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Reformed Apologetics: Christianity in Conflict

One of Cornelius Van Til's many unpublished syllabi was an overview of the history of Christian apologetics entitled *Christianity in Conflict*.¹ The title aptly characterizes Van Til's view of apologetics in two ways. First, he saw apologetics as properly confronting unbelief in non-Christian thought. In this sense it stands at the point of conflict between Christianity and non-Christian religions and philosophies. But second, he argued that there was an internal conflict within Christianity over the method and approach to be used in apologetics. This conflict was and is between defending Christianity by the improper approach of accommodating it to the unbelieving presuppositions of non-Christian thought and defending it by the proper approach of challenging those unbelieving presuppositions. This twofold note of conflict is characteristic of the Reformed approach to apologetics, especially as practiced by Van Til, Clark, and their disciples.

Biblical Standard for Defining Truth

Fundamental to classical apologetics and evidentialism are their respective approaches to epistemology, or the theory of knowledge. Putting the matter rather broadly, classical

apologetics is indebted largely to the rationalist tradition in Western philosophy, while evidentialism is indebted to the empiricist tradition. Now this characterization immediately requires qualification. Few if any classical apologists have been pure rationalists, and few (though some) evidentialists have been thoroughgoing empiricists. Nearly all apologists of both approaches today would favor some epistemology that combined elements of rationalism and empiricism and avoided the extremes of both theories.

Reformed apologists, on the other hand, believe a different approach to epistemology is in order. They typically reject not only rationalism and empiricism but also any epistemology that seeks to combine the two theories, as all these epistemologies in their different ways treat human knowledge as self-sufficient or *autonomous*. That is, rationalism, empiricism, and other such epistemologies attempt to explain how human beings can gain knowledge *without reference to God and man's relationship to God*. According to Van Til, there are ultimately only two kinds of epistemologies: those that make all human knowledge dependent on God and those that do not. "In the last analysis we shall have to choose between two theories of knowledge. According to one theory God is the final court of appeal; according to the other theory man is the final court of appeal."²

Reformed apologists argue that when classical and evidentialist apologists seek to use a method that non-Christians can accept, they are actually seeking a method that assumes man's self-sufficiency to arrive at truth (since only a method based on that assumption would be acceptable to non-Christians). Van Til, for example, insists that the Christian should use a distinctive method of knowledge in keeping with his distinctive understanding of God as the source of all knowledge: "The question of method is not a neutral something. Our presupposition of God as the absolute, self-conscious Being, who is the source of all finite being and

knowledge, makes it imperative that we distinguish the Christian theistic method from all non-Christian methods.”³

Most Reformed apologists do not reject deductive and inductive reasoning as such. However, they typically do reject deductive and inductive *apologetic* arguments. For Van Til, a deductive apologetic argument would require agreement between the Christian and the non-Christian on the premises, and such agreement does not exist. Moreover, the use of reason is not the same for the two kinds of people. The appeal to reason in apologetics as traditionally carried out is therefore problematic, as Van Til explains: “‘Reason’ in the case of the non-Christian is employed by such as assume themselves to be self-sufficient, while ‘reason’ in the case of the Christian is employed by those who through regeneration have learned to think of themselves as creatures of God and of their task of life as keeping covenant with God.”⁴

While Clark and Van Til disagree on the proper use of deductive logic in apologetics, both flatly reject inductive apologetic arguments because they conclude in probability rather than certainty. Van Til writes, “It is an insult to the living God to say that his revelation of himself so lacks in clarity that man, himself through and through a revelation of God, does justice by it when he says that God *probably* exists.”⁵

Reformed apologists also warn against defending Christianity on the basis of an epistemology that does not provide a proper ground for deduction and induction. The proper ground cannot itself be epistemological, since one cannot ground an epistemology on an epistemology, but must be a *metaphysic*—a view of reality, or what is also known as a worldview. Thus Reformed apologists insist that apologetics ultimately involves a conflict between Christian and non-Christian worldviews. As Greg Bahnsen puts it, “every apologetic

encounter is ultimately a conflict of worldviews or fundamental perspectives (whether this is explicitly mentioned or not).”⁶

Both Dooyeweerd and Van Til argue the necessity of employing transcendental reasoning to establish the ground of knowledge and meaning. As we saw in our profile of Dooyeweerd, a transcendental argument seeks to know what the conditions are that make knowledge possible; it seeks to give an account for what makes both deductive and inductive reasoning intelligible or meaningful in the first place. Unlike deductive and inductive reasoning, a transcendental argument does not begin from specific truth claims (premises or data) that must themselves be established before any conclusion can be drawn. Rather, it gives an account of what the necessary conditions must be for any truth claim, or even the *negation* of that truth claim, to be at all intelligible.⁷ According to Van Til, only a transcendental argument can validly be used to prove the reality of God: “Now the only argument for an absolute God that holds water is a transcendental argument. A deductive argument as such leads only from one spot in the universe to another spot in the universe. So also an inductive argument as such can never lead beyond the universe. In either case there is no more than an infinite regression.”⁸

Van Til also spoke of this transcendental argument as “reasoning by presupposition”:

To argue by presupposition is to indicate what are the epistemological and metaphysical principles that underlie and control one’s method. . . . The method of reasoning by presupposition may be said to be indirect rather than direct. The issue between believers and non-believers in Christian theism cannot be settled by a direct appeal to “facts” or “laws” whose nature and significance is already agreed upon by both parties to the debate. The question is rather as to what is the final reference-point required to make the “facts” and “laws” intelligible.⁹

Putting the question this way may seem to assume that non-Christians will agree on the need to have some consistent, intelligible view of facts and laws. As John Frame recognizes, not everyone actually agrees or even seems to care: “So the choice is this: either accept the God of the Bible or deny objective morality, objective truth, the rationality of man, and the rational knowability of the universe. Some might maintain that they don’t care much about this. They might say that they can go on living happily enough without having a rational basis for thinking and acting.”¹⁰

Elsewhere Frame observes that in contemporary thought a burgeoning movement called postmodernism self-consciously argues that there is no single rational basis for thinking and acting. Here is how he describes the movement:

Every several years, one hears the claim that contemporary thought has become radically different from anything that has gone before. The latest claim of this sort is made for “postmodernism.” We are told that thirty years ago or so, our culture rejected the rationalistic assumptions of the Enlightenment and came to recognize that “linear, scientific, objective” thinking is largely an expression of bias. Therefore, contemporary postmodern thought rejects all the assurances of the past and opens itself up to various non-Western, nonlinear influences, such as Eastern religions, occultism, and so on. It “deconstructs” language to lay bare its essential use—not as a means of rational communication from one mind to another, but as a means of social power, to control and oppress.¹¹

Contemporary Reformed apologists like Frame agree with their classical and evidentialist counterparts that postmodernism is an unacceptable and irrational approach to knowledge.

