

Although it would be easy to criticize this book for not being exhaustive in its treatment or for not being a systematic theology per se, such criticism would be unfair because the book does not claim to be exhaustive, and its explicit purpose is to provide *biblical* theology. Its goal of propounding a comprehensive, coherent model based on the biblical material in context is much more modest but is sufficient.

In short, this carefully-researched book synthesizes a large amount of biblical and hard-to-find scholarly data in order to develop both old and new ideas into a comprehensive model of the spirit realm. It is surprisingly easy to read, and I recommend it to anyone who is willing to read the Bible on its own terms—from lay people to scholars.

Stephen L. Huebscher

Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith, by K. Scott Oliphint. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. 277 pp. \$19.99.

Because Cornelius Van Til is both a towering figure in modern apologetics and also notoriously challenging to understand, several authors have attempted to write popularizations of his thought. Supplementing useful works from Greg Bahnsen, John Frame, and Richard Pratt, Scott Oliphint offers what he calls a *translation* (rather than *introduction*) of Van Til: his aim is to “translate much of what is *meant* in Van Til’s own writings from their often philosophical and technical contexts to a more basic biblical and theological context” (26). Oliphint’s volume is a valuable contribution to this goal.

Happily, Oliphint avoids a problem characteristic of many works on Van Til’s apologetic: that of spending more time defending Van Til’s apologetic than defending Christianity. Oliphint closes several chapters with sample conversations with various forms of unbelief (atheism, Islam, etc.). This is a great virtue; as Oliphint says, “An apologetic that can do little more than continually talk about itself is not worth the effort exerted or ink spilled over it” (25).

Holding the entire volume together is Oliphint’s list of “The Ten Tenets” of covenantal apologetics. These tenets are entirely theological in nature; they function as the most basic commitments needed to develop a robustly Christian apologetic. The common theme of the Ten Tenets is *covenant*, from the Triune God’s voluntary condescension (in tenet one) to the claim that all facts are what they are because of God’s covenantal plan (in tenet ten).

This emphasis on the covenantal grounding of apologetics gives rise to one of Oliphint’s more ambitious proposals: that Van Til’s apologetic be referred to as *covenantal apologetics* rather than *presuppositionalism*. Oliphint hopes to move away from this popular nomenclature, as he believes that it is misleading in some important ways. Primarily, his concern is that it suggests a kind of relativism that is utterly foreign to Van Til’s apologetic project.

His suggested replacement, *covenantal* apologetics, will strike some readers of this journal as so overtly Reformed as to be off-putting. The label suggests the possibility that Van Til's apologetic approach might be incompatible with a dispensational reading of Scripture in the same sense that it is (in fact) incompatible with any theology that is not fully Calvinistic on divine sovereignty. While a full discussion as to whether one can advocate both covenantal apologetics and dispensational theology is beyond the scope of this review, in my judgment, Oliphint's proposal has much to commend it.

His concern about the relativistic implications (or, at least, misunderstandings) of *presuppositionalism* is warranted. Further, the notion of *covenant* is centrally important to Van Til's project. The covenant idea expresses the exhaustively *personal* nature of divine revelation: that every fact in the world, being what it is because *God says so*, therefore reveals God. Only because of this covenantal relationship that all image-bearers have with God can the apologist call the unbeliever to epistemic repentance: submitting to the Lordship of Christ is a necessary precondition of rightly accepting *any* part of God's revelation. Whatever one concludes about the proposal to rename this school of thought, Oliphint has rightly drawn attention to the importance of the concept of covenant in Van Tilian apologetics.

A second major proposal of Oliphint's, but one that might be less substantiated on Van Tilian grounds, is that the goal of the Christian apologist should be *persuasion* rather than *proof*. Readers of Van Til are doubtless familiar with his bold pronouncement: "The best, the only, the absolutely certain proof of the truth of Christianity is that unless its truth be presupposed there is no proof of anything." How then can Oliphint argue "the notion of proof is, at best, tenuous" (122)?

Oliphint's argument is that Christian apologetics are never to be thought of as existing in a vacuum, as though a given argument, in some pristine Platonic form, itself settles all questions. Rather, apologetics is always done within a (here it is again) covenantal context: speaking to image-bearers, within God's created world, armed with God's verbal Word as the final authority on all matters.

Whether Oliphint's advocacy of persuasion over proof fully accords with all that Van Til argued is, again, more than can be settled here. Nonetheless, his argument is worthy of consideration, and is likely part of the explanation for why Van Til himself never laid out, in strict analytic form, the transcendental argument that he famously advocated.

A final strength of Oliphint's work is the examples of internal critiques of unbelieving worldviews. This method of argument, essential to any Van Tilian apologetic, Oliphint labels the "Quicksand Quotient." Oliphint observes that his sample dialogs, illustrating the method of pitting an unbelieving worldview against itself, are necessarily incomplete. "This dialog," he says, "...could go in many different directions and continue for a very long time" (217). While the apologist cannot anticipate every possible rebuttal, having the method of defending the faith demonstrated is immensely valuable.

Without question, Oliphint's translation of Van Til's apologetic would serve well as a text in an apologetics course, and his generous use of sample dialog makes it accessible to a wider audience than his otherwise technical arguments might permit.

Michael P. Riley

Good News to the Poor: Social Involvement and the Gospel, by Tim Chester. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. 214 pp. \$15.99.

In *Good News to the Poor*, Tim Chester presents a look at social involvement in light of the gospel. Chester (Ph.D., University of Wales) is a pastor at The Crowded House in Sheffield, UK and the curriculum director of The Acts 29 Oak Hill Academy. He was previously Research and Policy Director for Tearfund, a UK Christian relief and development charity. He has authored over thirty books, including *From Creation to New Creation*, *Delighting in the Trinity*, and *You Can Change*.

Chester begins with four fictional people that characterize different approaches to social involvement among nominal evangelicals: the post-evangelical who favors social work over evangelism, the conservative evangelical who thinks social action is heresy, the evangelical who pushes back against the conservative position and does not want to favor evangelism or preaching over social work, and the evangelical leader who fears the lure of post-evangelicalism so wants to emphasize the centrality of the Word. He believes the final two best represent the Bible and largely agree with each other but may not realize it because they are fighting against opposite opponents. Thus, Chester seeks to offer a perspective that “urge[s] conservatives not to marginalize those who uphold the cause of the oppressed and to urge social activists not to go down the blind alley of theological liberalism” (14).

The first two chapters argue for the necessity of social involvement for believers. After highlighting the examples of earlier Christians, Chester offers three reasons for Christian social involvement in chapter 1: the character of God, the reign of God, and the grace of God. In the second chapter, he discusses the objection that Christian faith is not meant for the public sphere, tracing the idea to the Enlightenment's exaltation of human reason. However, he argues, Jesus is meant to be Lord of every aspect of human life, so Christians cannot limit their faith to the private realm.

The third chapter emphasizes that humanity's greatest need is “to be reconciled to God and so escape his wrath” (56). Chester argues that eternal needs matter more than temporal needs. Thus, the proclamation of the gospel “must be at the heart of all that we do as Christians and as churches” (65). Chapter four considers the relationship of social involvement and gospel proclamation. Chester proposes that social activity is a consequence of evangelism, a bridge to evangelism, and the partner