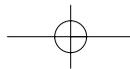
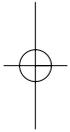
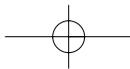
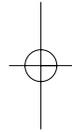


CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS





CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

CORNELIUS
VAN TIL

SECOND EDITION

EDITED BY WILLIAM EDGAR

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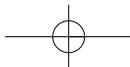
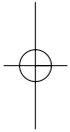
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INTRODUCTION

BY WILLIAM EDGAR

Defending the faith . . . The idea is repugnant to some. It smacks to them of defensiveness, at best, or coercion, at worst. Should not God be left to defend himself with no help from us? Is not the idea as absurd as defending a tiger in a cage? Why not just let him out? At a more thoughtful level, for some, there are theological reasons, which make apologetics superfluous, or even counterproductive. Karl Barth (1886–1968) believed that apologetics got in the way of the Word of God coming down from heaven. In his view, revelation creates its own capacity to receive it and is not dependent on anthropological examination. Further, apologetics tends to reduce Christian faith to religion and takes unbelief too seriously.¹ Similarly, though coming from a very different place theologically, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) asserted that apologetics would always fail to achieve any good purpose. His reasoning was that there is such a chasm between believers and unbelievers that argument or polemics are futile to bridge the gap.²

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1.1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), 26–47.

2. Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 160.

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There is a surface plausibility to these views. It is most certainly the case that some apologetics is counterproductive. A good deal of today's popular apologetics is no doubt cumbersome, cluttering up the landscape with evidences, proofs, and technical arguments, and generally keeping the tiger in his cage. At the more academic level, apologetics has tended to develop as a preliminary to theology or as a *prolegomenon* to receiving revelation, rather than flowing from it. Particularly in the nineteenth century, after Immanuel Kant put down a roadblock by which rational arguments for the existence of God were deemed impossible, apologists gave themselves the task of finding ways to attain the knowledge of God, other than receiving revelation by means of reason.

Preeminent among them was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) who argued that though Kant was right, we do not have to rely on reason, but we can know God by a *feeling of dependence*. Over the decades of that era, theology became more and more confused with anthropology and ethics. Jesus Christ was often remade according to the image of an all-too-human quest for truth. He was the great ethical teacher, the ideal human being, the prophet of the kingdom of God, etc.

When Karl Barth replied with his utterly sovereign God, who comes to us through Jesus Christ in a crisis experience, it was natural for him to question the propriety of apologetics. He was no doubt reacting to the sort of man-centered theology propounded by Schleiermacher and his heirs. But does Barth's crisis encounter with Christ provide any better basis for the knowledge of God than the anthropological theology of his predecessors? He has in fact thrown out the baby with the bathwater. For who can know for sure whether Christ has been encountered?

But what of Abraham Kuyper, who stands in a far more orthodox tradition than Barth? Why should the view that belief and unbelief are in two different camps render all apologetics

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futile? Is the mere fact of the antithesis between belief and unbelief enough to put into question the whole enterprise of defending the faith? Kuyper is, of course, onto something important. It is true that a gulf separates the two kinds of worldview, making any neutral common ground impossible. But is there not another kind of ground for conversation, one that does not require the apologist to leave his own position in order to communicate with his unbelieving friend? Here is where Cornelius Van Til, whose volume we are introducing again to the public, shows us a third way, one that allows for apologetic conversations without giving up any antithesis between two opposing worldviews.

* * *

Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) was without doubt one of the most original apologists of the twentieth century. Within the discipline he was a reformer, spending much of his time challenging the prevailing schools and articulating the approach to apologetics that has become known as *presuppositionalism*. Though its distant roots are in the Anselmian soubriquet, “faith seeking understanding,” the more contemporary context is the Dutch and Presbyterian theologies of his immediate horizon. His bones were filled with the marrow of the Reformed world-and-life view. He grew up with it and never left it. Yet, as he argues in the booklet *Why I Believe in God*, while it is perfectly true that he was nurtured on this particular kind of theism from his youth, it has been confirmed to him over and over again as an adult. In that same booklet, a piece as close to an evangelistic tract as he would ever write, Van Til succinctly set forth his entire philosophy in terms that are simple, yet profound: “Now, in fact, I feel that the whole of history and civilization would be unintelligible to me if it were not for my belief in God. So true is this, that I pro-

