



Every Thought Captive

Richard L. Pratt Jr.

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In down-to-earth language Richard L. Pratt, Jr. has given us this helpful study manual on apologetics, the task of defending the faith. Far from a theoretical exposition, this training manual teaches how to answer nonbelievers and to "take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." Pratt shows how the biblical doctrines about humanity and our relationship to our Creator determine how we should do apologetics. Within this theological framework he examines the premises, attitudes, and specific steps involved in a genuinely biblical defense of Christianity. Illustrations and review questions help to make this a valuable tool for individual or group study.

Every Thought Captive Details

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L. R. Bouligny Bouligny says

In an attempt to make Vantillian presuppositional apologetics palpable to the layperson, Richard Pratt has written Every Thought Captive. In a very quick read, only about 140 pages, the author builds his systematic approach to this method of defending the faith, and takes complex philosophical thoughts of VanTil and explains them though an easily understood format. He begins where the Bible does—in the beginning. By laying the groundwork of creation and man's partaking of the world God has made, Pratt does an excellent job of reminding the reader that the Bible is God's revealing to us our condition and the effects of the fall, and it is this same God who has revealed to us the inner workings of the sinful man's heart. If we do not begin with this knowledge, arguing over the existence of God with an unbeliever is an exercise in futility. Pratt continues building on the foundation of creation and the fall, in an effective manner, showing the unbeliever's worldview as one that is not a neutral position. Since the Scripture is the believer's guide in all things pertaining to life and godliness, it also explains to us as Christians what we are up against with unbelievers. Since no one seeks after God, but all suppress the truth in unrighteousness, the unbeliever is not a clean slate when it comes to thoughts about God. Armed with this truth, the Christian can proceed to dismantle the logic of the unbeliever by exposing his worldview as illogical and self-refuting.

While I do very much appreciate this approach, and plan on using it in the future, there is still the problem of offensive apologetics which is normally lacking in the presuppositional camp. Pratt attempts to fix this, working towards explaining different ways this can be done, but overall I still think it fails. It is one thing to say that all positions are going to be circular in some form—that is easy to agree with. However, it seems that using this method by continually bringing the unbeliever back to his need to trust the Bible and not his independent thinking, begs the question in some sense. Why should he trust in the Bible, because the Bible says so. Now, perhaps the author would not argue against supplementing these arguments with some evidences for the authenticity of Scripture, but I would like to see this camp utilizing many of the proofs out there that God has given us in addition to the presuppositional methodology.

I must clarify that I recognize that Pratt does spend 3 chapters using such proofs such as the “evidence from Scripture” and the “evidence from the external world,” it always is a knee-jerk formula to make the person not trust in his own independence, but the Bible. Of course I think this is great, but does this really bear fruit? If we want to be the most biblical, why argue with them at all about their atheistic commitments and just preach the gospel to them, leaving the job up to the Lord to save or reject? I am speaking somewhat tongue in cheek, since I do believe that God uses good arguments to save sinners, but I think this going round and around with the unbeliever about commitments might not make any headway with a person who does not care about truth in the first place.

All in all, I thought it was a good book for explaining the complex system of presuppositional apologetics. His arguments are sound, straightforward and helpful.

Roddy says

A primer on presuppositional apologetics but still not easy despite its claim to be written for "High school students"! Could have done with more of the application method included in the final chapter. I'm certainly attracted to presupp apologetics but it needs a lot of work to get your head aroundt it. Must watch Sie Ten Bruggencate on Youtube again. Atheists can't cope with him so they dismiss him as a prat and a loony without ever dealing adequately with the arguments.

Matthew Hodge says

If you want an overview of Van Til's presuppositional apologetics methodology (without all the headscratching), this is the book for you. I'm still not entirely convinced on the presupposition approach being the be-all and end-all of apologetics but it definitely needs to be grappled with when working out how to defend the faith.

Emma says

This book frustrated me to no end! I could tell that Pratt really did try to provide solid arguments, but in the end, his writing style confused me and left me with questions, not answers. After much discussion, I was able to find some truth in what he wrote, but if I were a non-believer, I would feel very put-off from Christianity, and in this way I feel that Pratt did a disservice to his readers. His words and diagrams are confusing and many of his arguments are repetitive and unfinished, so I would not count this as a helpful apologetics book.

