of God. . . . To venture into the empirical realm of sense perception is assumed to necessitate a foray into the hopeless land of probability and its attending levels of uncertainty [again, cf. some of the reservations of the compromisers]. . . . This is what motivates the presuppositional apologists to begin their apologetics with the assumption of the existence of God [pp. 87, 88, 89].

In spite of these and other significant reservations, the authors' verifictional dogmatism is not stifled: "We will endeavor to show that we can move from the phenomenal to the noumenal by the application of the law of noncontradiction, the law of causality, and the basic reliability of sense perception" (p. 89). The primary factor of underestimation which has contributed to this unjustifiable dogmatism is in the area of what they call "psychological prejudice" (pp. 69-70). Although the authors acknowledge that "even a sound epistemic system, flawless deductive reasoning, and impeccable inductive procedure does not guarantee a proper conclusion" (p. 69; cf. the practical and theological reasons given for this on p. 70!), they fail to apply the hamartiological connection to method. Although they concede "if we consider common ground to mean a common perception and perspective of reality, then obviously no such common ground for discussion exists between believer and unbeliever" (p. 70), yet they champion a common *epistemological* ground. Incidentally, they subsequently speak of "*a kind of common ground*" (p. 71, italics added) which in its paragraph context is the very same "kind" supported by Van Til!

A well-argued case for the ontological argument as developed by Anselm and perfected especially by Edwards is offered in chap. 6. Although Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley's communication is extremely sharp in reference to this profound philosophical debate, they necessarily succumb to that which they hate; they introduce into their argument several nondemonstrable assumptions. For example, the very last sentence of the chapter presuppositionally asserts: "*Infinite being must exist because we cannot conceive of its not existing*" (p. 108). Some of the other assumptions standing behind this bold conclusion are:

Once we think of the possibility of God, everything is proven. *To think of being is to know being* [p. 101]. . . . We cannot think of the nonexistence of perfect, necessary being. Therefore, that being must exist [p. 102]. . . . When one adds the simple observation that the necessary proof of anything is the inability to think of its nonexistence, this establishes the necessary existence of the perfect being [p. 103]. . . . But the idea of a necessary being does include in it eternally necessary existence [p. 106]. . . . [etc.].

Such boldness has resulted from the authors' failure to heed at least two warnings. The first has to do with the justifiable reservations of moderate rationalists; it is the warning that one must not leap from ontological probability to ontological certitude (once again, remember the compromisers). The second warning is far more serious; it involves the practical implications of a biblical hamartiology. That the authors are once again culpable may be illustrated through the implications of statements of theirs such as: "But does *a human seeking God* prove the finding of Him?" (p. 99, italics added). In the light of Psalm 14 (cf. Psalm 53), Romans 3, etc., they need to submit their assumptions and conclusions to an exegetical scrutiny pertaining to a scripturally sound and practical view of man and sin.

Chap. 7 organizationally follows with their defense of "the Cosmological and Teleological Arguments." The bottom line of their "updated" defense (cf. p. 136) is once again the tally of several nonverifiable assumptions. It should be pointed out, however, that there are several noteworthy concessions and challenges recorded in this chapter. Concerning the former, the authors well note:

We say that the cosmos, which *almost* all of us recognize, argues a Cosmic Mind, which all of us should acknowledge. If we do not, it must be for some reason other than lack of orderliness. . . . It will turn out that *a priori* we do not believe that there is a Cosmic Mind. . . . Because of our *a priori*, we will not allow ourselves to see a posteriori evidence of an orderly cosmos. *None are so blind as those who will not see* [p. 115, italics added].

Concerning significant challenges, the one relating to Montgomery's improper utilization of John 7:17 is illustrative:

But this is not the way Christ intended this statement: First, this cannot be an invitation to an unbeliever to experiment because it is morally impossible for an unbeliever to do the will of God. To do God's will one must begin by believing in Him and repenting of one's sins which, *ex hypothesi*, an unbeliever will not do. An experimenting unbeliever is a contradiction in terms. . . . So far from this text being an invitation to unbelievers to experiment, it is a rebuke to them that their not doing God's will is the source of their blind unbelief [p. 127].