Unfortunately, from the Reformed perspective, traditional apologists tend to assume a modernist

philosophy as the stance from which to refute postmodernism. That is, classical apologists treat postmodernism as the abandonment of the belief in absolute truth for the belief in the relativity of all beliefs—as if modernism were somehow preferable to postmodernism. Evidentialists criticize postmodernism on the grounds that it flies in the face of the facts—as if facts had meaning apart from the philosophical framework in which they are viewed.

Frame proposes that postmodernism be viewed in terms of Van Til's analysis of the history of non-Christian thought as the working out of a kind of dialectic between a rationalistic impulse and an irrationalistic impulse. If Van Til were alive today, Frame comments, "he would say that the 'new thinking' of our time is really nothing drastically different from what has been going on since the Garden of Eden. Essentially, it is rationalism and irrationalism."¹²

The rationalistic impulse is an expression of the desire by fallen human beings to subject all of reality, including God, to rational inspection and evaluation. Rationalism, in this broad sense, is the error of treating the human mind as capable in principle of determining what is true and what is right. It is the sin of seeking "the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17; cf. 3:5, 22) as a knowledge measured by the human mind. The irrationalistic impulse expresses the desire by fallen human beings to be free of any final, determinative standard of truth and value. In this sense irrationalism is the error of denying that there is an objective, transcendent Origin determining for us what is true and what is right. It is the sin of seeking to "be like God" (Genesis 3:5), to be gods unto ourselves. According to Van Til, both impulses are constantly present to some extent in unbelieving thought:

It was thus that man, in rejecting the covenantal requirement of God became at one and the same time both irrationalist and rationalist. These two are not, except formally, contradictory of one another. They rather imply one another. Man had to be both to be

either. . . . In ancient philosophy the rationalistic motif seemed to dominate the scene; in modern times the irrationalist motif seems to be largely in control. But the one never lives altogether independently of the other.¹³

Frame applies this analysis of the history of unbelieving thought to the contemporary movement of postmodernism:

The latest contemporary ideas are essentially no different from those of the ancient Greeks, the modern rationalists and empiricists, Kant, Hegel, and the others.

Postmodernism, insofar as it is really a change from what has gone before, is a shift from a rationalist to an irrationalist impulse. Its rejection of “linear objectivity” is something we have seen before, among the Greek Sophists, in Hume’s critique of objectivity, in Kant’s critique of metaphysics, and in Hegel’s attempt to achieve truth through negation and synthesis.¹⁴

Frame suggests two lines of criticism that the apologist can fruitfully present when confronted with a non-Christian who claims not to care whether his life has a rational basis or who adheres to postmodernism or any other irrationalist philosophy. First, the apologist can point out that the irrationalist’s attitude or profession is inconsistent with the way he normally lives. Second, the apologist can tell the irrationalist that in his heart he knows better:

But if someone has resolved to live without logic, without reason, and without standards, we cannot prevent him. He will, of course, accept logic and rationality when he makes his real-life decisions, and so he will not live according to his theoretical irrationalism. In many apologetic situations, it is useful to point this out. But for a tough-minded

irrationalist, logical inconsistency is not a problem. Still, at some level he knows he is wrong. God still speaks, around and in the unbeliever.¹⁵

The Vindication of Reformed Theology

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Presbyterian and Reformed churches struggled over encroaching modernism. A breach developed between those who defended historic Calvinism and those who moved in the direction of theological liberalism. But within the conservative Calvinistic camp, another rift developed over the way the Calvinistic position should be defended. While the “Old Princeton” school, including B. B. Warfield and Charles Hodge, advocated a classical approach to Christian apologetics, Dutch Calvinists such as Abraham Kuyper argued that such an approach was inconsistent with Reformed theology’s Augustinian and Calvinistic roots. This is the heart of R. J. Rushdoony’s later criticism of the Old Princeton apologetic method. “To believe that man can reason his way to the faith constitutes a form of Arminianism; it is an affirmation that the natural man *can* receive the things of the Spirit of God, and that he *can* know them (I Corinthians 2:14). To attempt to reason man into faith, or to appeal to a rationalistic apologetics is thus to set up reason rather than God as ultimate, because it asks the sinful and fallen reason of the natural man to assess and judge God.”¹⁶

Similarly, Cornelius Van Til argues that Calvinistic theologians who follow the traditional method of apologetics derived from Arminian theologians (especially Butler) have allowed their apologetic to lag behind their theology.¹⁷ He agrees with Warfield’s theological position, especially on the inspiration of Scripture, but takes issue with his appeal to the reason

of natural man because of its inconsistency with the implications of Reformed theology.¹⁸ In the same way, he criticizes Hodge's use of the traditional method of apologetics and endorsement of reason as a means of evaluating a revelation.¹⁹ Van Til instead follows Kuyper by beginning with the Christian theistic position rather than reasoning "to the full theistic position from a standpoint outside of it."²⁰ He contends that a choice must be made: a person can either use reason to stand in judgment of the credibility of the Christian revelation, or he can renounce his perception of himself as ultimate. Arminian apologetics follows the former course; Reformed apologetics takes the latter.

Van Til insists that it is "logically quite impossible for the natural man, holding as he does to the idea of autonomy, even to consider the 'evidence' for the Scripture as the final and absolutely authoritative revelation of the God of Christianity."²¹ Apart from the Reformed faith, theology and philosophy "lead ultimately to a universe where chance is placed above God."²² In short, Van Til maintains that the traditional method of apologetics compromises the biblical doctrines of God, revelation, man's creation in the image of God, and sin.²³ The fact that this method has been employed for so long by Reformed theologians has "stood in the way of the development of a distinctly Reformed apologetic."²⁴

Toward a Christian Philosophy

Reformed apologists of all the kinds surveyed in the previous chapter call for Christians to develop a Christian philosophy that is based on its own principles and is faithful to the Christian revelation. Alvin Plantinga, the most renowned Reformed philosopher of this century, and representative of what we called the "left wing" of the Reformed apologetic tradition, will

serve as our example here. In his paper “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” he urges Christian philosophers to be more independent of the academic philosophy establishment, to display more integrity or wholeness in their work, and to be bolder in affirming their Christian perspective.²⁵ He points out that “the Christian community has its own questions, its own concerns, its own topics for investigation, its own agenda, and its own research program” (298). He also warns that Christian philosophers need to avoid becoming so enamored of contemporary philosophers that they fall into the trap of trying to express Christian concepts using alien ideas. He uses the philosopher Willard van Orman Quine as an example:

Quine is a marvelously gifted philosopher; a subtle, original, and powerful philosophical force. But his fundamental commitments, his fundamental projects and concerns, are wholly different from those of the Christian community—wholly different and, indeed, antithetical to them. And the result of attempting to graft Christian thought onto his basic view of the world will be at best an unintegral *pastiche*; at worst it will seriously compromise, or distort, or trivialize the claims of Christian theism. (299)

Plantinga encourages Christians engaged in philosophical work to be unabashed in expressing a distinctively Christian point of view. “And—and this is crucially important—the Christian philosopher has a perfect right to the point of view and pre-philosophical assumptions he brings to philosophic work; the fact that these are not widely shared outside the Christian or theistic community is interesting but fundamentally irrelevant” (299).