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pose to argue that unless God is back of everything, you cannot find meaning in anything.”³

Stated in this way, there would seem to be nothing particularly original in his view. A closer look reveals, however, that it is one thing to claim to begin with God; it is another to put that claim to work in a thorough and consistent way. Van Til’s originality consists in this: he sought to develop a God-centered apologetics without compromise and yet without cutting off communication with unbelievers or retreating into a Christian tribalism. Indeed, he was so unashamedly theistic that he was often accused of *fideism*. This term refers to a view that stems from a leap of faith, never needing to justify itself with reasons or evidence. His critics typically believed that he could not argue rationally for the Christian faith, but was forced into a shouting match with unbelievers.⁴ This understanding of Van Til may have a surface plausibility, but upon investigation proves to be patently false. Indeed, Van Til’s goal as a presuppositionalist was to show that the Christian worldview is the only rational and objectively valid one. Without it nothing makes sense. In fact, he held that there are all kinds of compelling proofs for the validity of the Christian position. Furthermore, because everything in the world speaks of God the Creator, the Christian apologist can begin an argument virtually from any point in human experience and show how it voices the truth.

What he did not hold is that apologetic arguments in themselves could drive someone from skepticism to faith. Not only is our reasoning often faulty, because it is self-interested and sinful (the “noetic effects” of sin), but if God is transcendent, no argument could hope to substantiate him that does not include his authority and compelling power to begin with. For

3. Cornelius Van Til, *Why I Believe in God* (Philadelphia: Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, n.d.), 3.

4. See, for example, R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 184–86.

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this reason, Van Til had strong reservations about the classical proofs (the *theistic arguments*) for the existence of God.⁵ Based on natural theology, they claim to demonstrate the necessity of God's existence either from unaided human reason or from pure observation of the world, without the need for revelation. For Van Til, however, there could never be isolated self-evident arguments or brute facts, because everything comes in a framework. That is why he calls his approach the "indirect method." One cannot go directly to the facts, as though they were self-evident. First, one must recognize the foundation and go on from there.

Presuppositional apologetics asks that we but recognize that all ideas and arguments come within a basic arrangement, a framework within which they make sense. That framework, when it does not conform to biblical truth, is open to challenge. To use one of his favorite illustrations, unbelievers construct their world by wearing colored glasses. Everyone "sees" through a lens. There can be no neutrality, because everything in our awareness flows out of some kind of presupposition. Christian apologists should ask their unbelieving friends to take off those glasses and see things as they are in God's world. Van Til strongly believes in facts, proofs, evidences, but not in isolation from a universe of discourse in which they make sense. He goes so far as to say, in the very book we are presenting, "It is therefore a contradiction in terms to speak of presenting certain facts to men unless one presents them as parts of this [Christian] system. The very factness of any individual fact of history is precisely what it is because God is what he is."⁶ Is this circular reasoning? In a way, it is. But it is not a vicious circle that says, "It is true because it is true." Rather, it is a set of complementary realities: "The starting point, the

5. Van Til did not dismiss the classical proofs altogether. He was open to working with them, in a limited way, provided they are placed within a proper epistemological framework.

6. *Christian Apologetics* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 97.

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method, and the conclusion are always involved in one another.”⁷ How could it be otherwise, if God be God?

In view of this antithesis, then, is it possible at all to build a bridge over to the unbeliever? To use more theological language, what point of contact could there be? How can we agree on anything, let alone have an intelligible conversation with an unbeliever, since our frameworks are so opposite? Here, Van Til makes one of his most crucial contributions, one that explains why he was so vehemently opposed to Karl Barth, as well as to classical Roman Catholicism. Because of our constitution as God’s image-bearers, as well as because of the natural revelation that surrounds us, we have a God-consciousness. We do not arrive at it by going through a long journey or a logical sequence. We know God because of who we are as human beings. Even in a fallen world, whereas we process the knowledge of God to our own ends, we nevertheless know him for who he is. “What may be known about God is plain to them, because God made it plain to them,” Paul tells us in Romans 1:19 (NIV). He goes on to say that his divine attributes are “clearly seen . . . so that men are without excuse” (1:20 NIV). The problem is that though we know God, we do not honor him.