Such biblically based concessions and challenges need to be taken far more seriously by the authors themselves. One wonders about their theological and apologetical assumptions when they pose the following questions (p. 127):

What objection is there against logical compulsion? What is logic if it is not compelling? If the case for Christianity is merely suggestive, or merely makes consideration feasible or intelligible or respectable, why should anyone convert?

Are we to believe that logic usurps the prerogatives of the omnipotent Spirit (e.g., John 16:8)?

Chap. 8, "Supernatural Revelation and Miracles," is unfortunately characterized by axiomatic excess as illustrated by the following quotation: "Now we have thus *proved* that the Bible is the Word of God on this formula: Natural revelation plus miracle plus claimed revelation proves revelation" (p. 159, italics added). (For a full critique of the major problems of their argument, see: Gary Phillips, "Apologetics and Inerrancy: An Analysis of Select Axiomatic Models" [Th.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1985].) Practically speaking, apologetical finesse is exalted to the place of assisting the sovereign Spirit via a pre-Testimonium: "There is no circle here because when the Word testifies to the Spirit it has already been established as the Word of God by apologetics" (p. 141). For a presuppositional approach see James M. Grier, "The Apologetic Value of the Self-Witness of Scripture," *GTJ* 1 (1980) 71-76.

Their whole argument is doomed to failure because of their hamartologically naive first premise: "It is *virtually* granted that the Bible (not assumed to be inspired) contains *generally reliable* history" (p. 141, italics added). Then they put forth an apologetical task of sheer frustration: "To those outside the church, the case for basic reliability must be made" (p. 142). To this is added their argumentation concerning miracles: "From an *un-inspired* Bible we are arguing for miracles, and from miracles we are arguing for an *inspired* Bible" (p. 144). This they assure the reader is not arguing in that ever-dreaded circle. From their perspective (and ours, i.e., the Christian's *Weltanschauung*) the conclusions flow quite naturally:

The biblical miracles need to be considered on their own merits. Their impossibility, or even improbability, has never been demonstrated. We have positive evidence for their occurrence. The *reasonable person* [italics added] will believe that they occurred as recorded. . . . But if our argument is sound, then *rational and honest people* [italics added] must not only believe *that* the Bible so teaches but they must also believe *what* the Bible teaches [pp. 152, 153].

But where are these "reasonable," "rational and honest people" to be found "outside the church?" Outside of Christ are only those who are actively hostile in their minds to the things of God (cf. ὄντας . . . ἐχθρούς τῆ διανοίᾳ in Col 1:21; etc.). Not only is this problem found outside the flock but it often plagues the sheep of the fold (contra some of the authors' unqualified assertions on pp. 140-41, etc.). Even after the disciples witnessed incontestable miracles they still demonstrated symptoms of 'heart trouble' (e.g., Mark 6:51-52); after they had received intensive instruction on the resurrection (e.g., Mark 8:31ff.), they still refused to receive the testimony of the witnesses (cf. Luke 24:1-11). They just were not very reasonable!

The relationship of "the Spirit, the Word, and the Church" is briefly surveyed in chap. 9. Some positive contributions include their discussions of the pneumatological significance of Pentecost (p. 165), the statement about predestination as it relates to apologetics (p. 167), and the acknowledgement that Christ's testimony to the Word of God is ultimate (pp. 177-78). However, once again, it is apparent that the second and third of these observations never become apologetically determinative for the authors.

At the outset there is a slight contradiction concerning the Spirit's testimony to Messiah (cf. pp. 162-63). There are, however, more significant

hermeneutical and theological problems either in the chapter or as it relates to the rest of the volume. For example, John 14:26 is inappropriately used to support a *general* testimonium (pp. 166, 168). John 14:26, 15:26–27, and 16:13 undoubtedly have a special application to the apostles. Similarly, 1 Cor 2:9 is used initially without qualification (p. 167); however, later some important observations provide clarification (p. 171). The biggest disappointment of the chapter concerns those pneumatological truths which are practically forgotten or rendered impotent in the subsequent development of their apologetical methodology. The authors themselves state, “We know persuasion is not by apologetic might, nor rational power [and yet compare the contents and critique of their last chapter!], but by the Spirit of the Lord. . . . The Spirit of God testifies to the Word of God” (pp. 167, 178). However, these statements are contradicted by their assertions in the previous chapter (see the comments above).

