

Review of *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* , by John M. Frame, (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing Co., 1994) \$14.99, paper. 265 pages.

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*Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (hereinafter abbreviated *AGG*) as the title clearly suggests, is another attempt to describe and explain the proper, biblical means to defend the Christian faith. While this discipline is an area of on-going theological controversy and debate, Frame's proposed method will by no means shorten the controversy. This recent contribution is essentially a synthesis of the "traditional", or so-called "classical", apologetics approach (as set forth first by Aquinas and more recently by John Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley, and R.C. Sproul) with the presuppositional, or transcendental, approach of the late Dr. Cornelius Van Til. This result was not, of course, the explicitly stated intention of the author; instead, his stated concern is the need (as he sees it) for a "revision" (p. xii) of Van Til's work so as to 1) translate it into more easily understood language, 2) relieve it of some weaknesses which "obscure its tremendously important insights" (p. xii), and 3) provide specific arguments (one area of weakness in Van Til's work, according to Frame) for Christians to use with unbelievers.

The structure and format of the book consist of nine major chapters with several subsections in each. Chapter One deals with certain basics of apologetics, including discussions on the use of presuppositions, circular arguments, Scripture, and natural revelation. Chapter Two, focusing on the "message" of apologetics, involves the reader in a brief philosophical treatment (almost a survey) of the place and nature of metaphysics and epistemology in apologetics. In this chapter God is described as the Absolute Personality; and this becomes increasingly fundamental to Frame's method throughout the book. Chapter Three through Five concern the discipline of apologetics as proof, or "finding a rational basis for faith" (p. 57), emphasizing: 3) methodology, 4) arguments for the existence of God, and 5) the Gospel. Chapters Six and Seven are devoted to the so-called "problem of evil" as the primary charge levied by unbelievers against the existence of God. Chapter Eight is concerned with apologetics as "offense", taking into consideration what Frame holds as the only two alternatives to Christianity, *viz.*, atheism and idolatry. In chapter Nine Frame concludes the main body of his work by offering the reader a popularization of his apologetic approach in action. Following the nine chapters are two appendices: 1) his Fall 1985 *Westminster Theological Journal* review of the book

*Classical Apologetics*, and 2) Dr. Jay Adams' response to Frame's critique of his treatment of the problem of evil in his book, *The Grand Demonstration*.

The more general outline and content of *AGG* are related to what Frame calls, “three aspects of apologetics”: *apologetics as proof, as defense, and as offense* (p. 2). Significant for the reader to note is that Frame employs his well-known perspectival approach to this study as he has to other endeavors in the last few years, for these three aspects just mentioned are “perspectivally related”; and each is “a perspective upon” “the whole apologetic enterprise” (p. 3). For a proper understanding of Frame's notion and use of “perspectivalism”, the reader should consult his *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, to which Frame himself refers the reader quite often in *AGG*. When I consider the emphasis by perspectivalists upon the vagueness of language and of Scripture itself in terms of its literary nature, both subjectivism and situationism immediately come to mind. And this was also the case as I read *AGG*.

Some implications of perspectivalism in *AGG* can be seen in an early part of the book where Frame, having introduced an imaginary character, Oscar, who lives in a dream world, asks the question how such a person can be helped. Frame states,

Of course, the answer is that we reason with him according to the truth as we perceive it, even though that truth conflicts with his deepest presuppositions.  
(p. 12)

“Truth as we perceive it” is indeed important since every individual must perceive truth, but such an approach will never succeed with someone who may be just as content with his perception of truth as the Christian is with his. Instead, we are to be concerned with presenting the objective truth as God has given it by means of His holy, inscripturated, self-attesting Word which *is* truth. We certainly recognized the problem of correct *versus* incorrect interpretation of certain passages of Scripture; however, this problem is due to our own sin and lack of understanding. The fact remains, however, that all that is necessary for one's salvation is set down in those passages that are unquestionably perspicuous.