This knowledge of God by virtue of the structure of creation has been given various names in the history of theology. John Calvin called it the “seed of religion,” which God has sown in all men.⁸ Or, again, he notes that we have within ourselves a “workshop, graced with God’s unnumbered works and, at the same time, a storehouse overflowing with inestimable riches.”⁹ For Van Til, this means we have a ready-made point of contact with unbelievers. “Deep down in his mind every man knows that he is the creature of God and responsible to God.”¹⁰

7. *Ibid.*, 62.

8. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.4.1.

9. *Ibid.*, 1.5.1.

10. *Christian Apologetics*, 57.

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And this means we may appeal to a true knowledge of God within each person, without conceding neutral common ground.

* * *

What about an actual method of apologetics? How does Van Til suggest we perform an actual conversation with an unbeliever? Although he did not develop a great many practical applications, he does, indeed, offer a method, or, better, an approach. For at bottom, it is neither a ten-step demonstration of Christian faith nor a series of evidences stacked-up until an unbeliever is forced to own-up. The heart of Van Til's apologetic approach is twofold. These are not meant to be sequential steps, but complementary moves. First, the apologist must get over onto the ground of the unbeliever for argument's sake and show him that his claims cannot succeed. This does not mean conceding ground, but, rather, patient exploration, as though a particular form of unbelief were true, in order to show how impossible it is. With confidence, the apologist will know that there is no sufficient basis for meaning and value (or "predication" as Van Til liked to put it) in his friend's view. Gently, but firmly, he will "remove the iron mask," or "take the roof off" the house of unbelief, to show how dark it is without the Lord. For example, someone might claim to be an irrationalist, with no need for authority. But then the apologist would have to point out that irrationalism cannot stand without some rational basis.

Second, the apologist should invite the unbeliever over onto Christian ground, for argument's sake, and show him how meaning and value are established by the biblical worldview. This is the equivalent of saying, with the psalmist, "O taste and see how good the Lord is." In so many ways, this means preaching the gospel. Here, it must be stressed that Van Til not only was not ashamed of using evidences, but his system re-

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quires it. But the evidences are not isolated from the framework in which they come. Furthermore, there are not particular lists of more compelling evidences than others, say, the empty tomb, or the New Testament manuscripts. In Van Til's approach everything becomes evidence for the Christian worldview, since everything in creation proclaims God's handiwork. Even our self-knowledge is rooted in the knowledge of God.

This twofold approach is simple and far removed from various contemporary methods. It is more akin to wisdom than to demonstration. The approach is called "presuppositional" because it seeks to go beneath the surface and lay bare the preconditions of someone's views. What are his basic commitments, what is his "faith"? Can they sustain him in his life? This is resolutely *not* a denial of the use of evidences. Everything proclaims God's truth. Only there are no brute facts, or data in a vacuum. Presupposition and evidence together amount to a powerful evangelistic argument for the truth of God's revelation.

* * *

An interesting question could be raised here. Does this attention to basic commitments make Van Til a friend of postmodernism, as some would claim? Again, there may be a surface plausibility to this comparison. His attention to interpretive frameworks and colored eyeglasses would seem to justify the comparison. Postmodernism is famously difficult to pin down. To make things simple, we might say that the postmodern is a condition, not just a set of ideas. As such it sets itself over against the modern way of doing things. Roughly speaking, modernity, which came into its own at the time of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, is a mode of thinking and doing that favors the new over the old. Things new (the adverb *modo* means "just now," hence *modernity*) include a commitment to the sufficiency of human reason as opposed to divine

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revelation, a belief in the progress of human history over the centuries, and the unique importance of the self and of self-consciousness. There is a social dimension to modernity as well, which includes the right to self-government, the rise of the administrative state, a market economy, the development of modern science and technology, and the increasing rapidity of transportation and communication.