Chap. 10 (i.e., “An Outline of Presuppositional Apologetics”) introduces the major points of tension between historical verificationism and presuppositionalism. Several observations based upon this chapter have already been made in the general portion of this critique. But let me state two further observations. First, the authors express their aversion to circular argumentation (p. 188). However, they ignore the larger philosophical problem of the universal necessity of beginning with nondemonstrable assumptions. Second, they express their concern that presuppositionalism represents a departure from Reformed theology (p. 184). However, departures from orthodoxy are conspicuously related to verificationist preoccupations.

Chap. 11 is characterized by overstatements, understatements, and even by non-statements. It is best to explain this last criticism first. In a historical survey of traditional apologetics it is interesting to note the conspicuous absence of Aquinas and the Romanist core of this tradition. Rather the authors apparently choose to become carefully selective namedroppers as reflected in their chapter title, “General Apologetic Tradition on Reason and Faith: Augustine, Luther, and Calvin.”

Their survey of the evidence from Augustine seems to be well balanced (cf. pp. 189–96). Faith and reason do not appear to be mutually exclusive for Augustine; nevertheless, it is obvious that he put things into perspective through a sound hamartiology (cf. pp. 193–94).

The too brief discussion on Luther and reason (pp. 196–98) opens with one of those aforementioned understatements: “Martin Luther is notorious for his opposition to reason” (p. 196). Modification of that observation is suggested but not supported by *primary* sources. Their reliance upon one secondary source (i.e., B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason*) leaves the reader unconvinced.

Another understatement introduces the section entitled “Calvin and Reason” (pp. 198–208): “There has been considerable debate about the nature of Calvin’s position on the knowledge of God” (p. 198). An essentially credible survey ensues. However, it is doubtful that Calvin really “regarded” the theistic arguments “as compelling” (p. 203) or that he “regarded evidence as a foundation for faith” (p. 206). In the context of Calvin’s overall theology, these appear to be overstatements on the part of the authors.

As has been previously acknowledged Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley have not only pointed out some verifiable inconsistencies in Van Til's epistemology, etc., but they have also distorted some of the essentials of his presentation as used to exemplify presuppositionalism. Chap. 12, "The Starting Point: Primacy of the Intellect and Autonomy," may be used to illustrate this point. Some examples of fair evaluation occur sporadically on pp. 212, 223, and 231-33. However, these are overshadowed by misconceptions, unfair evaluations, and invalid conclusions based upon distorted and/or false assumptions. Often these occur amidst or at the end of some credible critiques. For example, after a few quotations from Van Til in which he genuinely acknowledges the noetic effects of sin, the authors caricature his position with the following words: "Human reason, which is a God-given instrument for truth [i.e., their presupposition which is never substantiated via exegetical theology], has become an instrument leading to error. In that case, human mental faculties (not only holiness) have been *eradicated* by the Fall" (p. 213, italics added). No presuppositionalist, including Van Til, would have argued that way. The authors flagrantly deny any noetic effects of the Fall, and furthermore boldly assert that "this is theological error, as well as an apologetic fatality. Van Til has not answered his critics because, believing as he does, he cannot" (p. 213). From the tenor of Van Til's *total* presentation and from the meager exegetical correctives mentioned in this critique, it seems obvious that they are the ones who are errant theologically. But it must be remembered that for them theology is apparently subservient to apologetics!

In another place they interact with secondary sources (e.g., p. 216) and conclude that presuppositionalists are hyper-Calvinistic (p. 217). Rather than proceeding down this avenue and utilizing their construct of 'Reformation theology' as the ultimate yardstick, one wishes they would consider in a profound way the exegetical and apologetical implications of passages such as 1 Cor 2:14. Selective allusions to 1 Cor 2:14a will not do (cf. pp. 216-18, *passim*), and besides, reflection upon the impact of the *whole* verse might have kept them from making embarrassing statements like the following: "If the unregenerate do not 'see' it, it is only because they *will not*, not because they *cannot*" (p. 218, please note the italics are theirs). Note especially what the last part of 1 Cor 2:14 says: "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them (καὶ οὐ δύναται γινῶναι), because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor 2:14)! Besides this straightforward assertion, the Spirit in other places reminds us that noetic inability is all the more complicated by Satanic blindness (e.g., 2 Cor 4:3-4).