According to Plantinga, a Christian philosopher who stands resolutely on his principles will respond to philosophical challenges to Christianity differently than one who wants to accommodate Christianity to philosophy. Plantinga uses verificationism, the logical positivist movement, as an example. Many Christian philosophers and theologians, faced with the

challenge of the verifiability criterion of meaning (according to which theological statements are meaningless), took the challenge far too seriously. All too often they tried to accommodate Christian theology to verificationism.

What they should have said to the positivists is: “Your criterion is mistaken: for such statements as ‘God loves us’ and ‘God created the heavens and the earth’ are clearly meaningful; so if they aren’t verifiable in your sense, then it is false that all and only statements verifiable in that sense are meaningful.” What was needed here was less accommodation to current fashion and more Christian self-confidence: Christian theism is true; if Christian theism is true, then the verifiability criterion is false; so the verifiability criterion is false. (301)

Plantinga illustrates his point again with the problem of evil. Against those who press the reality of evil as evidence weighing against belief in God’s existence, he replies that in ordinary reasoning such evidence is weighed along with the rest of what the person considering this evidence already believes and knows to be true. He then suggests that the Christian has every right to include the belief that God exists as a basic part of that body of truth that is already believed and possessed—in which case the reality of evil will not undermine the person’s confidence that God exists.

Perhaps the theist has a right to *start from* belief in God, taking that proposition to be one of the ones probability with respect to which determines the rational propriety of *other* beliefs he holds. But if so, then the Christian *philosopher* is entirely within his rights in starting from belief in God to his philosophizing. He has a right to take the existence of God for granted and go on from there in his philosophical work—just as other

philosophers take for granted the existence of the past, say, or of other persons, or the basic claims of contemporary physics. (303-304)

If a Christian is asked what justifies his belief that God exists, one possible answer is that given by Augustine and developed by Calvin. God, Plantinga says, “has developed in humankind a tendency or *nisus* or disposition to believe in him,” a disposition that remains universally present despite its suppression by sin (304, 305). “No doubt this suggestion won’t convince the skeptic; taken as an attempt to convince the skeptic it is circular” (305). But that should not inhibit the theist from affirming this answer, since a Christian philosophy rightly takes its foundational principles as basic and builds on them.

But this means that the Christian philosophical community need not devote all of its efforts to attempting to refute opposing claims and/or to arguing for its own claims, in each case from premises accepted by the bulk of the philosophical community at large. It ought to do this, indeed, but it ought to do more. For if it only does this, it will neglect a pressing philosophical task: systematizing, deepening, clarifying Christian thought on these topics. (312)

Much of what Plantinga says here will resonate with more conservative Reformed apologists. One key difference, though, is that he concludes that Christian philosophers ought to be prepared to argue their position based on premises acceptable to non-Christian philosophers, while not treating such arguments as primary or necessary justification for their position. For Van Til, on the other hand, as for most conservative Reformed apologists, it is impossible to find any premises acceptable to non-Christians from which the Christian position can be validly defended. Whereas Plantinga argues for the rational *respectability* of theism, especially Christian

theism, Van Til argues for the rational *inescapability* of Christian theism (and *only* specifically Christian theism). “We as Christians alone have a position that is philosophically defensible.”²⁶

Van Til’s view of philosophy may also be helpfully compared with that of Herman Dooyeweerd. Both of them agreed that the only true philosophy would emanate from what Dooyeweerd calls “a radical Christian starting-point.” However, Dooyeweerd argues “that this Christian philosophy does not derive its fundamentals from theology in its scientific sense, and, therefore, should be sharply distinguished from the latter.”²⁷ In the end this means that Christian philosophy does not derive its fundamentals from a study of the Bible. Dooyeweerd does encourage Christians to believe that philosophical thought can “be ruled by the central motive of Holy Scripture.” However, this central or “spiritual basic motive is elevated above all theological controversies and is not in need of biblical exegesis, since its radical meaning is exclusively explained by the Holy Spirit operating in our opened hearts, in the communion of this Spirit.”²⁸

Van Til, on the other hand, argues against any hard-and-fast distinction between philosophy and theology. “Philosophy deals with no concepts that theology does not deal with. It is but a matter of terminology.”²⁹ Both philosophy and theology are concerned with the subjects of being (metaphysics), knowledge (epistemology), and morality (ethics); they simply deal with them in different language. Moreover, the Christian philosopher, no less than the theologian or anyone else, must base his intellectual work, his arguments and conclusions, on the Bible. This does not mean, Van Til cautions, that philosophy is subordinate to theology; rather, both are subject to the Bible. The philosopher may, however, turn to the theologian for help in understanding the Bible, since that is the theologian’s area of specialization. “The philosopher is directly subject to the Bible and must in the last analysis rest upon his own interpretation of the

Word. But he may accept the help of those who are more constantly and more exclusively engaged in biblical study than he himself can be.”³⁰

Christianity against False Science

Both classical and evidentialist apologetics tend to accept the methods of modern science as basically valid and its findings as generally correct. The former tends to be more cautious in endorsing scientific theories than the latter, but both agree that Christianity can be shown to be consistent with science. Reformed apologetics calls this traditional assumption into question on the grounds that the nature, methods, and findings of science will in principle be different when practiced by non-Christians than when practiced by Christians. While Christianity is in agreement with the facts, non-Christians naturally view the facts in a way that is biased against the Christian faith.

The basic lines of this view of science were laid down by Abraham Kuyper in his *Principles of Sacred Theology*.³¹ As we noted in the previous chapter, at the heart of Kuyper’s teaching is the idea that regeneration, or palingenesis, effectively divides the human race into two kinds of people, the regenerate and the unregenerate. These two kinds of people “face the cosmos from different points of view, and are impelled by different impulses,” resulting in “two kinds of *science*.” The assumption of the absolute unity of science, therefore, “implies the denial of the fact of palingenesis, and therefore from principle leads to the rejection of the Christian religion” (154). Kuyper hastens to explain that “truth is one,” and from that standpoint “science also can only be one” (155). What he means is that the regenerate and the unregenerate are building “two different structures, each of which purposes to be a complete building of science,” yet they necessarily differ from one another because of their differing viewpoints on the world

(156). Both edifices cannot be true; one must be regarded as ultimately false to the reality it seeks to reproduce.