By contrast, the postmodern rejects this rational world and is suspicious of metanarratives. That is, any story of the world that claims to be all encompassing, such as Kant's philosophy, Marxism, Freudian psychology, Christian theism, etc., is by definition unbelievable. According to advocates of the postmodern, these worldviews will inevitably lead to oppression and discrimination, because they admit of no diversity. It is more honest to make do with being subjective, to have faith, since everyone does, as long as you don't disturb anyone else's. In some of the more extreme versions of postmodernism, such as deconstruction, language has no valid connection to reality.

What can one put in the place of the modern? Postmodern answers to this vary. Some would say we replace the modern with a playful acceptance of styles and forms, never claiming them to be true. Irony, parody, and therapy are about the only thing we can hope for. There is no fixed meaning and no correspondence between language and the outside world. Others would say that each person has a right to be different. No one philosophy, no one morality is right. Yet we must learn to respect each other's views, without judging them to be right or wrong. At worst, someone's view might be "insensitive," or even "offensive," but not wrong. Thomas Kuhn talked about the history of science being a series of paradigm shifts, rather than progress toward an objectively true understanding of the world. He was interested in the way an older model, for example, the Ptolemaic earth-centered astronomy, eventually

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gave way to a newer model, Copernicus' sun-centered astronomy. It happened not primarily through observation, but through a preference for simplicity and a paradigm that honored the elegance of concentric circles.

Without entering into the issue of whether these two great schemes, the modern and the postmodern, have any merit as interpretations of the history of ideas, we ought to notice that there are salutary aspects to the shift toward the postmodern. Facts do come in a framework. Religious and philosophical faith commitments cannot be avoided. Paradigm shifts have something in common with conversion. In this way, the Enlightenment's view that truth could be determined by unaided reason was never a true friend of Christian faith. We ought to be suspicious of some metanarratives. We should happily recognize, with the postmodernists, that difference makes a difference! Does this not accord with Van Til's views?

Not really! In addition to the surface compatibility of postmodernism with presuppositionalism, its ethos carries fundamental flaws into the bargain. First, and as an aside, the postmodern condition is much less prevalent than its adherents claim. The capital of the Enlightenment is far from spent, as we still live in a world characterized by markets, science, technology, democracies, etc. Second, the deeper problem is that any view that maintains that language is not connected to the world and that settles for the playful and the therapeutic is doomed to complete irrelevance, or possibly worse. Van Til argues not for subjective faith, nor for the right to be different, but for objective truth, provable truth! There is a metanarrative after all, the true story of Christian revelation. Conversion is far more than a change of paradigms. It is the prodigal son coming to himself and remembering the truth about his father's house. This truth, of course, is not a narrow, foundationalist, Enlightenment story, but the grand account of thought and life under the rule of the sovereign, benevolent, ontological Trin-

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ity, the God who made the world and holds it together by his own authority. This means that Van Til's view is neither modern nor postmodern, in the end, but something quite different from both. It is simply biblical.

* * *

Christian Apologetics is one of many syllabi that Van Til developed for his courses over a period of several years. It served as a basic text for his introductory course in apologetics. In 1955 he would write *The Defense of the Faith*, which expanded the material from the syllabus and incorporated numerous references to philosophers and theologians, many of which he argues against. In 1963 he would publish an abridged version of *The Defense of the Faith*, removing many sections in which he replies to his critics. *Christian Apologetics* was officially published by Presbyterian and Reformed in 1976 and was offered as part of the "Cornelius Van Til Collection" in the mid 1980s. In my judgment it is the most complete, succinct introduction to his apologetics in all of his writings. Its five chapters discuss (1) the basic worldview of biblical Christianity, first in theological terms, then (2) in relation to philosophy and science. They move further to (3) the bridge with unbelieving systems, then (4) the presuppositional method (approach), and, finally, (5) questions about authority and reason.

Readers expecting elegant prose may be disappointed. This book remains a course syllabus and is not intended to showcase particular literary merits. It may sound more like a rehearsal than a concert performance. Nevertheless it is full of insights and contains truly revolutionary material. And the style grows on you! At its best, the narrative is like the seascape observed by the scuba diver, full of reefs and fish and sparkling plankton.