Holly says

I read this book on the recommendation of my pastor, which is normally all the endorsement a book needs for me to plow through it with gusto. I had no gusto after a few paragraphs because, for me, the writing style was dreadfully dull. I was further discouraged because I felt that the author was far, FAR too harsh in his criticism of other apologists and evangelistic techniques. In fact, I had to put the book down for about a week and a half and come back to it with a cooler head. Being a Bahnsen fan already, I did very much enjoy Pratt's chapter, "Structure of a Biblical Defense" and all the chapters that followed because they demonstrated Pratt's technique in a variety of potential apologetic situations. The last chapter, while I believe again it was a caricature of other apologetic techniques, did reveal their inherent weaknesses and the strength of a presuppositional approach. The book reveals that the FANTASTIC STRENGTH of the presuppositional model is that any Christian can be prepared to "boil that cabbage down" with any attacker/seeker to reveal their underlying beliefs. While I think Lee Strobel and other evidence based defenses are very fruitful and necessary and NOT AT ALL unbiblical (as the author states) and that those defenses meet everyone on the common ground of "we all agree that we can think and reason," and that many I know have come to faith through such ministries, ultimately we either show people that they let GOD be God, or they exalt themselves as God as their prior faith commitment, which is what presuppositional apologetics as presented by Pratt does handily in his book.

Michael J says

A good refresher if you have been offer worldview apologetics before, but might be rusty. I would not recommend this book to someone who is brand new to the idea of worldview apologetics. Pratt summarizes much and doesn't give lots of detail, assuming the reader can make some logical progressions on his own. Not an ideal teaching scenario for a new apologist.

Jimmy says

This book was written by Richard Pratt, the Old Testament professor out at Reformed Theological Seminary. Quite the well rounded professor, he wrote this work when he was much younger, for the purpose of training young Christians (high school age) in the defense of the Faith from a Van Tillian perspective. I appreciated Pratt's effort of communicating Van Til's school of apologetics in non-technical language. The thirteen lessons are perfect for sunday school material, and each lesson ends with several discussion questions. The book also has various drawings as visual aids, a plus for those who learn visually. The book also manage to critique popular non-Presuppositional apologetics in lesson nine, where Pratt provided a general yet gracious critique of Paul E. Little's popular, "Why I Believe". But the gist of the book was positive construction of the framework to engage in apologetics. The core of his apologetics methodology applied is found in lesson 11-13, and much of his attention is on the certainty-uncertainty dialectic found in the autonomous (what Pratt calls 'independent') man. The book close with an illustration of a hypothetical scenario of apologetics applied.

Adam Calvert says

This is a great book on presuppositional apologetics. Probably the second best book available on defending the faith from a Biblically consistent approach that the lay young-adult learner would benefit from (I'd have to say Always Ready is better - at least for those in their 20s and up).

While this book was written for high-schoolers, I think everyone would benefit greatly from reading it. It illustrates well how to defend the faith without departing from the foundation of the faith, and yet is very readable. One of the most engaging aspects of presuppositional apologetics is recorded in the following: "Christians must always remember when defending the faith that human reason is never to be treated as the ultimate or final authority" (p. 70).

Probably the best practical outline of how presuppositional apologetics works that I've ever seen is at the end of this book, in Lesson 14: An Apologetic Parable. I would say the book is worth the price from that chapter alone.

All together the book is 142 pages and worth every one of them. I highly recommend it for anyone who wants to know how to defend the faith as a Christian should.

Rebecca says

I read this book for a discussion-based apologetics class, so disclaimer: our discussions about it may have influenced my opinion of the book. I did not like this book. The writing style was disorganized at some points, and too organized at parts where I thought the topic was too complex for lists and basic outlines. I did not really understand what Pratt was trying to get across until I read the epilogue, which was written in parable form. This was much more helpful than the lists and confusing chapters leading up to it. But the thing I disliked most about the book was the undertone of manipulation I felt throughout the entire book. I felt like Pratt was trying to teach me how to manipulate people into Christianity. Christians should never act

that way. You should never become friends with someone just so you can convert them--friendship has no agenda. And in any conversation about Christianity, the believer should never be trying to win; rather, they should authentically and sincerely explain what they believe out of love for the other person. Christians also need to pay attention to other people's concerns about Christianity and make sure they fully understand them, instead of classing arguments and having blanket counter-arguments that come from books that they don't really understand to throw into the conversation whenever the topic arises. A Christian needs to actually understand evolution before he can make arguments about it.

Michael Boling says

Many books focused on the discussion of apologetics engage the issue with a barrage of techniques aimed at providing the reader with a list of responses to those who reject biblical truth. Often the techniques provided by those authors neglect one important factor, that of the necessity for any apologetical effort to be firmly rooted in Scripture. All the arguments and communicative techniques in the world will be of no service to the conversation if God's word is not first and foremost the source of one's approach to all of life. It is this presupposition that God's word is the source of truth that forms the basis for the approach contained in *Every Thought Captive: A Study Manual for the Defense of Christian Truth* by Richard Pratt.

At the outset of this study manual on apologetics, Pratt rightly notes the words of the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 10:5: "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." Arguably, this is a verse about how to do apologetics that is quite often overlooked. Fundamentally, this is what the pursuit of apologetics for the believer is all about. While certainly providing a defense of what we believe is also of utmost importance, providing that defense should not come at the expense of the necessity to destroy any thought or speculation that takes aim at the things of God. In order to wage war against ungodly thoughts and ideas, one must first understand what building a firm foundation on God's word is all about.