Kuyper also emphasizes that the difference between the two sciences does not prevent overlap and even cooperation in some matters.

First, because there is a very broad realm of investigation in which the difference between the two groups exerts *no* influence. For in the present dispensation palingenesis works no change in the senses, nor in the plastic conception of visible things. The entire domain of the more primary observation, which limits itself to weights, measures and numbers, is common to both. . . . Whether a thing weighs two milligrams or three, can be absolutely ascertained by every one that can weigh. (157)

It would, however, be a mistake to conclude that science is the same for both groups. Kuyper points out that measures and numbers constitute only the “*first and lowest part*” of science, representing “the foot of the ladder of scientific investigation” (157). As one moves up that ladder into the interpretation of such measures and numbers, one quickly begins to deal with matters where one’s worldview affects one’s interpretation. Thus it is really useless for a Christian to try to persuade a non-Christian that Christianity is scientifically true. The worldview of non-Christians dictates that they practice science and view the facts studied by science in a way that really assumes that Christianity is false. Kuyper concludes that traditional apologetics is misguided in its efforts to convince non-Christians that Christianity is scientifically credible:

No polemics between these two kinds of science, on details which do not concern the statement of an objectively observable fact, or the somatic side of the psychical sciences, or, finally, a logical fault in argumentation, can ever serve any purpose. This is the reason why, as soon as it has allowed itself to be inveigled into details, and has undertaken to

deal with things that are not palpable phenomena or logical mistakes, Apologetics has always failed to reach results, and has weakened rather than strengthens the reasoner.

(160)

Kuyper's position, in sum, is that the usual characterization that modern discoveries and theories have resulted in a conflict between religion and science, or between faith and science, is mistaken. "Not faith and science therefore, but *two scientific systems* or if you choose, two scientific elaborations, are opposed to each other, *each having its own faith.*"³²

Van Til's most extensive treatment of science appears in his book *Christian-Theistic Evidences*, in which he begins by defining such evidences as "the defense of Christian theism against any attack that may be made upon it by 'science.'" He takes "the word science in its current meaning," including both "the results of science, both real and imaginary," and "the methodology of science." The thesis of Van Til's book is "that it is only upon Christian presuppositions that we can have a sound scientific methodology." It is because science typically proceeds on the basis of assumptions or presuppositions that are inimical to the Christian faith that it reaches conclusions that are at variance with the teachings of the Bible. "The chief major battle between Christianity and modern science is not about a large number of individual facts, but about the principles that control science in its work. The battle today is largely that of the *philosophy of science.*"³³

For Van Til, the fundamental premise of a true philosophy of science must be the biblical view of the world as created and providentially ruled by God. "Scripture teaches that every fact in the universe exists and operates by virtue of the plan of God. There are no *brute facts* for God." Modern science, on the other hand, "takes for granted the ultimacy of brute facts."³⁴ By "brute facts" he means the idea that facts are random bits of information that are not necessarily

related in any fixed or given way and may therefore be known by the human interpreter apart from an interpretive context.³⁵ They are not to be confused with *objective* facts, the existence of which Van Til affirms.³⁶ The idea of brute facts presupposes that facts are random occurrences in a universe operating according to chance rather than the determined plan and purpose of God. Thus modern science is principally committed to the presupposition that the God spoken of in Scripture (particularly as understood in Reformed theology) does not exist.

Not surprisingly, then, Van Til concludes, “It is fatal to try to prove the existence of God by the ‘scientific method’ and by the ‘appeal to facts’ if . . . the scientific method itself is based upon a presupposition which excludes God.”³⁷ Rather than trying to prove God by science, the apologist should argue that the validity of science depends on God. Science seeks to discover the coherence, unity, and uniformity in nature. But the assumption that there is uniformity in nature is at odds with viewing nature as a mass of brute facts waiting for the scientist to correlate and interpret them as he sees fit. The uniformity of nature presupposes a transcendent origin of nature in the singular mind of God, who created the world and made the facts of nature what they are according to his design.

Our argument as over against this would be that the existence of the God of Christian theism and the conception of his counsel as controlling all things in the universe is the only presupposition which can account for the uniformity of nature which the scientist needs. But the best and only possible proof for the existence of such a God is that his existence is required for the uniformity of nature and for the coherence of all things in the world.³⁸

Thus Christian apologists or scientists should not entertain as valid possibilities scientific theories that exclude God and debate such theories on a factual level, as if the matter were open

to interpretation. Instead, they should insist that any theory that is inconsistent with the necessary presupposition of all scientific theory, the existence of the sovereign God, is self-defeating and irrelevant.

Over against this contention that theoretically any hypothesis is as relevant as any other, we place the Christian position which says that no hypotheses which exclude the necessary existence of the triune God of Scripture can be relevant to any group of facts. There is only one absolutely true explanation of every fact and of every group of facts in the universe. God has this absolutely true explanation of every fact. Accordingly, the various hypotheses that are to be relevant to the explanation of phenomena must be consistent with this fundamental presupposition.³⁹

For example, Van Til argues that the theory of evolution should be rejected as irrelevant: “If one offers the hypothesis of biological evolution as the explanation of man’s appearance on the earth, we reply that the hypothesis is irrelevant. Our further study of the factual material is no more than a corroboration of our assertion of the irrelevancy of this hypothesis.” He makes clear that while the “factual material” can and should be studied, the Christian should conduct such study on the assumption that any and all facts must confirm what we know from Scripture is the true interpretation of the facts. “*We appeal to facts, but never to brute facts. We appeal to God-interpreted facts.*”⁴⁰

We should not overlook the importance of Van Til’s teaching on science for creationism. One of the founders of contemporary creationism was John C. Whitcomb, Jr., whose book *The Genesis Flood*, co-authored with Henry M. Morris, is really the primary text of the movement. More specifically, this book is commonly regarded as marking the beginning of the contemporary scientific creationist movement that defends a young earth, a global Flood, and

geologic catastrophism in defense of a literal interpretation of Genesis.⁴¹ Whitcomb based his view of the relationship between science and Scripture on a form of Van Til's apologetic system.⁴² Like Van Til, Whitcomb and other young-earth creationists emphasize the impossibility of scientific theories without religious presuppositions. They argue that both creationism and evolutionism should be seen as essentially religious in character, an assessment that is characteristic not only of Van Til but of the entire Kuyperian tradition. Like Van Til, young-earth creationists affirm the priority of biblical teaching to scientific investigation. In their view the Bible speaks both more authoritatively and more clearly about such questions as the age of the universe than science should or can. Young-earth creationists also understand the radical effects of the Fall on human thought to extend to affect science in a substantial way.