On the crucial issue of autonomy, the authors accurately note Van Til's key contribution: "Van Til thus rejects any element of neutrality in the non-Christian mind" (p. 232). What surfaces in this portion (pp. 231-40) are two definitions of autonomy: one derived philosophically and methodologically (i.e., theirs) and the other derived theologically (Van Til's). Therefore, they argue from their definitional benchmark that "given Van Til's notion of autonomy, it is agreed that autonomous humanity cannot accept any higher authority. As we have shown repeatedly [i.e., via philosophical and methodological extrapolation], however, that is not a proper usage of autonomy"

(p. 234). We are seemingly confronted with a presuppositional deadlock in reference to an apologetically strategic definition; however, the concept which is based upon a biblical hamartiology is surely the acceptable one.

Now comes the Achilles' heel of the volume, chap. 13, "The Noetic Influence of Sin." Actually, their approach to this issue was unveiled in chap. 12; therefore, it would seem that this chapter is basically a summary-conclusion of a position which has already been delineated. Consequently, a detailed critique would be redundant. Interestingly, the authors note at the outset that "the subject we now consider—the presuppositionalist view of noetic influence of sin—is supposed to show *why* the nonpresuppositionalist errs" (p. 241). Although the authors fail to concede this, indeed it does; it is *their* Achilles' heel!

Once again at a strategic juncture scriptural exegesis is notably absent. Instead their defense commences with a section entitled "Classic Calvinists on the Noetic Influence of Sin" (pp. 241–43). Additionally, a retreat to the false anthropological dichotomy of "heart" and "mind" recurs: "We suggest that classic Reformed orthodoxy saw the noetic influence of sin not as direct through a totally depraved mind, but as *indirect* through the totally depraved heart" (p. 243). Selectively utilizing the data of Romans 1, the authors resist acknowledging the epistemological paradox of mankind's having knowledge in one sense and yet not having it in another. Nevertheless, they seem to feel quite comfortable in saying that mankind's mind is not reprobate; however, God has judicially delivered the race over to a reprobate mind (p. 244). Arguing practically, as they have done on occasion, is not applied herein, and a consistent hamartiology is not evident.

Chap. 15 (i.e., "The Attack on the Theistic Proofs") perpetuates the same line of argumentation as the two previous chapters but with a growing boldness—man's mind, apparently unscathed by the Fall, becomes an impartial judge (cf. pp. 257–58). This new boldness apparently feeds an invigorated vitriolic criticism of Van Til and other presuppositionalists. Guilt by association arguments abound with only a few disclaimers (cf., e.g., "Presuppositionalism's Agreement with Neo-Orthodoxy," pp. 253–59). Their conception of "Calvinistic tradition" is again brought in as the ultimate canon (pp. 256–57), and their ubiquitous dichotomy of "mind" and "heart" is coregent (pp. 257–58). Concerning this latter observation, the authors' boldness reaches an unabashed level when they accuse Rushdoony of "surreptitiously" confusing these key anthropological terms! He may be culpable, but their own confusion is much more dramatically obvious.

The last portion of this chapter is launched with the following castigation: "Having observed presuppositionalism's agreement on the theistic proofs (Van Til's in particular) with contemporary neo-orthodoxy and secularism, we will now observe its disagreement with traditional orthodoxy" (p. 259). It is in this portion that some of Van Til's inconsistencies (a few of which are justifiable in the light of Scriptural data) are manipulated and caricatured in a critique which reaches its ebb (cf. esp. p. 263).

