Phillips, Timothy R., and Dennis L. Okholm, eds. *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995. 238 pp. Paper, $15.99.

The contributors to *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* seek to contribute to an evangelical apologetic which maintains gospel purity and is relevant to the local church and postmodern culture (11). This review summarizes the various traditional and new approaches (recommended in the book) that reject and/or build on some features of postmodernity.

The most consistently negative assessment of postmodernity is presented by Douglas Webster (chap. 11). He suggests that there should be a clear distinction from postmodernity in preaching the gospel. This is because attempts to seek a place in the postmodern world may cause the Church to be evangelized by it. Also, postmodern affirmation, approval, and political correctness are contrary to biblical correctness, repentance, and deliverance. Webster laments the secularization of Church mainliners (who seek respectability and political correctness) and Church marketers (who seek popularity). He concludes that if we gain the postmodern world, we may lose our souls.

The most consistently positive assessments of postmodernity are presented by Nicola Creegan (chap. 4) and John Stackhouse (chap. 3). Creegan proposes that insights from Schleiermacher on grafting Christianity to the universal, rational structure of modern thought are useful for similar grafting to postmodernism. Stackhouse identifies apologetic values in the language of postmodernity. He argues that the church cannot speak about the credibility of the gospel until it establishes its plausibility. This is because there is ignorance about Christianity even among many who presume they know the faith enough to dismiss it. Also, many Christians make the faith unattractive. Finally, Christian plausibility may be supplemented by postmodern architectural and literary devices, and testimonies about the supernatural.

An ambivalent attitude toward postmodernity is evident in the contribution by Roger Lundin (chap. 2). He denies that we must abandon serious, critical engagement with postmodernity or shun its study. However, he seems to be in harmony with Timothy Phillips' and Dennis Okholm's aim to convince postmodernists that they must play by the rules of the gospel (chap. 1). Lundin's basic concern is evident in his warning against use of postmodern vocabulary to communicate the gospel. He suggests that the gospel overturns the categories of postmodernism that involve assumptions concerning self, truth, and ethical life. These categories also imply the replacement of truth with therapeutics and psychological effectiveness and are tied up with a naturalistic view of reality and a preferential view of morality.

A similar ambivalence is evident in William Craig's proposal (chap. 5). On the one hand, one may be committed to Christian truth and yet be open to postmodern seeing of truth and learning from other world religions. On the other hand, postmodernism may be shown to be self-refuting. According to Craig, traditional apologetics is still effective since, while revelation is a category above reason, it is supported by evidence. The self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit is the

foundation of faith. However, evidence confirms faith and may encourage postmodernists to consider the faith perspective. Phillips and Okholm question (chap. 1) whether any apologetic can succeed in the postmodern era. However, Craig presents an extensive defense of Christian particularism as an alternative to the postmodern celebration of religious diversity.

Other chapters in this book engage postmodern criticisms of Christianity. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh (chap. 7) seek to answer a postmodern criticism of Christianity: that its metanarrative excludes the experiences and realities of some people and legitimates the power structures that oppress other perspectives. To this end, they make a "postmodern" defense of the biblical metanarratives as free of some totalizing aspects which are rejected by postmodernism. For example, biblical narratives are rooted in suffering, and their basic, creational intent delegitimizes violent and oppressive uses of the biblical story.

James Sire (chap. 6) accepts postmodern criticism of the modern assumption that human knowledge can be certain. However, he argues that the question of truth cannot be avoided. While the Christian framework is not presumed as a given, we need to present Christ as the logos of reality. Also, before giving rational evidences we must show rhetorical plausibility. Lastly, there is a way around postmodernism's ontological agnosticism. The postmodern concern with language allows plausibility to be shown by telling a likely story. One may take advantage of postmodern freedom to tell one's own story in order to tell the story of Jesus in the academy as well as in the community. Sire's approach is complemented by Dennis Hollinger's discussion (chap. 10) of the Church as plausibility structure for the Christian worldview. The Church must make the biblical story manifest in its entire life.