Van Til himself appears to have been broadly supportive of the creationist movement, although his treatment of creation did not focus on such questions as the age of the universe.⁴³ He did criticize Philo for his view that "the Mosaic account of the origin of the world and of the days of creation must not be taken as historical but allegorical."⁴⁴

We should also note the highly controversial view of science advocated by Gordon Clark. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Clark rejected inductive argument as fallacious when used as a means of knowing truth, favoring instead an exclusive use of deductive logic working from premises known to be true. True to this epistemology, in his book *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God* Clark reviews the history of science in order to show that science does not and cannot arrive at truth. This is not to say that Clark thinks we cannot ascertain facts about the physical world; rather, there is a sense in which science cannot *explain* any of the facts it describes. "Does science explain anything? . . . Surely we want to know more than the path of the planets and the acceleration of a freely falling body. Facts such as these are interesting and

important. But a statement of fact is not an explanation: It is the very thing that needs to be explained. Viewed in this light, science explains nothing.”⁴⁵

Worse still, according to Clark, science’s descriptions of nature in the form of laws or mathematical formulas are not descriptions of the way things actually are in the real world. Rather, they are mathematical idealizations. For example, the law of the pendulum, which “states that the period of the swing is proportional to the square root of the length,” assumes a perfect pendulum in a perfect environment (57). “Only an ideal pendulum, an imaginary pendulum, only a non-existing pendulum is described by the Newtonian law” (58). And this is true for all such scientific laws describing physical processes in mathematical form. Clark does not mince words: “Therefore, all the laws of physics are false” (60).

Science depends heavily on the use of inductive argument. So much the worse for science, according to Clark. Recall that his form of presuppositionalism regards the Bible’s truth as axiomatic and assumes the validity of deductive reasoning as a means of drawing inferences from the Bible. This emphasis on deduction carries through to his view of science. The argument form implicit in all claims of verification of scientific laws through experimentation, according to Clark, is the following.⁴⁶

If hypothesis H is true, then experiment E will produce the results R.

Experiment E does produce the results R.

Therefore, hypothesis H is true.

Clark comments, “Obviously, this argument is the fallacy of asserting the consequent; and since all verification must commit this fallacy, it follows that no law or hypothesis can ever be logically demonstrated” (71). This fallacy is a mistake in deductive reasoning of the following form:

If A, then B.

B.

Therefore, A.

In logic the *A* is called the antecedent and the *B* the consequent. The fallacy of affirming the consequent is the mistake of thinking that if the consequent is true, the antecedent must be true. To see that this is not so, consider the following example:

If it rained, the driveway will be wet.

The driveway is wet.

Therefore, it rained.

With a moment's reflection one can easily imagine other circumstances that might have caused the driveway to become wet (for example, someone just washed the car). Arguments of this form, then, are deductively invalid. According to Clark, this is also true of all claims that experiments have verified scientific hypotheses. He concludes "that the violation of logic can be justified only on the ground that scientists are not interested in the literal truth of their laws. . . . What is needed now is not so much a new science, but a new philosophy of science" (72).

On the basis of this line of reasoning, Clark favors a form of the philosophy of science known as **operationalism**, a version of **nonrealism**, according to which science does not progress toward a greater and more accurate knowledge of the "real" world. According to operationalism, science consists in descriptions of the *operations* performed by the scientist and not the actual entities or realities studied or hypothesized. For Clark "the most certain truth of physics is that physics is not true—not true as an account of what nature is and how nature works" (79). "Electrons and light waves are not physically existing things; they are elements of a set of instructions on how to operate in a laboratory" (90).

In Clark's apologetic, operationalism completely undermines any attempt to use science to disprove creation or any other aspect of Christian doctrine. If science is not a means for gaining knowledge about nature but is instead a method developed "to utilize nature for our needs and wants" (93), then science cannot overturn what we know about God's activity in the creation of nature. If science is not *true*, it cannot prove Christianity false. Since science is a discipline that develops protocols for performing operations in a laboratory, its "laws" are not literal descriptions of reality that do not change. Rather, they are conventions that can and are frequently discarded for new ones. "Therefore anti-Christian arguments based on science always depend on premises that will soon be discarded" (102).

For Clark, then, science really is irrelevant to Christian apologetics. Noting that even Einstein acknowledged that science can never enable us to know the real nature of things, Clark concludes: "From this the further conclusion follows that science can never disprove the truth of Christianity. It can never prove or disprove any metaphysical or theological assertion" (109).

Presuppositionalists who follow Van Til instead of Clark generally assume a realist view of science, yet heavily qualify their realism in light of their conviction that non-Christian science fails to interpret the real world properly. In making this distinction two Van Tilians in particular, Vern Poythress and John Frame, have drawn on the work of the nonrealist philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn. In Kuhn's landmark book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, he argued that science progresses as communities with shared paradigms, or ways of viewing the world, replace their paradigms in sudden revolutions or "paradigm shifts." These occur under the pressure of internal criticism from within the scientific community as scientific renegades propose rival paradigms to account for information not well integrated into the old paradigm.⁴⁷ Poythress in particular has found a number of useful and valid insights in Kuhn's work. The Reformed claim

is that there are rival sciences rooted in the different paradigms, or worldviews, of the Christian and non-Christian scientific communities. Poythress also suggests that Christians progress in their understanding of science, and indeed of theology, by considering rival paradigms (for example, alternative theological formulations on controversial doctrinal questions). Both Poythress and Frame, while distancing themselves from Kuhn's relativistic and outright nonrealistic view of science, consider him useful in helping people understand the critical role that presuppositions play in apologetics.⁴⁸

Revelation as Interpreting History

The way Reformed apologists view science carries over into how they view history and the use of historical evidences in apologetics. We will speak briefly of the views of Kuyper and Clark, then give Van Til's more complex position more in-depth attention.

Kuyper had no real use for historical evidences. In his view, apologetic arguments in support of the Christian faith are constrained by the fact that in every single point of contention, the antithesis between the Christian and non-Christian view of knowledge and of the world is ultimately at issue. "Scarcely has a single step been ventured in the way of such a controversy before it is felt on both sides that the acknowledgment of a different opinion on this one point would unsettle one's entire life- and world-view." The naturalist, therefore, cannot concede one miracle without forfeiting his position. He will answer the argument from miracles by denying their very possibility; he will answer the argument from prophecy by claiming that all apparent prophecies must have been written after the fact.⁴⁹

Given Clark's thoroughgoing rejection of all empirical, inductive arguments as resting on deductive fallacies, one would assume that he rejected all historical arguments supporting the

Bible and Christian truth. Actually, though, that would be something of an overstatement. First of all, Clark agreed that evidences have their place; he simply denied that they could serve as positive arguments for the truth of Christianity. “Certainly there is a place for evidences in the propagation of the Christian faith. Certainly the resurrection of Jesus should be preached and the testimony of the eye witnesses recounted. But after we have published abroad His wonderful name, and after we have declared our faith, the auditors may ask us a reason. Apologetics therefore has its place too, but in the temporal order it is a later place.”⁵⁰

Clark saw only a limited, negative purpose for such argumentation, that of answering objections. Apologetics must go beyond these matters to the underlying, foundational issues:

The Christian reply to a rationalistic rejection of revelation should not concern itself too much with archaeological evidence that the Bible is historically accurate. Spinoza, to be sure, was an early member of the long line of higher critics who delighted to find blunders in the Old Testament. . . . But Spinoza’s argument was that an historical narrative, even if perfectly accurate, is valueless in religion. A Christian reply therefore must be directed against the epistemology that underlies Spinoza’s statement. The important question is not whether or not the Bible is true, but whether or not all knowledge is deducible by reason, i.e., by logic alone.⁵¹

For Clark, historical argument cannot prove Christianity true; at best it can answer arguments purporting to show that it is false. Clark denies that one can logically reason from the fact of the Resurrection (assuming a non-Christian can be persuaded to agree to that fact) to the truth of the Christian belief about Jesus.