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Several surprises await the reader. Not the least of them is the unembarrassed use of theology as philosophy. Most of the first chapter, for example, is a rehearsal of basic Reformed doctrines, reading more like an introduction to dogmatics than the basis for epistemology. But that is the point! Van Til's approach to knowledge begins not with abstract philosophical notions but with systematic theology, intended to be the summary of biblical doctrines about God, mankind, creation, fall, and redemption in Christ. He often claimed to be heavily indebted to Geerhardus Vos, the Princeton professor of biblical theology. This will become evident in the way he treats epistemology in relation to the creation, the fall, and the redemption of human beings. Making theology the basis for his apologetics is fully intentional. Readers who look closely will detect a spark of originality even in the way Van Til puts certain doctrines. For example, "the diversity and the unity in the Godhead are therefore equally ultimate."¹¹ When Adam in the garden determined to disobey God's command, "he had to assume that [his powers of logic alone] could somehow legislate for what is to be the future."¹² The point of contact, as we saw, is found within the natural man: "Every man, at bottom, knows that he is a covenant-breaker. But every man acts and talks as though this were not so."¹³ It could well be that besides being an original apologist Van Til will be known as a most significant theologian of the twentieth century as well!

Another, less agreeable, surprise may await the contemporary reader. In an age such as ours, which is extremely sensitive to the deep feelings of others, the tone of this book may appear unduly abrasive. Readers may balk at Van Til's constant references to Roman Catholics or Arminians as being off the

11. *Ibid.*, 8.
12. *Ibid.*, 11.
13. *Ibid.*, 57.

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mark, and to Calvinism as holding the answers. Barth, Brunner, and Niebuhr are dispatched quite summarily.¹⁴ To be sure, this is polemical stuff! And no doubt there could be more nuanced ways to say things. But the purpose of this sort of text is simply to march forward with the ideas and take no prisoners. Kant, Plato, Hodge, and many others, are brought to the stage not for the rich fabric of their ideas but for a particular point in need of treatment that is often at odds with Christian faith. It suits Van Til's purposes to use ideal types, with labels such as "non-Calvinistic Protestantism" or "modern irrationalism," whether or not everyone included would be comfortable with the assigned label. There is a tradition throughout the history of theology of saying things vigorously, combatively. Luther and Calvin sometimes went into diatribes that make Van Til look mild by comparison. If the material is too combative for some, I would urge them to swallow hard and get past the feisty form to the fertile content.

Besides, the deeper nature of the content is full of grace. First, it might appear that Van Til uses names and schools only to point up their flaws, never to show their strengths. But this is not the case. Indeed, he often remarks that we owe a great deal to people we don't agree with. Sometimes his language may sound patronizing, but it really is not.¹⁵ For example, of broader, Arminian evangelicals, he says, "In other words our aim is not to depreciate the work that has been done by believing scholars in the Arminian camp. Our aim is rather to make better use of their materials than they have done by

14. Van Til was fully informed about the ins and outs of these theologians. His large volume *Christianity and Barthianism*, 2d ed. (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), exhibits an extensive knowledge of Barth's entire theology, although it has not escaped the same kind of criticism we are here discussing.

15. The twenty-first-century reader will also find that Van Til often uses "man" and the male pronouns inclusively, as did everyone writing in his era. We have not changed this feature of his style, but expect that the reader will make his or her own adjustments.

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placing underneath it an epistemology and metaphysic that makes these materials truly fruitful in discussion with non-believers.” And on the other side, he also chides Reformed people for being “all too often worse than our position.”¹⁶

Second, and more importantly, Van Til’s apologetics is not only tied to theology for the reasons stated above. But it is profoundly gospel-driven. Van Til’s critics often miss the most basic foundation of his approach, for reasons that are not easily identified. It is, simply, that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. Though a person may have access to God through reason, it is only the grace of God that can turn a sinner, reason and all, into a Christian.¹⁷ So many of the insights for which Van Til is justly famous fall flat if they are isolated from the great emphasis on redemption that pervades his work. His stress on the antithesis between belief and unbelief, the place of common grace, his opposition to “block-house methodology” (making a case one step at a time from the realm of “reason” to the realm of “faith”)—none of these elements stands alone. They all belong to the gospel story. Apologetics for Van Til is simply a thoughtful form of evangelism.