Dangerous indeed is the ground upon which one walks when Wittgensteinian tiddleywinks is played with language in general and with Scripture in particular. Another rather clear example of this is found on p. 46, where Frame discusses the relationship of the doctrine of the Trinity to “The Message to the Apologist”. His statements are,

The Nicene Creed says that they are one “being” but three “substances”, or, differently translated, one “substance” and three “persons”. I prefer to say “one God, three persons”. The technical terms should not be understood in any precise, descriptive sense. The fact is that we do not know how precisely the three are one and the one is three.

Any consistent reformed theologian will readily admit that the doctrine of the Trinity is beyond complete comprehension by man; however, it is interesting to note that John Calvin so understood the structure and use of the terms in the Nicene Creed that he refused to submit to it as a binding statement of faith because it was clear that the composers of the creed did not consider the Son of God to exist *a se ipso*. Because of Calvin's understanding of the "precise, descriptive sense" of "the technical terms" of the Nicene Creed and refusal to submit to it, he was charged with Arianism.

Frame's emphasis upon a "perspectival" approach to almost any field of study affords him the mechanism by which he attempts to qualify and re-qualify terms such as "presuppositional" (p. 12, n. 16), "transcendental" (pp. 69ff), as well as "circularity" and "circular argument" (pp. 9ff). The result of such "careful" re-qualifying and re-defining of terms establishes for Frame the basis upon which he proceeds to a revisionist (see p. xi of the "Preface") approach to Van Tillian presuppositional apologetics.

While Frame reproduces in *AGG* much of what Van Til himself believed and taught, such as the impossibility and utter lie of "neutrality" (whether explicit in Aquinas or implicit in Gerstner or Sproul), the Word of God as the Christian's ultimate standard in the employment of presuppositions, the necessity of the operation of the Holy Spirit to enable the sinner to repent and believe, and the noetic effects to sin, his defense of a particular kind of circular argument is marred by an illustration he gives on p. 11, where he discusses the fact that every man, specifically, every unbeliever, knows God but represses that knowledge. Frame states,

Although he represses that knowledge (vv. 21ff.), there is at some level of his consciousness a memory of that revelation. It is against this memory that he sins, and it is because of that memory that he is held responsible for those sins. At that level, he knows that empiricism is wrong and that Scripture's standards are right. We direct our apologetic witness not to his empiricist epistemology or whatever, but to his memory of God's revelation and to the epistemology implicit in that revelation. To do that, to accomplish such meaningful communication, we not only may but must use Christian criteria, rather than those of unbelieving epistemology. So when the unbeliever says "I can't accept your presuppositions", we reply: "Well, let's talk some more, and maybe they will become more attractive to you (just as you hope yours will become more attractive to me) as we expound our ideas in greater depth. In the meantime, let's just keep using our respective presuppositions and move along to some matters we haven't discussed."

I am sure that Frame would agree that sin is ultimately against God Himself and not just against "memory" of God's revelation to man. But more important to consider from this quote is the idea of making our presuppositions "attractive" to the unbeliever by moving from one accepted set of them to another. The Van Tillian presuppositionalist is not interested in how attractive his presuppositions are to the unbeliever since he knows that unbeliever to be in *ethical* rebellion against God. As Van Til emphasizes over and over

again, the real problem with the unbeliever is not intellectual but ethical; and the intellect is severely skewed by the ethical problem of willful rebellion against the ultimate authority of God. Circular argumentation presupposes not only the existence of God and the supreme authority of His Word, but also the ethical depravity of the unbeliever. Hence all theistic presuppositions will, of necessity, be much more than “unattractive”—they will offend and even outrage the unbeliever.

In another place Frame says,

If the unbeliever objects to the “circularity” of the Christian's evidential arguments, the Christian can simply change to another kind of argument, such as an “offensive” apologetic against the unbeliever's own worldview or epistemology. That apologetic will also be circular in the precise sense noted above, but less obviously so. (p. 13)

The Van Tillian presuppositionalist will readily admit that confrontation with an unbeliever can involve several different approaches; after all, the Bible itself is replete with examples of such. Nevertheless, we must not shift from one form of argument to another so as to engage a cloaking device for circularity in the arguments. If the Christian's arguments are truly consistent with the apologetic methodology of Scripture, no matter what kind of argument is employed, the unbeliever who is “consistent” with himself will repeatedly object to the circularity evident in each and every one. Unless an argument against the unbeliever is transcendental in nature, which means that Christian theism as a unit is presupposed from the outset and is present everywhere in the argument, then the argument is simply not acceptable by the standard of Scripture and is doomed to die the death of sheer rationalism.