Suppose Jesus did rise from the grave. This only proves that his body resumed its activities for a while after his crucifixion; it does not prove that he died for our sins or

that he was the Son of God. While this line of anti-Christian argument contains certain misstatements, none the less the inference in the last sentence is valid. The resurrection, viewed purely as an isolated historical event, does not prove that Christ died for our sins, not only because Lazarus also rose from the dead, but also because sin is a notion which requires a particular view of God and the universe, and on such questions archeology and history are incompetent.⁵²

Van Til's position is more complex, and there has been much controversy about its actual import. On the one hand, his critics routinely complain that his method negates any value for historical evidences and arguments in apologetics, and they can cite a number of passages from his writings that would seem to support their contention. On the other hand, his defenders insist that he had a positive place for historical argument and evidences in his apologetic. They too cite supportive passages from his writings.

The most often cited such passage appears in *The Defense of the Faith*. In it Van Til quotes at length from an article in which he responded to criticisms of his apologetic by J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., a well-known evidentialist. Van Til explains how his approach differs from the traditional one. (a) He says he takes the Bible as absolutely authoritative and bases his apologetic, and indeed his whole philosophy of life, on its teachings. (b) He argues that God's revelation of himself both in nature and in Scripture is objectively clear, so that people are utterly without excuse for their failure to believe in God. This leads him to reject any kind of apologetic that stops short of that conclusion. In particular, he objects to formulating theistic arguments in such a way that they conclude that God *probably* exists. (c) He does not deny that fallen human beings can reason or understand truth. What he does deny is that their reason and understanding can be intelligible apart from the creation of human beings in God's image. He

therefore objects to an apologetic that seeks neutral ground between Christians and non-Christians.⁵³ The fourth and final way Van Til's apologetic differs from the traditional is:

(d) Implied in the previous points is the fact that I do not artificially separate induction from deduction, or reasoning about the facts of nature from reasoning in an *a priori* analytical fashion about the nature of human-consciousness. I do not artificially abstract or separate them from one another. On the contrary I see induction and analytical reasoning as part of one process of interpretation. I would therefore engage in historical apologetics. (I do not personally do a great deal of this because my colleagues in the other departments of the Seminary in which I teach are doing it better than I could do it.) Every bit of historical investigation, whether it be in the directly Biblical field, archaeology, or in general history, is bound to confirm the truth of the claims of the Christian position. But I would not talk endlessly about facts and more facts without ever challenging the non-believer's philosophy of fact. A really fruitful historical apologetic argues that every fact *is* and *must be* such as proves the truth of the Christian position.⁵⁴

While this frequently quoted statement must, of course, be given full weight in interpreting Van Til, it must be read in light of everything else that he says about evidences and apologetics. The last sentence is key: historical apologetics should argue that every fact *must* prove Christianity. And how, for Van Til, is this to be done? Van Til leaves no doubt. Christian evidences must show that apart from Christ's interpretation of man in Scripture, man's speech is meaningless.⁵⁵ Non-Christian interpretations of the facts or evidences are not to be refuted primarily by a study of the facts but by dismissing them as irrelevant. "For the non-Christian any sort of hypothesis may, at the outset of an investigation, be as relevant as any other. . . . But for one who holds that the facts are already part of an ultimately rational system by virtue of the plan

of God it is clear that such hypotheses as presuppose the non-existence of such a plan must, even from the outset of his investigation, be considered irrelevant.”⁵⁶

Recall that this is how Van Til asserted that scientific hypotheses should also be treated. Study of the facts can at best corroborate the Christian position; *proof* is to be found in the transcendental or presuppositional argument that unless Christianity is true there are no intelligible facts to be studied in the first place. He illustrates this point with the Resurrection: “*God’s self-existence is the presupposition of the relevancy of any hypothesis.* If one should seek to explain the claim of the disciples of Jesus that their Master’s body was raised from the tomb by offering the hypothesis of hallucination, we reply that the hypothesis is irrelevant. Our further study of the factual evidence in the matter is no more than a corroboration of our assertion of the irrelevancy of such an hypothesis.”⁵⁷

Van Til flatly disallows any attempt to reason apologetically by a direct appeal to the facts,⁵⁸ because the non-Christian can always toss the facts “in the bottomless pit of pure possibility.” For example, he can allow that the Resurrection took place as merely an unusual event, while rejecting the Christian understanding of that event as God’s miraculous vindication of his Son. “You see that the unbeliever who does not work on the presupposition of creation and providence is perfectly consistent with himself when he sees nothing to challenge his unbelief even in the fact of the resurrection of Christ.”⁵⁹

The basic difference between the approaches to historical evidences of presuppositionalists on the one hand and classical and evidentialist apologists on the other hand is that the former reason *transcendentally* about the facts while the latter reason *inductively* about them. Consequently, presuppositionalists claim that their apologetic argument yields absolute certainty for their knowledge of the historical facts of the Bible, whereas traditional

apologetic arguments yield only probability. Presuppositionalists, in fact, consistently criticize apologetic arguments that conclude that this or that biblical event or claim is “probably” true. To the criticism that historical investigation by its very nature cannot rise above probability in its findings, Greg Bahnsen makes the following telling reply:

This kind of criticism [against probabilistic arguments] is often answered by saying that historical facts (especially miraculous ones), just because they are such, cannot be known with any more than a high degree of probability. Such an opinion is contrary to God’s inspired word, however. Peter proclaimed this historical event (and miracle): “Let all the house of Israel therefore *know with certainty* that God has made him Lord” by raising Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24, 36). He did not say that it was highly probable that Christ rose from the dead, but rather that it was “not possible” that death could hold him (v. 24).⁶⁰

Bahnsen’s defense of the presuppositionalist rejection of probabilistic apologetic arguments makes it clear that his approach to historical evidences does not proceed inductively. That is, we do not “know with certainty” that God raised Jesus from the dead because we have studied the historical evidence inductively. We know it with certainty because if we were to deny it, we would implicitly be denying the Christian theistic revelation, apart from which we have no coherent basis for knowing anything in history.

