Westminster is like a smorgasbord. Each man on the faculty has had a special measure of heavenly wisdom, and in each department of study there is a daily uncovering of treasures to be found in the particular area, yet all flows from a central source. And thus, it would be unjust to begin an introduction to the seminary without due mention of the centrality of the Scripture for those who belong to our community. For better or for worse, Apologetics has grown up as a separate department of study in this country, and Westminster has always had a strong tradition in this field. Dr. J. I. Packer, a recent guest at the seminary, commented on the prominence of apologetic thinking in the Reformed circles in America, and quite rightly he attributes much of its presence to the undeniable Dutch influence in our theology. Let us examine some of the highlights of the thinking at Westminster on this subject, attempting both to see the contributions made, as well as some of the problems which are raised.

All good things come in threes, and it is fair to say that there are at present three schools of thought which are, in descending order of prominence, usually incorporated into any student discussions on Apologetics here at Westminster. First, Dr. Cornelius Van Til. Though he is a most thorough apologist and a prolific writer, his influence has not yet been properly felt in the theological world. The value of Van Til is that while respecting individual differences, he nonetheless recognizes the basic unifying principles of non-Christian thought. Starting from his strong grounding in Systematic Theology, Van Til is able to come to the central problems of autonomy and dialectical thinking in apostate philosophers. It is true that he has been criticized for his difficult language. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to grasp Van Til's method without thoroughly wrestling with the issues he presents, primarily by reading and re-reading the materials. Rushdoony recently sent him a letter from California announcing that he had passed around many of the apologist's syllabi to various housewives on the West Coast, and that they had had no problem grasping the whole business. I am not quite sure what conclusion to draw from that for his student readers. We hear of many of our former students discovering the great applicability of Van Til in their present experience as pastors or as teachers.

The second source of apologetic thinking which has had a great deal of influence on the thinking of Westminster students is that which comes out of Amsterdam. Specifically, of course, it is the original approach of Herman Dooyeweerd at the Free University which has
triggered several schools of thought, often described as the «Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea,» or simply «Christian Philosophy.» It is particularly for his critique of Western thought that Dooyeweerd has been appropriated at the seminary. Dr. Robert Knudson, also in the Apologetics Department, demonstrates the richness of Dooyeweerd's method for understanding the flow of history. The value of the Amsterdam «W. die W.» exponents is in their sense of the overall direction of philosophical and scientific thought. Thus we learn from them particularly the dynamics of what Dooyeweerd calls the fundamental «ground motives» of thought, the surging forth of apparently new modes of thinking being put into perspective of the whole thereby.

Recently, however, a third influence which is gaining in importance at the seminary is the fresh approach of Dr. Francis Schaeffer from Switzerland. Several times now he has visited the seminary and related to us his system of Apologetics. Based on the contention that Christians have the double responsibility of understanding clearly their own position as well as that of the culture into which they speak, Schaeffer examines each level of twentieth-century thought-forms, from philosophy, to art, to literature, to theology, even to the movie. His stress on the reality of the Christian Life as a demonstration of God's existence, in proper coordination with Scripture, and with his cultural critique, has deeply moved many of us at the seminary. What all of these approaches have in common is the desire to do justice to the Bible. This must be central, and opportunities for improvement in the light of Scripture are always present, and it is that task to which Westminster Apologetics is dedicated.

I am wondering how many of us are really aware of these areas at all? Or even that they are an important part of the Christian witness? Is Apologetics only restricted to negative criticism? Quite the contrary, according to Dr. Van Til, who uses the illustration of the building up of Jerusalem on the one hand while yet protecting her on the other. Both must follow from the Biblical stance. An example might lend support to this. A recent exhortation was made to us by a friend of the seminary, that we ought to keep a proper balance between doctrine and practice. This seems at first sight to be quite proper, yet the apologist, well-grounded in the positive side of his field, would immediately detect a certain Aristotelian aesthetic involved in the exhortation. The Scripture never tells us to keep a «balance» at all, but we are told that one flows from the other, and that such dichotomies are really false. Again, we are thrown back upon the Bible.

To my mind, the greatest need pointed to in this whole area is that of communication. Many misunderstandings about the defense of the gospel could so easily be avoided by means of greater koinonia among Christians the world over. In a day when the means for communication are so available, it is surprising how little we know each other. Westminster at this point shares the guilt. In my hopefully sanctified daydreams, I foresee a day when the seminary could be a kind of center for conversation, especially in the above areas. Already a tremendous amount of literature is available on the subject—the Westminster book store is one of our most rewarding arteries. The resources are with us, by God's grace: we now simply need to be more aware of each other.

So the next time you see a book by someone on the Westminster faculty, pick it up and find out what is coming forth from our walls. Or, better still, if you are ever near Philadelphia, do not neglect to pay us a visit.