The direction in which Frame proceeds forces him to admit into his apologetic enterprise a quasi-evidentialistic methodology which is the reason for his reluctance to apply the term “presuppositional” to his own approach. The popular but mistaken notion that Van Til had absolutely no use for evidence or for theistic argument causes Frame to offer the disclaimer in footnote 16 on pages 12 and 13.

With such confusions abroad, I am reluctant to use the term at all! Still, I don't want to quibble over words, and the term has become a standard label for all of those who understand that there is no religious neutrality in thought and knowledge. So I will occasionally use that label of myself and Van Til, by way of accommodation, and also to emphasize what we share with Clark and others: the rejection of neutrality. (p. 13)

Let us join together with Frame and “others” who reject neutrality in thought and knowledge; but let us not be so hesitant to use a term, although much misunderstood, that is nevertheless quite accurate and useful in its connotation and denotation with respect to biblical apologetics. But implicit in this portion of the footnote just quoted is Frame's desire to leave the apologetic door open to the use of rational argument by means of a

rhapsody on a theme of the Thomistic synthesis.

This fact becomes evident when the reader sees Frame attempting to shorten the distance and bridge the gap between Cornelius Van Til and Thomas Aquinas (a gap which, for Van Til, was altogether unbridgeable). The attempt referred to here is found, in part, on pp. 19-20 of *AGG*, where Frame discusses the relationship between Scripture and facts outside of Scripture (i.e., extrabiblical data). He states that Van Til feared, “though not consistently”, arguing “the truth of Scripture based on facts outside of Scripture”, because such would tend to elevate those facts to the level of Scripture itself. Footnote number 21, pages 19-20 of *AGG* is where I am now directing the reader's attention. Here Frame asserts that the antithesis between Van Til's presuppositional method and Aquinas' use of causal argumentation is “not obvious”.

For example, in *Defense of the Faith*, 252, he criticizes arguments that started from human experience with causation and purpose and by analogy argued to the idea of a cause of and a purpose with the world as a whole. He objects that “if you start with the ideas of cause and purpose as intelligible to man without God when these concepts apply to relations within the universe, then you cannot consistently say that you need God for the idea of cause or purpose when these concepts apply to the universe as a whole”. True enough. But arguments about cause and purpose do not necessarily assume that “cause and purpose are intelligible to man without God”, even as they “apply to relations within the universe”. In fact, an apologist may very well advance such an argument because of his conviction that cause and purpose are not at all intelligible without God. Indeed, if Thomas Aquinas's causal argument is sound, it makes, in effect, that precise claim. His causal argument implies that if God doesn't exist, there is no complete causal explanation for anything, and therefore there is nothing that can rightly be called “cause”. (Thomas may or may not himself have thought along these lines; I am deducing that is implicit in his argument. But whether he did or not is a question of personal piety, not a question about the value of his argument.) Thomas is usually considered (by Van Til and others) to represent the antithesis of Van Til's presuppositional method, but in this case the antithesis is not obvious. I intend to explore more examples of this sort in my forthcoming book on Van Til. (pp. 19-20)

I recognize the awkwardness of enclosing such a lengthy quote in a review article; however, I do so in order to allow the reader to see the entire context for himself. Too often quotes are given out of context. Speaking of context, the quotes by Frame from Van Til are from the well-known exchanges between Mr. White, Mr. Grey, and Mr. Black. Mr. Grey had just failed in his appeal to convince Mr. Black that, based on the tangible evidence by which we all are surrounded, it must be highly probable that there is a cause for everything and that this cause must be God himself.

These arguments are known as *a posteriori* arguments; and Van Til presents them as Aquinas presented them in his *Summa Theologiae* as his “Five Arguments” for the

existence of God. If the reader of this review will take the time to avail himself of this work and read in a candid manner the arguments which Aquinas presents, he should be able to see that each argument is heavily laden with presuppositions of one sort or the other. Contrary to Frame's apparent misunderstanding of Aquinas, the causal argument rests squarely upon what Van Til states as "the ideas of cause and purpose as intelligible to man without God". This was the whole point of Aquinas's Five Arguments. This Roman Catholic theologian presupposed a natural theology which is available to every human being if only he correctly employs the "First Principles" of knowledge which are rooted in the over-arching, supreme logical principle known as the Law of Contradiction (or, as it is also known, the Law of Non-contradiction).