As a point of order, this reviewer and many other presuppositionalists would strongly disagree with the authors' statement that Clark is "perhaps the most thoroughgoing presuppositionalist of them all" (p. 265; cf. their own delayed disclaimer on p. 334). In their subsequent discussion an important

concession surfaces: "It is true that people do not acquiesce in the God of natural revelation until they are illumined by the God of special revelation. But saying that there is no *acquiescence* in natural revelation apart from special revelation does not deny natural revelation" (p. 268). Quite true, but it does deny any apologetical compulsion inherent in a natural *theology*, contrary to previous suggestions by the authors.

A topic introduced in chap. 14 is summarized in chap. 15—"The Attack on Christian Evidences." Two different assumptions clash again in this chapter: ter:

Supposedly, the Bible is the foundation of Van Til's thought. Actually, it is the foundation of the foundation. For what is crucial is not merely the Bible, but the way by which Van Til comes to the Bible. He claims a sound approach to the Bible; we think he has an unsound approach to the Bible [p. 277].

The authors' assumptions will never change unless they allow apologetics to become subservient to theology. Since they do not, they castigate Van Til's severe restrictions of Christian evidences: "For Van Til, the resurrection of Jesus Christ (which he believes fervently and preaches vigorously) proves absolutely nothing" (p. 283). It should be remembered that not only presuppositionalists object to unqualified evidentialism but so do many verificationists (i.e., the compromisers). Failing to recognize any limitation in reference to Christian evidences, the authors are compelled to substitute a strained and unconvincing argument (pp. 283-86).

The chapter concludes with Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley's most ironical critique which pertains to the absolutely vital issue of inerrancy. Presuppositionalism is not to be blamed for the darkening eclipse of inerrancy as they postulate. Rather the growing preoccupation with evidentialism is darkening the bibliological horizon. Contemporary historical corroborations of bibliological erosion come through institutional (e.g., Fuller Seminary) and personal (e.g., Pinnock) examples. Speaking from the perspective of human responsibility, the greatest sustainer of inerrancy is a humble-minded apologetic thoroughly dominated by the Word and the Spirit.

An allergy of the authors to anything paradoxical lies at the heart of their critique of presuppositionalism in chap. 16. Characteristically, they lead off with a sensationalistic statement concerning presuppositionalism. In this context it is its tenet of "the self-attesting God": "It makes Karl Barth look like the champion of 'system' and Emil Brunner the most consistent of theologians" (p. 287). They unfortunately illustrate their objections first through a discussion which has historically evolved beyond the exegetical data (i.e., the lapsarian controversy, pp. 287-91). With the exception of their valid criticism of Van Til's holding that Adam "was created only *posse peccare*" (p. 289), the rest of their objections are suspect due to misinterpretations of Van Til and/or the biblical data. For example, it is apparent that they interpret Van Til's reference to "the sovereign grace of God freely proclaimed" as "mere *arbitrary* grace" (p. 288). One might ask who is now bearing the earmarks of hyper-Calvinism? Similarly, they assert, "Of course, reprobation is a decree of God, as truly and therefore as ultimately as election" (p. 288). Not one exegetical insight is offered from Romans 9 nor from anywhere else, however. The primary irritant responsible for their allergy is

their failure to accept the practical implications of passages like Isa 55:8-9 and Rom 11:33. Instead, they leave the impression that they have thoroughly integrated the biblical data and so conclude that "Divine 'control' and significant human choices hardly constitute a rational difficulty or apparent contradiction, not to mention paradox" (p. 291). There is an apparent softening at the end of the chapter (p. 295); however, it indeed is only apparent when couched in the context of their whole argument.

Due to the hamartiological concessions which have permeated their whole treatise, chap. 17's discussion of "the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit" is anemic. It does begin, however, with a very accurate critique: "The testimony of the Holy Spirit is the heart of the heart of presuppositionalism" (p. 296). As one might anticipate by now, the authors' subsequent evaluation of this crucial constituent comes via their conception of "traditional Reformed doctrine" (pp. 296-98). Besides another appeal to the alleged heart/mind dichotomy as popularized by Edwards, the substance of their argumentation may be summarized in their appeal to Owen: "We allow, then, that every man with reason and understanding and having the regular use of them, may, *without the saving agency of the Holy Spirit*, according to the measure of his ability, find out the true sense of these propositions and retain their meaning" (p. 297). Unfortunately, the authors have emphasized the wrong portion of Owen's quotation. Rather, the words "according to the measure of his ability" ought to have been emphasized and evaluated by Scripture and even by "traditional Reformed doctrine." Then the measurement of that ability according to both of these yardsticks would total zero. This too abbreviated chapter concludes with a critique of Frame and Dooyeweerd. Their critique of Frame is defensive and borders on being tactless by any standard (pp. 299-303).