* * *

Cornelius Van Til is not the last word on apologetics, nor would he ever have claimed to be. Today, we owe it to this father in the faith to develop and apply his apologetics. He was a pioneer, painting with broad-brush strokes. Our task is not only to go into the details, but also to apply the approach to many fields besides the ones that had his attention. Even in philosophy, where he was well trained, his terminology was often limited to the Greeks, or to the Idealists. Much more work needs to be done in the warp and woof of philosophy, both ancient and

16. *Christian Apologetics*, 96.

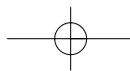
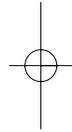
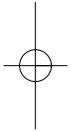
17. *Ibid.*, 99.

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modern, by his successors. How does the approach work its way into discussion with post-structuralism, with the new Reformed epistemology, with hermeneutical philosophies? Besides this, work needs to be done in areas such as cultural analysis, the history of science, world religions, psychology, and so many more. And, although Van Til outlined the terms of a methodology, far more needs to be done with actual arguments, both their form and content. How does one conduct an argument with an adherent of deconstruction, with a communitarian, with a follower of New Age religiosity? And we will need to apply the principles of presuppositional apologetics to social groups other than academics. How does it work with street children, with business people, with athletes?

The text of this edition of *Christian Apologetics* is virtually identical with the original. Occasionally a word is modified either to modernize the meaning or to better fit the original intent. Also, a few parentheses shown in the typeface you are now reading have been added, which contain such items as translations from a foreign language or succinct explanations of terms. The main addition to this edition is the use of annotative footnotes, again in a distinct typeface from that used for Van Til's material, to provide longer explanations. Some of them expand on ideas in the hope of clarifying issues only briefly set forth in the text. Others refer the reader to sources, or to complementary passages in Van Til's other writings. Still others make comments on Van Til's approach and how he has been perceived. All these helps are offered in hopes of making the original text all the more accessible to today's readers.

In *Christian Apologetics* we have the work of an extraordinary visionary. In it the author presented a revolutionary case for God's grace and truth in his generation. May we continue to do so in ours.



CHAPTER 1

THE SYSTEM OF CHRISTIAN TRUTH

Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.

It is frequently said that apologetics deals with theism, while evidences deals with Christianity. For that reason, it is said, apologetics deals with philosophy while evidences deals with facts.

Now there is, to be sure, a certain amount of truth in this way of putting the matter. Apologetics does deal with theism more than it deals with Christianity, and evidences does deal with Christianity more than it deals with theism. For that reason, too, apologetics deals mostly with philosophy and evidences deals mostly with facts. But the whole matter is a question of emphasis.

That the whole question can be no more than one of emphasis and never one of separation is due to the fact that

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Christian theism is a unit. Christianity and theism are implied in one another. If we ask, e.g., why Christ came into the world, the answer is that he came to save his people from their sins. But what is sin? It is “any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.” And who or what is God?

True, we have here given the orthodox doctrine of the work of Christ, and the orthodox definition of sin. But we could just as well give any other definition of the work of Christ, and we should find that it always involves a certain concept of God. If we say that Christ came to set us a fine example of morality and no more, then we have redefined sin to mean some weakness inherent in human nature, and therewith we have redefined God to be something less than that absolute and holy being which orthodox theology conceives him to be. Christianity can never be separated from some theory about the existence and the nature of God. The result is that Christian theism must be thought of as a unit.

We may, therefore, perhaps compare the vindication of Christian theism as a whole to modern warfare. There is bayonet fighting, there is rifle shooting, there are machine guns, but there are also heavy cannon and atom bombs. All the men engaged in these different kinds of fighting are mutually dependent upon one another. The rifle men could do very little if they did not fight under the protection of the heavy guns behind them. The heavy guns depend for the progress they make upon the smaller guns. So too with Christian theism. It is impossible and useless to seek to vindicate Christianity as a historical religion by a discussion of facts only. Suppose we assert that Christ arose from the grave. We assert further that his resurrection proves his divinity. This is the nerve of the “historical argument” for Christianity. Yet a pragmatic philosopher will refuse to follow this line of reasoning. Granted he allows that

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Christ actually arose from the grave, he will say that this proves nothing more than that something very unusual took place in the case of "that man Jesus." The philosophy of the pragmatist is to the effect that everything in this universe is unrelated and that such a fact as the resurrection of Jesus, granted it were a fact, would have no significance for us who live two thousand years after him.