We may summarize the distinctive approach taken by Reformed apologetics to historical evidences by comparing it with the two approaches already covered. Evidentialists argue that one can make a case for God’s action in history by examining the evidence for those events using critical historical methods that do not assume that God exists. Classical apologists disagree; they maintain that one must first establish theism as true and, on that basis, examine the

evidence for God's actions in history. Reformed apologists take the classical objection to evidentialism one step further: not only is it necessary to establish the truth of theism in order to see God's actions in history for what they are, it is necessary to establish the truth of *Christian theism*. But this is really the same as saying that the historical evidence cannot be the basis of any kind of empirical apologetic argument for the truth of Christianity. At most the historical evidence can be adduced as confirmation within the perspective of a full-orbed Christian worldview.

In short, Reformed apologists argue that we cannot use history to prove theism (as in evidentialism) or even to prove revelation to those who accept theism (as in classical apologetics). Rather, we must use revelation to prove theism and the true meaning of history.

The Problem with Experience

Classical apologists appeal to the pervasiveness of religion and religious experiences (of all kinds) throughout human history and in all cultures to show that human beings have an incorrigible need to relate to a source of transcendence. This argument aims at proving that some kind of God must exist. Evidentialists commonly take a different approach in view of the fact that vastly different religions claim rather similar religious experiences. For them Christianity is unique because it offers objective, verifiable evidence for its religious claims, which are then known with certainty through the experience of Christian faith. They therefore invite non-Christians to examine the evidence for Christianity in order to see that there are objective grounds for “trying” Christianity experientially.

Reformed apologists take yet another approach to the relation of experience to apologetics, basic to which is the Reformed understanding of the “total depravity” of

unredeemed humanity. According to the Reformed doctrine, unredeemed human beings are still in God's image, and yet that image is thoroughly darkened by sin. Non-Christian religion, in this view, in some way bears witness to the reality of God's image in man, yet at the same time is a completely unreliable source of knowledge about God. The only way human beings can come to know God truly is to experience the illuminating effects of regeneration by the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ.

On the basis of this understanding of the creation and fall of mankind, most Reformed apologists avoid basing apologetic arguments on religious experiences in general. But neither do they appeal to the experience of regeneration as the basis of an apologetic argument. Rather, they typically contend that the rational faculties of Christians are enabled through regeneration to recognize and believe the truth about God. In other words, the experience of regeneration is the cause, not the ground, of Christian belief.

According to Reformed apologists, the condition of the unregenerate mind precludes finding common ground with the unregenerate in shared beliefs or principles of thinking. This is because the unregenerate mind is committed in principle to thinking about everything in such a way as to avoid acknowledging their spiritual darkness and need for redemption in Christ. However, Reformed apologists do acknowledge another kind of common ground, or what is often called a point of contact, between Christians and non-Christians: the image of God that is in both of them. Because all people are still in God's image, they have within them, albeit suppressed by sin, an awareness of God to which appeal may and should be made in apologetics.

Both Clark and Van Til share this understanding of the point of contact. We quote first from Clark's defense of apologetics in his critique of Karl Barth's theological method: "But Reformed theology, while denying a common epistemological ground, has always asserted a

common psychological or ontological ground. Believer and unbeliever alike, though their philosophic axioms and theorems are totally incompatible, bear in their persons the image of God from creation.”

By “a common epistemological ground” Clark means the idea of non-Christians and Christians sharing the same approach to knowledge. For Clark the only sound approach to knowledge is to accept the Word of God in Scripture as absolute truth. The “common psychological or ontological ground” is the image of God that exists in both Christian and non-Christian. The mind and being of the unregenerate is still created in God’s image. As a result, non-Christians still know and think some truth. Thus, Clark continues: “This image consists of or at least includes their ordinary rational ability as human beings and as an exercise of this rationality certain minimal theological and moral principles. These beliefs, dimly and inconsistently held, often submerged and repressed, can be thought of as a point of contact for the Gospel.”

Although believers and unbelievers do not agree on the axiomatic starting point for knowledge of the truth, unbelievers do recognize some truth because they still bear God’s image. Clark speaks of this recognized truth as “beliefs, dimly and inconsistently held, often submerged and repressed.” That is to say, non-Christians do in some fashion believe some truth about God, but they may not be aware of it and may on the surface appear to believe something quite different. These beliefs, despite these difficulties, may be used in apologetics as the point of contact:

Apart from the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit, these beliefs could never develop into a belief in the Gospel nor even into a knowledge of the Gospel. But in the series of psychological experiences, with all the many and great differences from individual to

individual, these elementary beliefs can be used by the Holy Spirit to produce an acceptance of the message preached. Thus there is no inconsistency in denying a common axiom while asserting a common psychological or ontological “ground” or “point of contact.”⁶¹

Turning to Van Til, we find at first much the same understanding of the point of contact. “Disagreeing with the natural man’s interpretation of himself as the ultimate reference-point, the Reformed apologist must seek his point of contact with the natural man in that which is beneath the threshold of his working consciousness, in the sense of deity which he seeks to suppress.”⁶²

For Van Til, as for Clark, the sense of deity (Calvin’s *sensus divinitatis*) is a function of the image of God that is present in both the unregenerate and the regenerate. Like Clark, he contends that the truth about God is still present in the unregenerate, though “beneath the threshold of his working consciousness,” due to its suppression in sin. However, he does not apply the image of God as the point of contact in the same way as Clark: “And to do this the Reformed apologist must also seek a point of contact with the systems constructed by the natural man. But this point of contact must be in the nature of a head-on collision. *If there is no head-on collision with the systems of the natural man there will be no point of contact with the sense of deity in the natural man.*”⁶³

Thus, for Van Til the point of contact is not one of *agreement* with what the unbeliever thinks, but of *disagreement*, for the position the unbeliever professes and thinks is at odds with what he knows in his heart. “All men, even after the fall, know, deep down in their hearts, that they are creatures of God; that they should therefore obey, but that they actually have broken, the law of God.” But because they are in rebellion against God, “all men seek to suppress this truth, fixed in their being, about themselves.”⁶⁴ The result is that, outwardly, non-Christians refuse to

believe in the true God, while inwardly, at the core of their being, they really know that he is God and are unable to escape this knowledge entirely. “Psychologically there are no atheistic men; epistemologically every sinner is atheistic.”⁶⁵ According to Van Til, an apologetic argument can appeal to this point of contact by reasoning in a transcendental argument that unless man is made in the image of God, nothing in our experience makes sense. “A truly transcendental argument takes any fact of experience which it wishes to investigate, and tries to determine what the presuppositions of such a fact must be, in order to make it what it is.”⁶⁶