A previously discussed topic is reintroduced as the primary subject matter of chap. 18 (i.e., "Presuppositionalism and Verification"). Once again, an accurate critique introduces their discussion: "Verification is the hallmark of evidentialism and the antithesis of presuppositionalism. One tradition says that seeing is believing; the other, believing is seeing" (p. 304). Almost every other construct of presuppositionalism's stance in this chapter is accurate (cf., e.g., the conclusions relating to Bahnsen on p. 309); however, the authors will have nothing to do with presuppositionalism's scripturally corroborated reservations concerning evidences. In actuality, Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley are at times much more devoted to apriorism than most presuppositionalists. This becomes obvious when they make sensationalistic comments such as this: "We agree with the inerrancy doctrine of Van Til and Notaro, but we have more respect for the *augmentation effort* of Pinnock, Jack Rogers, and Barth, despite their *unsound reasoning*. The presuppositionalists arrive at a sound conclusion by a wrong method, the others, at an unsound conclusion by a right method" (p. 307). It has already been suggested that such axiopic preoccupations have characterized contemporary departures from orthodox bibliology.

Chap. 19 (i.e., "Analogical Thinking") is a generally commendable evaluation of Van Tillian epistemological transcendence. Many incontestable evaluations surface; for example, "if God can say that finite knowledge is knowledge, then Van Til can never say that finite knowledge is not knowledge" (p. 315).

Also found in this brief chapter is the first disclaimer that Van Til came out of the same mold of epistemological nihilism as Kant (p. 313).

The volume concludes (i.e., chap. 20) with severe criticisms of "Circular Reasoning." Their *modus operandi* does not change in this last chapter (e.g., commencing with a section on "Reasoning in the Reformed Tradition"). However, their opening evaluation of presuppositionalism is not as credible as some of the previous ones: "In all systems of thought except presuppositionalism circular reasoning is considered demonstrative evidence of error. In presuppositionalism, instead of being a vicious circle, it is a sign of intellectual virtue" (p. 318). Their first sentence is suspect because many logicians obviously acknowledge the 'necessary evil' of commencing with nonverifiable assumptions, and for them it does not necessitate the presence of logical error. The second sentence needs to be amended in order to make it an acceptable assessment; it would be more accurate if the words "a sign of intellectual virtue" were changed to "a sign of *theological* virtue."

To the authors the unpardonable sin of presuppositionalists in this most crucial area is *petitio principii*: "With respect to the existence of God and the authority of the Bible, presuppositionalists frankly admit to the use of circular reasoning in precisely this sense" (p. 322). But the authors are just as guilty, although they vigorously but futilely strain to deny it (e.g., p. 323). In a section on "Rushdoony on Circular Reasoning" there is a statement which boomerangs on the authors, indicating that it is really Warfield's emperor who has no clothes (contra their accusation directed at presuppositionalists, p. 338):

As soon as the reason realizes that there is a God, it immediately yields itself to that God, and honors Him as the author of itself, unless the reasoner has a vested interest in suppressing this information, *as sinful people do have*. We are not arguing whether this approach of Warfield and the others is successful or not. We know that Rushdoony and others do not think that it is. We believe that they are wrong. We believe that Warfield is right (p. 327, italics added).

After having refused to accept the awesome hamartiological implications of a biblically exposed autonomy, the authors ultimately have proved themselves to be more fideistic than most presuppositionalists when it comes to their own system. Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley's whole system deviates at this crucial hamartiological juncture as is evident in their concluding appeal to Henry's appraisal. He and they assert that "presuppositionalist theology . . . 'exaggerates the noetic consequences of the fall of man'" (p. 337). Unfortunately, it is they who have *minimized* these consequences!