It is apparent from this that if we would really defend Christianity as a historical religion, we must at the same time defend the theism upon which Christianity is based. This involves us in philosophical discussion. To interpret a fact of history involves a philosophy of history. But a philosophy of history is at the same time a philosophy of reality as a whole. Thus we are driven to philosophical discussion all the time and everywhere. Yet in defending the theistic foundation of Christianity we, in the nature of the case, deal almost exclusively with philosophical argument. In apologetics we shoot the big guns under the protection of which the definite advances in the historical field must be made. In short, there is a historical and there is a philosophical aspect to the defense of Christian theism. *Evidences deals largely with the historical while apologetics deals largely with the philosophical aspect. Each has its own work to do but they should constantly be in touch with one another.*

If we are to defend Christian theism as a unit, it must be shown that its parts are really related to one another. We have already indicated the relation between the doctrine of Christ's work, the doctrine of sin, and the doctrine of God. The whole curriculum of an orthodox seminary is built upon the conception of Christian theism as a unit. The Bible is at the center not only of every course, but of the curriculum as a whole. The Bible is thought of as authoritative on everything of which it speaks. Moreover, it speaks of everything. We do not mean that it speaks of football

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games, of atoms, etc., directly, but we do mean that it speaks of everything either directly or by implication. It not only tells us of the Christ and his work, but also tells us who God is and where the universe about us has come from. It tells us about theism as well as about Christianity. It gives us a philosophy of history as well as history. Moreover, the information on these subjects is woven into an inextricable whole. It is only if you reject the Bible as the Word of God that you can separate the so-called religious and moral instruction of the Bible from what it says, e.g., about the physical universe.

This view of Scripture, therefore, involves the idea that there is nothing in this universe on which human beings can have full and true information unless they take the Bible into account. We do not mean, of course, that one must go to the Bible rather than to the laboratory if one wishes to study the anatomy of the snake. But if one goes only to the laboratory and not also to the Bible, one will not have a full or even true interpretation of the snake. Apologetics must therefore take a definitely assigned place in the curriculum of an orthodox seminary. To intimate this place, something must be said about the general subject of theological encyclopedia.

THEOLOGICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

By theological encyclopedia is meant the arrangement in the curriculum of the various theological disciplines. These disciplines are all centered on the Bible because the Bible is thought of as described above. There are first of all the biblical departments dealing with the Old and New Testaments respectively. In these departments the original languages, exegesis, and biblical theology are taught. In all this there is a defense as well as a positive statement of the truth.

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The matter of defense of the truth of Christian theism cannot be left to the apologetic department alone. The specific truths of Christianity must be defended as soon as they are stated. Not one of them has been allowed to stand without attack, and the experts in each field can best defend them.

Then comes systematic theology, which takes all the truths brought to light from Scripture by the biblical studies and forms them into one organic whole. Of this we must speak more fully in the next section. When we have the system of truth before us, we wish to see how it is to be brought to men and how it has been brought to men. Since it is the Word of God or God's interpretation to men, it must be brought in God's name and with God's authority. In practical theology the matter of preaching the Word is taken up. Here too defense must be coupled with positive statement.

Then church history takes up the story as to how this preaching of the Word has fared throughout the centuries. Have those to whom the preaching and teaching of the Word was entrusted brought it faithfully in accordance with the genius of that Word as the Word of God? Have men readily received it when it was preached faithfully? What has been the fruit if it has perhaps been poorly preached and halfheartedly received? Such questions as these will be asked in church history. And again defense and positive statement go hand in hand.