One must keep in mind that, for Aquinas, *reason* was primary to *faith*. Aquinas' formation of his arguments for the existence of God do not presuppose the Word of God as the ultimate standard for the believer, nor do they presuppose the noetic effects of sin upon the unregenerate man. Instead, his arguments presuppose the rational ability of man to think autonomously (interestingly enough, to which Frame himself refers repeatedly) and therefore the ability to rightly employ the Law of Non-contradiction to the world of experience. For Aquinas, the sensate world and nature of man, combined with his rational ability, is more ultimate than divine revelation when it comes to apprehension of truth, even the truth of God's existence. In every case, however, man becomes the ultimate standard, or the starting point, for all predication.

I cannot at this time take up the Five Arguments in order to demonstrate the unsoundness of each of them based on both the premises and their conclusions (although I have done this in my doctoral dissertation to which I refer later). Suffice it to be said that Frame's deduction of what appears to him to be implicit in Aquinas' causal argument is *not* what he intended in that argument; and I make this claim in light of the overall context and context of *Summa Theologiae* which is an attempt to synthesize Augustinian theology with Aristotelian philosophy (both metaphysics and logic). Frame is simply off the mark at this point.

As can be seen, therefore, Frame seeks to bridge the gap between Van Til and Aquinas or, if Frame prefers, traditional apologetics. He disagrees with Van Til in a number of other significant points (see pp. 69-88), among which are Frame's objections to Van Til's position that there is absolutely certain proof in the transcendental method, and to Van Til's regard of the traditional arguments as proving something less than the God of the Bible (*cf.* pp. 7aff). He then says,

Therefore, Van Til's transcendental argument (like every other argument) is not sufficient, by itself, to prove the existence of the biblical God to everyone's satisfaction. (p. 73)

Frame seems either to forget or ignore that Van Til's use of "proof", particularly in the transcendental argument, is *not* for the purpose of proving the existence of God "to everyone's satisfaction". How easy it seems to be for Reformed theologians to miss the

supremely important point of Van Til's presuppositional, transcendental approach which is that an unbeliever will acknowledge such "proof" only when he is regenerated and thus enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Van Til never pretends to appeal to the naked, fallen rational intellect of man as though by the sheer use of logic he can convince the unbeliever of the truth. This is the point which seems to be consistently put into the shadows by Frame and others who criticize Van Til of inconsistency.

Most, if not all, who criticize Van Til along these lines, and who even quote him, often do so ignorantly, out of context, or perhaps, deliberately to prove their point. An example of this is found with Frame himself where he offers support for some arguments which conclude with only the *probability* of the existence of God in contrast to those which purport to involve absolute certainty. (See pp. 77ff)

For example, I might consider formulating an argument for God's existence based on the Second Law of Thermodynamics. But since my understanding of that law is quite imperfect, I would not trust myself in that situation to convey adequately the absolute truth of God's evidence. So I would be inclined in that case to use the word *probably* a great deal. I don't believe that Scripture forbids us to explore areas that we don't quite understand; quite the contrary. (Gen. 1:28ff) Nor do I think that Scripture forbids us to formulate tentative ideas concerning how relatively unknown phenomena relate to God. To do so, and to use the word *probably* in this connection, is not to say that the revealed evidence for God is merely probable; it is rather to say that one portion of the evidence, not well understood by a particular apologist, yields for him an argument which is at best possible or probable. Van Til himself recognized something like this distinction: "We should not tone down the validity of this argument to the probability level. The argument may be poorly stated, and may never be adequately stated. But in itself the argument is absolutely sound." (pp. 81-82)

Here is part of Frame's justification for use of arguments of probability with respect to the existence of God. The quote given from Van Til is found on p. 62 of his work, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, (P & R Publishing Co., 1977). On p. 61 of that work, the reader will find Van Til arguing against the employment of the theistic proofs by Heinrich Hepp in a manner similar to that of Herman Bavinck. Van Til goes on to say,