Philip Kenneson (chap. 8) celebrates the postmodern attack on objective truth and tends toward a dichotomy of objectivity and plausibility. It is not objectivity which gives Christianity its authority, but the fact that the Church lives in a way that is incomprehensible apart from its God. Efforts to demonstrate the objective truth of Christianity reduce it to a form of modern Gnosticism. Kenneson critiques the origin of objective truth in methodological doubt. He rejects the dichotomy by which objective truth brackets all people together and subjective truth places the burden of truth on individuals. Ironically, he claims that since he has no theory of truth, he cannot be accused of relativism but is an antirelativist who rejects objective truth. For Kenneson, the Church's indispensable convictions are not a second-class knowledge. Truth is internal to a web of beliefs with no external standard. We are always in the grip of belief while seeking to make others believe as we do. By word and deed a community narrates faith in order to give it substance. It is futile to proclaim Christ's Lordship as truth while we live in a way that makes that lordship invisible. Instead of answering questions no one is asking, we should live in a way that drives the world to ask about our hope. Kenneson's approach is complemented by Ronald Potter's observation (chap. 9) that the social-economic realities of life make faith problematic more often than do traditional, intellectual challenges. Apologetics must be centered in the Church and be praxis-oriented.

Christians who are tempted to take a purely positive view of postmodernity would do well to be forewarned about its dangers which have been presented in this book. However, the positive, negative, and ambivalent views summarized

above provoke many questions. What "language" may we use to communicate the gospel? Should we prefer premodern or modern languages? Is there some universal language available? Is the simple repetition of Scripture language sufficient? Does apologetics need to translate the message of Scripture into contemporary language?

Some answers to these questions are suggested in the well-written chapters of this book. The multiplicity of authors leads to a lack of harmonious recommendations for a response to postmodernity. However, the various perspectives may facilitate the reader's appreciation of issues which must be considered in the construction of a theological response to postmodernity. Some have concluded that postmodernity is best ignored as a passing fad. However, the evangelical responses contained in this book illustrate the fact that contemporary Christians may not easily escape the challenge and opportunity of constructive engagement with postmodern thought.

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Phiri, Isabel Apawo. *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi.* Blantyre: Christian Literature Association in Malawi (CLAIM), 1997. 160 pp. Paper, $10.00.

This is a recent publication of the productive Kachere Series, a line of books on religion and theology that is sponsored by the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Malawi. The author, herself a former member of this department, is currently Director of the Institute of Contextual Theology of the University of Durban—Westville, Republic of South Africa. The issue of the status and ministry of women in the Christian church is becoming one of increasing importance, and frequently controversy, in most denominations nowadays. Thus Dr. Phiri's detailed historical and sociocultural study of the matter in the context of the Presbyterian Church of Malawi (CCAP) comes as a welcome introduction to many of the relevant aspects.

The book begins with a valuable survey of the important role that women played in the ancient, traditional, religious practice of the Chewa people as spirit mediums and shrine leaders (chap. 1). The main body of the book then deals with the various struggles in which women have had to engage in order to have their voice heard and their talents utilized in a church that was initially characterized by a conservative "patriarchal theology" (43) and male-dominated administrative practice, even within their own fellowship group (Chigwirizano).

In her well-written overview and evaluation, the author considers such crucial topics as female initiation, bride wealth, child marriages, husband desertion, a widow's property rights, and remarriage. Current attitudes toward women in the church are explored on the basis of personal field interviews (chap. 4), and various ecumenical efforts at promoting a greater awareness of women's issues are reported (chap. 5). Dr. Phiri concludes her study (chap. 6) with a reflection of the ecclesiastical status of women in relation to several key scriptural passages that concern this subject. Here, in particular, is where the author expresses several potentially controversial opinions of a hermeneutical nature, and one wishes that