This really completes the story of Christian encyclopedia. There has been in the disciplines enumerated a detailed and comprehensive statement of the truth. There has been in addition to that a defense of every truth at every point. Is there, then, no place for apologetics? It would seem so. Yet perhaps there may be the work of a messenger boy.¹ Per-

1. Here, Van Til sets forth a comprehensive view of apologetics. It ought to function across the disciplines, showing in each field of knowledge, however specialized, that a defense and commendation of the whole of Christian faith should constantly be kept in view.

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haps the messenger boy can bring the maps and plans of one general to another general. Perhaps the man who is engaged in biblical exegesis is in need of the maps of the whole front as they have been worked out by the man engaged in systematic theology. Perhaps there will be a more unified and better organized defense of Christian theism as a whole if the apologist performs this humble service of a messenger boy.

Then too the apologist may be something in the nature of a scout to detect in advance and by night the location and if possible something of the movements of the enemy. We use these martial figures of speech because we believe that in the nature of the case the place of apologetics cannot be very closely defined. We have at the outset defined apologetics as the vindication of Christian theism. This is well enough, but we have seen that each discipline must make its own defense. The other disciplines cover the whole field and they offer defense along the whole front. Then too they use the only weapons available to the apologist; namely, philosophical and factual argument. It remains that in apologetics we have no well-delimited field of operation and no exclusive claim to any particular weapon.

The net result, then, seems to be that in apologetics we have the whole field to cover. And it was this that was included in the analogy of a *messenger boy* and a *scout*. This does not imply that the messenger boy or the scout must leave all the work of defense to the others so that he would have nothing to do but carry news from one to the other. No indeed, the scout carries a rifle when he goes scouting in the historical field. Then too he may have to, and does have to, use the large stationary guns that command a larger distance.

We have just now employed the figure of a fortress or citadel. We may think of the apologist as constantly walking

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up and down on or near the outer defenses of the fortress. This will give the other occupants time to build and also enjoy the building. The others too must defend, but not so constantly and unintermittently. The apologist too must rest and must enjoy the peace of the fort, but his main work is to defend and vindicate.

In this connection we must guard against a misuse that might be made of the figure of the fortress. It might be argued that this seems to put Christianity on the defensive. Is it not true that Christianity was meant to conquer the whole world for Christ? Yes it is. We have already said that we think of Christian theism, when we think of Christianity. That covers the whole earth. If we can successfully defend the fortress of Christian theism, we have the whole world to ourselves. There is, then, no standing room left for the enemy. We wage offensive as well as defensive warfare. The two cannot be separated. But we need not leave the fort in order to wage offensive warfare.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

It is apparent from our discussion so far that systematic theology is more closely related to apologetics than are any of the other disciplines. In it we have the system of truth that we are to defend. We must therefore look briefly at this system which we are offered.

Systematics divides what it has to give us into six divisions as follows: theology, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. We shall look at each of these in turn.

Theology

Naturally, in the system of theology and in apologetics *the doctrine of God* is of fundamental importance. In apologetics

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it must always be the final if not the first point of attack. In theology the main questions deal with the existence and the nature of God. We ask the questions “Does God exist?” and “What kind of God is he?” Frequently the order in which the various questions pertaining to the doctrine of God are taken up is that of the knowability of God, the existence of God, and the nature of God. For our purposes, however, we may begin with the question of the nature of God. We are not interested in discussing the existence of a God the nature of whom we do not know. We must first ask what kind of a God Christianity believes in before we can really ask with intelligence whether such a God exists. The what precedes the that; the connotation precedes the denotation; at least the latter cannot be discussed intelligently without at once considering the former.

What do we mean when we use the word *God*? Systematics answers this question in its discussion of the attributes or properties of God. We mention only those which pertain to God’s being, his knowledge, and his will.

The Being of God

1. The independence or *aseity*² of God. By this is meant that God is in no sense correlative to or dependent upon anything besides his own being. God is not even the source of his own being. The term *source* cannot be applied to God. God is absolute (John 5:26; Acts 17:25). He is sufficient unto himself.

2. The *immutability* of God. Naturally God does not and cannot change since there is nothing besides his own eternal being on which he depends (Mal. 3:6; James 1:25).

2. From the Latin *a se*, meaning “from himself.” It means God is self-sufficient, dependent on nothing. He determines all things. As the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) puts it, “God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass” (3.1).