Reformed apologists, then, like Clark and Van Til, do not appeal to specific experiences to validate or provide evidence for theism or Christianity. Rather, they appeal to the universal experience or condition of humanity as both created in God’s image and fallen in sin. They argue that confronting the unbeliever with the truth about his created and sinful condition is a necessary part of presenting the gospel of redemption from sin. They then look to the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating those God has chosen to redeem as the experience by which the unbeliever will be able to recognize the truth about his fallen condition and gratefully repent of his epistemological rebellion. As Van Til explains, the Reformed apologist recognizes that apologetic argument will not convert or regenerate anyone, but at the same time he engages in apologetics in the expectation that God will use it as part of the experience leading to regeneration. “The miracle of regeneration has to occur somewhere, and all that we are arguing is that we must ask where it is that the Holy Spirit will most likely perform this miracle. And then there can be no doubt but that the likelihood is in favor of that place where the non-theist has to some extent seen the emptiness and vanity of his own position.”⁶⁷

For Further Study

Clark, Gordon H. *A Christian View of Men and Things: An Introduction to Philosophy*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981. One of Clark's most respected works, presenting his approach to history, science, religion, epistemology, and other areas of thought.

North, Gary. *Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*. Vallecito, Calif.: Ross House, 1976. Collection of thoughtful essays on a Van Tilian approach to various academic disciplines, including psychology, history, mathematics, apologetics, philosophy, and theology.

Notaro, Thom. *Van Til and the Use of Evidence*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980. An influential, short book arguing that Van Til had a positive view of evidences.

¹Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1962). Excerpts from this syllabus are published in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 287-292.

²Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1955), 52, in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 97.

³Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 18, in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 62.

⁴Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 15, in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 94.

⁵Van Til, *Defense of the Faith* (1955), 256, in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 81.

⁶Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 30.

⁷Ibid., 501-502.

⁸Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), 11, in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 516.

⁹Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 3rd ed. (1967), 99-100.

¹⁰Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 102.

¹¹Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, 236.

¹²Ibid., 237.

¹³Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1969), 49, 50.

¹⁴Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, 237.

¹⁵Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 102.

¹⁶R. J. Rushdoony, "Clark's Philosophy of Education," in *Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, ed. Nash, 276.

¹⁷Van Til, *Defense of the Faith* (1967), 3-5.

¹⁸Ibid., 260-66; Jack B. Rogers, "Van Til and Warfield on Scripture in the Westminster Confession," in *Jerusalem and Athens*, ed. Geehan, 154-65.

¹⁹Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 80-89; foreword to Jim S. Halsey, *For a Time Such as This: An Introduction to the Reformed Apologetic of Cornelius Van Til* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1978), ix.

²⁰Robert D. Knudsen, “Progressive and Regressive Tendencies in Christian Apologetics,” in *Jerusalem and Athens*, ed. Geehan, 283.

²¹Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 142.

²²Halsey, *For a Time Such as This*, 15.

²³Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 257-59; “My Credo,” in *Jerusalem and Athens*, ed. Geehan, 18-19.

²⁴Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 259. For Van Til’s insistence on a Reformed apologetic, see further Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 11-24; *Toward a Reformed Apologetic* (privately printed, 1972); and cf. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 530-37.

²⁵Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” in *Analytic Theist*, ed. Sennett, 296-315 (quote on 297); reprinted from *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984): 253-71. Parenthetical page references in the following paragraphs are from the Eerdmans volume.

²⁶Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 8, in Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 109.

²⁷Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought*, 113.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 142, 146.

²⁹Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, xv, in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 58.

³⁰Cornelius Van Til, *Apologetics* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976), 37, in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 67.

³¹Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968). Quotations from Kuyper in this section are cited from this work.

³²Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 133.

³³Cornelius Van Til, *Christian-Theistic Evidences*, introduction (unnumbered).

³⁴*Ibid.*, 51.

³⁵Cf. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 268 n. 20.

³⁶Cf. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Introduction to His Thought*, 180 n. 19.

³⁷Van Til, *Christian-Theistic Evidences*, 55-56.

³⁸Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 103.

³⁹Van Til, *Christian-Theistic Evidences*, 56.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 57.

⁴¹John C. Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961).

For a discussion (by an advocate) of the importance of this book to the movement, see Charles

A. Clough, "Biblical Presuppositions and Historical Geology: A Case Study," *Journal of*

Christian Reconstruction 1, no. 1 (summer 1974): 35-48. This periodical is the work of Christian Reconstructionists, a Calvinist movement emphasizing the ethical, social, and political applications of Van Til's philosophy.

⁴²For his advocacy of Van Til's apologetic system, see John C. Whitcomb, Jr., "Contemporary Apologetics and the Christian Faith," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134 (1977): 99-106, 195-202, 291-98; 135 (1978): 24-33. Some indication of Whitcomb's adherence to a philosophy of science akin to that of Van Til can be seen in the introduction to *The Genesis Flood* (see especially xxi).

⁴³Cf. Cornelius Van Til, "The Doctrine of Creation and Christian Apologetics," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 1, no. 1 (summer 1974): 69-80.

⁴⁴Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 73; cf. *Defense of the Faith* (1955), 247-51.

⁴⁵Gordon H. Clark, *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God*, 3rd ed. (Jefferson, Md.: Trinity Foundation, 1996), 36. Parenthetical page references to Clark in this section are to this work.

⁴⁶We are stating here formally what Clark informally expresses.

⁴⁷Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

⁴⁸See Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Academic, 1987); Poythress, *Science and Hermeneutics: Implications of Scientific Method for Biblical Interpretation*, *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Academic, 1988); Frame, *Doctrine of the*

Knowledge of God (1987), 28-29, 72, 86, etc.; Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (1994), 200; Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Introduction to His Thought* (1995), 133-34.

⁴⁹Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 386-87.

⁵⁰Gordon H. Clark, "Apologetics," in *Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Great Neck, N.Y.: Channel Press, 1957), 140.

⁵¹Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (Nutley, N.J.: Craig Press, 1961; 2nd ed., Jefferson, Md.: Trinity Foundation, 1986), 53.

⁵²Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian Philosophy of Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 35, as quoted in Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*, 107.

⁵³Van Til, *Defense of the Faith* (1967), 197-99.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 199.

⁵⁵Van Til, *Christian-Theistic Evidences*, preface.

⁵⁶Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 99.

⁵⁷Van Til, *Christian-Theistic Evidences*, 56-57, emphasis in original.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁹Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 204.

⁶⁰Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 644 n. 197. We may note here in passing that Acts 2:24 has nothing to do with historical argument or even how the Jews were supposed to know that Christ was risen. Peter is simply saying that because Jesus was the Lord of life, it was impossible for him to stay dead.

⁶¹Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1963), 100.

⁶²Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 98.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 98-99, emphasis in original.

⁶⁴Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 196.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁶Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 10.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 208.