To avoid a natural theology of the Roman sort, we shall need to come to something like a clear consciousness of the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian mode of argument with respect to the revelation of God in nature. God is, and has been from the beginning, revealed in nature and in man's own consciousness. We cannot say that the heavens *probably* declare the glory of God. We cannot allow that if rational argument is carried forth on true premises, it should come to any other conclusion than that the true God exists... Thus the imperative necessity of introducing the distinction between the psychologically and the epistemologically interpretive, becomes again

apparent. God still speaks in man's consciousness. Man's own interpretative activity, whether of the more or of the less extended type, whether in ratiocination of an intuition, is no doubt the most penetrating means by which the Holy Spirit presses the claims of God upon man. The argument for the existence of God and for the truth of Christianity is objectively valid. We should not tone down the validity of this argument to the probability level. The argument may be poorly stated, and may never be adequately stated. But in itself the argument is absolutely sound. Christianity is the only reasonable position to hold. It is not merely as reasonable as other positions; it alone is the natural argument as clearly as we can, we may be the agents of the Spirit in pressing the claims of God upon men. If we drop to the level of the merely probable truthfulness of Christian theism, we, to that extent, lower the claims of God upon men. That is, we believe, the sense of Calvin's *Institutes* on the matter. (pp. 61-62)

The necessity of this extended quotation should be apparent from the preceding quote from Frame who goes on to say that he would prefer to consider the evidence as absolutely sound and the argument used to present that evidence as more or less adequate. But the point is this: Van Til *nowhere* (at least as far as I have read him) allows for probability of either a “mere” degree or less than a “mere” degree. The whole idea of probability concerning the existence of God is preposterous to Van Til. There is nothing in the preceding quote from Van Til which offers support for Frame's claim. Van Til's description of arguments which are "poorly stated" or which "may never be adequately sound" does not apply to arguments of probability.

For Van Til, evidence is everywhere, and since every fact is a God-created fact and therefore revelational of Him Who made it, evidence is in superabundance. Likewise, there is, indeed, absolutely certain proof for the existence of God. These are not the problems. The problem is, as stated before, the unbeliever's ethical rebellion against this evidence and the proof. His intellect cuts like the tilted blade of the buzz saw. He sees, but he cannot see straight. He knows, but he cannot know accurately. The task, therefore, of the Christian is to challenge the unbeliever at every point of his God-hating world-and-lifeview (*weltanschauung*).

The attempt to synthesize Van Til with Aquinas, or those who hold to so-called "traditional" apologetics, will always result in vanity, absurdity, confusion, and inconsistency; and such could rightly be called “framework” apologetics. Van Tillians must *never* relinquish the important truth that there is no epistemological half-way house, middle ground, or area to commonality between these two opposing methods. It is sad, indeed, to see one who was, at one time, so close to Van Til now attempting to cast him into a mold which he himself so forcefully and forthrightly repudiated.

Further “proof” of Frame's attempted synthesis between Van Til and Aquinas is seen in Chapter Four in his defense of the so-called “traditional”, but not absolutely certain, arguments for the existence of God: 1) the moral argument; (pp. 93ff) 2) the

epistemological argument; (pp. 102 ff) 3) the teleological argument; (pp. 105 ff) 4) the cosmological argument (cause); (pp. 109 ff) and 5) the ontological argument (being). (pp. 114 ff) When the reader examines his treatment of each of these arguments, he will find an approach that attempts to blend the rationalism of Aquinas with the presuppositionalism of Van Til.