Pratt aptly comments "The Bible is both the foundation upon which our defense must be built and one of our beliefs which must be defended. All too often, this twofold role which the Bible must play is forgotten. Well-meaning Christians lose sight of the foundational character of the Bible and tend to build their defense on mere human wisdom and reasoning. The Word is placed, as it were, on the roof of their structure and is supported by apologetics." He further elaborates on this concept noting "As followers of Christ, we must remember always to build out defense of the Christian faith on the sure foundation of the Bible. If we do so, there will be no weight too great to be supported; no wind too strong to be resisted." This is a very important element for those engaging in apologetics to understand. Given that apologetics should be a practice of all believers to one degree or another, it is vital for followers of Christ to grasp that apologetics apart from a firm foundation of Scripture is not apologetics. In reality, such an approach is far too often what takes place in the apologetic community, specifically the appeal to human reasoning as subservient to Scripture. That backwards approach is presented by Pratt as wholly incorrect and resting on shaky ground at best.

Another important element presented by Pratt of understanding how to properly define and practice apologetics is that of understanding who God is and how we related to Him as His creation. Pratt describes this as the "Creator-creature distinction". This concept is vital to apologetics for a number of reasons which Pratt does an excellent job of elaborating. For instance, our perspective on origins stems from this distinction. This is because "Man can understand himself and the creation surrounding him only as he recognizes the Creator-creature distinction revealed there and sees the will of God more clearly through his observation of creation." Even our understanding of biblical concepts such as the character of man, both

before and following sin, as well as that of redemption, stem from this Creator-creature distinction. Those in the apologetics community who solely depend on human reasoning and arguments based on logic must recognize something Pratt ably declares, namely that “Logic is not God and it should never be given the honor due to God alone. Truth is found at the judgment seat of God, not the court of logic.”

After providing this necessary foundation for apologetics, Pratt spends the remainder of this study manual providing valuable tips for engaging the non-believers positions on a number of key matters, including the deity of Christ, the existence of God, the problem of evil, the resurrection of Christ, the validity of Scripture, sin, origins, eschatology, and general matters of faith. As Pratt moves through those issues, he does so by constantly returning to the aforementioned Creator-creature distinction that forms the locus for his apologetical approach. In each element of his approach, Pratt not only provides valuable responses to popular tactics of the non-believer, more importantly, he roots his recommendations on the solid foundation of Scripture, essentially practicing the very methodology he teaches the reader.

At the end of each chapter, Pratt provides the reader with additional study questions focused on reiterating the material in the chapter as well as assisting the reader with tools to engage the topic at hand in greater detail. I always enjoy such study questions and books that include that element are ones I find to be most helpful and something I will return to in the future.

Every Thought Captive is a journey into the presuppositional or “Van Tillian” approach to apologetics, one rooted in the belief that God and His word should form the basis for any defense or discussion of biblical truth. It is a work that everyone engaged in apologetics, meaning every believer should read and take note of this book as the concepts and principles provided by Pratt will serve the reader well when the time comes for them to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

Wade says

This is a great book about how to build a Biblical apologetic. It is not so much a handbook of Christian Apologetics (although, there are quite a few arguments laid out), but more importantly it is a step-by-step process of how to build and think through a Biblical Christian Apologetic.

Bob Gooch says

I've always thought that Van Tillian apologetics was just circular logic and I could never quite get a handle on its popularity. This book was said to explain it in "down-to-earth language" and "to help ordinary people engage in apologetics along the lines of Van Til's approach", and it did just that -- it helped me better understand this form of apologetics, and I can understand now why it is so popular.

However, even though the author directly addresses the circular logic problem, I still have issues with it, and don't believe that it would be effective in confronting non-Christians. I do agree with the basic problem in apologetics that Van Til identifies (that of authority), but I'm not (yet) satisfied that this is the way to address that problem.

Timothy Decker says

Good lay-level explanation of the theology behind the reformed apologetic. But poor demonstration of it, at least until the last chapter. Other books do much better in demonstrating how the theology of this approach should be put into practice. I'm in between 3 and 4 stars. Say 3.5 but list 4.

Josiah Richardson says

A good, basic, general introduction into apologetics. Though it stems from a presuppositional apologetic, I don't hold that against it. Starting with the condition of man, his creaturely nature, and moving towards a renewed nature, it is helpful to trace the different apologetic needed at each step. With end chapter discussion questions, this would be good material for a highschool or college study guide.

Joshua says

Good introduction to apologetics, though not scintillating. Although it is somewhat repetitious, it does so to drive home the most important point in apologetics: that the believer is dependent on the Bible for truth, while the unbeliever is dependent on man.