In fairness to Frame, I am please to see that he recognizes the presuppositional nature of Anselm's ontological argument, concerning which he says,

Remarkably, the prayer in which Anselm formulates his argument identifies him as a sort of Christian presuppositionalist. He indicates that he is not really in doubt as to God's existence, but that he is seeking a simple way to prove the God whom his heart "believes and loves". He seeks "not to understand, that I may believe, but to believe, that I might understand" (*credo ut intelligam*). Faith here is the basis for understanding, rather than the product of it. Indeed, even Anselm's reply to Gaunilo is an attempt to address not the unbeliever whom Gaunilo represents, but the Catholic whom Gaunilo is. And it is essentially an appeal to Gaunilo's "faith and conscience". Have we not found here another "presuppositionalist of the heart"? (p. 117)

While I agree with this assessment for the most part, (especially since this was my doctoral dissertation, *The Presuppositional Nature of St. Anselm of Canterbury's Ontological Argument*, which I cannot get published because it is "too academic"), I do not agree with Frame's statement, "We know that Augustine and Anselm were both heavily influenced by Plato, and perhaps Plato is the ultimate source of their argument" (p. 115). Influenced? Yes. Ultimate source of their argument? NO! We must always be careful to distinguish between the "early" Augustine and the "later" Augustine, as he himself informs us in his *Retractationi*, particularly, *De Natura et Gratia*. And Anselm in his *Monologion* straight-forwardly asserts that what he says in that work is nothing other than Augustinian theology.

Because of Frame's Thomistic defense of the above mentioned arguments, his attempted "revision" of Van Til is seriously flawed and will only serve to place him in yet another category among inconsistent apologists, of whom Van Til repeatedly warns us.

Chapter Five, which deals with "Apologetics as Proof" is a somewhat refreshing and reassuring chapter. It is encouraging to read Frame's strong emphasis upon the importance of the Word of God in the apologetic method. Particularly do I appreciate his treatment concerning "Miracle and Resurrection" (pp. 143rr) where he relates such matters as: 1) the account of the rich man and Lazarus by quoting Abraham's response to the rich man's request in Luke 16:31: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." (Frame's version); 2) "Indeed, that was the experience of Jesus himself. He wrought many miracles, but they rarely led people to faith."; and, 3) concerning the resurrection of Christ: "However, I would mention again, contrary to the traditional approach, that the chief evidence for the Resurrection is the

Word of God itself” (p. 145). These are good, strong, solid observations which the Van Tillian presuppositionalist will be pleased and thankful to find in *AGG*.

Chapters Six and Seven are devoted to a treatment of “The Problem of Evil” for which Frame says there is no “totally satisfying theoretical reconciliation between divine sovereignty, goodness, and evil” (pp. 150-151). Most of Frame's treatment of this subject is negative in nature. He criticizes not only Dr. Jay Adam's answer to the problem, but also all other “standard” answers posed both by Christians and non-Christians. Reformed theologians generally recognize, as Frame does in Chapter Seven, that God is not obligated to man so as to provide him with convenient, curiosity-satisfying answers for every question he might raise. Instead, man must recognize that God is righteous in all that He does and that only with the eye of faith can man view things in this world differently from the unbeliever who can offer no complaint and certainly no explanation for the fact of evil.

In Chapter Eight Frame discusses what he sees to be the only two alternatives of unbelieving thought in opposition to Christianity: 1) atheism, and 2) idolatry (which differs essentially from atheism in that, “Epistemologically, idolatry tends to be less relativistic than atheism”). By way of example, he criticizes the hypothesis of evolution as a Kuhnian paradigm which establishes “a criterion for judging other proposals, itself not subject to judgement” (p. 197). This is illustrative of what Frame refers to as the “dogmatic certainty that accompanies much unbelief” (p. 196). This chapter provides helpful insight into the influence of both atheism and idolatry as Frame has treated them.

Chapter Nine seems to be Frame's version of Van Til's Mr. White, Mr. Grey, and Mr. Black confrontation. While the hypothetical discussion is interesting to read and might occasionally evince a smile, it actually appears to be “too easy”. By that I mean that Frame has done a fine job in creating a scenario into which his apologetic neatly fits and which brings positive results with amazing ease.

Since this is only a review and not a full refutation of polemic of Frame's book, it will be obvious that a great deal of the content is left without specific comment. Let the reader of this review judge the work for himself. Perhaps, and hopefully, enough has been said to sufficiently whet the appetite.

In conclusion, without intending to be sarcastic but based, rather, on my sincere evaluation of *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, I would suggest that a more appropriate title for the book would have been *Perspectives on Apologetics*, or *Perspectival Apologetics*.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

**Return to [Contra Mundum Root Page](#)**

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