Van Til's Insights on the Trinity

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Cornelius Van Til may have been the most important evangelical Trinitarian thinker in the 20th century, but his work has not at all received the attention it deserves. No doubt one reason for this neglect was the fact that Van Til's rather difficult approach to apologetics occupied the center of the stage. Amidst controversy about the transcendental argument, epistemology, and questions like whether or not Christians and non-Christians share common ground, the Trinitarian center of Van Til's apologetics seems to have gone unnoticed. It may be added, too, that his formula for the Trinity — one Person, three Persons — was dismissed out of hand by some because it struck them as a plain contradiction. Finally, Van Til's trinitarianism perhaps did not attract the attention it should have because it suffered from a lack of full development in Van Til. Though the doctrine of the Trinity is at the core of all that Van Til wrote, one might still say that rather than offering a full-bodied Trinitarian theology, he offered the foundations upon which such a theology might be built. Van Til blazed trails, leaving it up to those after him to build the highways and cities.

Van Til's contribution touches at least five general areas. First, Van Til offered a basic and general statement of Trinitarianism, supplementing the traditional formula. Second, Van Til related the doctrine of the Trinity to the Greek philosophical problem of the one and the many. Third, Van Til taught a doctrine of knowledge that is distinctly Trinitarian. Fourth, Van Til claims that the doctrine of the Trinity is the Biblical foundation for a properly Christian approach to apologetics. Fifth, Van Til suggests a covenant relationship among the persons of the Trinity. These five general areas do not exhaust Van Til's contribution, but they do show that Van Til was an original Trinitarian thinker who offered a truly Reformed — because emphatically Biblical (*Sola Scriptura*) and theological (*Soli Deo Gloria*) — approach to systematic theology and the Christian worldview.

Trinitarian Formulas

John Frame was the first theologian to draw attention to Van Til's suggested reformulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, though Van Til himself stated his view relatively clearly. Frame refers to it as a "very bold theological move," but a few have regarded it as heresy or something very close. What did Van Til suggest that was either "bold" or "heretical"? Van Til spoke of God as "a one-conscious being" and also "a tri-conscious being."[1] At the point where this observation is introduced, however, its full implications are not stated. Rather, Van Til offers Biblical justification for the doctrine of the Trinity and an extended discussion of the statement of the doctrine in Church history, noting contributions by Calvin and Bavinck in particular, and treating the important Church fathers and creeds.

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[1] *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), p. 220.

Though this discussion is heavily dependent upon Charles and Alexander Hodge, Benjamin Warfield, and Herman Bavinck, Van Til does not fail to offer his own very penetrating observations.

1. He notes that the procession of the Spirit must be from both Father and Son in order that the three persons may be understood as wholly co-ordinate and so that the inter-communion of the persons may be complete. The Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father. Eternal procession, thus, corresponds to eternal generation and with the doctrine of eternal generation offers a Trinitarianism in which the intercommunication and co-ordination of the three Persons is complete.[2]

2. In an interesting restatement of Schaff's explanation of the heresies that the early creeds opposed, Van Til notes that "all heresies with respect to the Trinity may be reduced to the one great heresy of mixing the eternal with the temporal."[3] This leads to a very remarkable statement: "God exists as triune. He is therefore self-complete. Yet he created the world. This world has meaning *not in spite of*, but *because of*, the self-completeness of the ontological Trinity. This God is the foundation of the created universe and therefore is far above it. If he were defined only as the negation of the universe, without first being thought of as its foundation, we would have an *absolute otherness* of God. But this 'absolute otherness' would in the end become an aspect of reality as a whole, when brought into relation with the temporal universe at all. Any doctrine that denies God's providence (as deism does) or his providence and creation (as Greek thought did) must in the end become a confusion of the eternal and the temporal. Deism and pantheism are not more than two forms of the one basic error of confusion of the eternal and the temporal."[4]

3. Van Til emphasizes Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity. His discussion here is dependent on Warfield's analysis of the history of Trinitarian theology and Calvin's contribution. Warfield pointed out that Calvin's emphasis on the "*autothetes*" (self-existence) of the Son undermined the tendency to subordinationism, a tendency that came to expression in Arminian theology. Another observation borrowed from Warfield's exposition of Calvin is equally fascinating: "According to Calvin, then, it would seem, there can be no such thing as a monadistic God; the idea of mutiformity enters into the very notion of God."[5] Van Til, following Calvin, insists that God must be a Trinity in order to be God and that the Three Persons must be equally ultimate.

4. On modernism Van Til comments, "Modernism is the happy heir of all the heresies and basic to all its heresies is the denial of the consubstantiality of the Son and the Spirit with the Father. Or rather, its error is even deeper than that, since the

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[2] Ibid., p. 226.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid. p. 227.
[5] Ibid., p. 223, quoting from Warfied's *Calvin and Calvinism*, p. 191.

Father himself is for Modernism no more than an aspect of reality. If ever there was a need for re-affirming and teaching the true doctrine of the Trinity, it is now."[6]

What is important for our discussion here is to note that in his lengthy explanation of the basis and history of the doctrine, it is very clear that Van Til wholeheartedly agrees with the tradition formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity. He is not proposing a new formula to replace the Church tradition.[7] In that sense, then, Van Til cannot be legitimately charged with teaching heresy, for he most enthusiastically confesses the doctrine of the creeds.

He adds to it, however, his own formulation. Before we consider that formula, we may ask, if he is satisfied with the Creeds of the Church, why add? Van Til himself offers us a hint at his motivation when he speaks of the addition of the *filioque* by the Western Church. "If the true doctrine was to be maintained it had to be continually restated and refined."[8] A few years have passed since Athanasius and Augustine refined the Nicene doctrine. Our modern (postmodern) world presents it own unique challenges, which means we must continually restate the doctrine in language that clarifies its application to our own time. That is essentially what Van Til was doing.

The Enlightenment challenged the authority of the Bible and denied that faith in the Biblical God was the true starting point and ultimate standard for human knowledge. Van Til had to address the modern West and its pretended intellectual autonomy. One of the foundations of that intellectual autonomy, though Van Til does not refer to it in his discussion of the Trinity, is the theory of evolution, which stands behind the modern view of the world. The origin and movement of the universe depend upon impersonal forces. If there is unity, it is in an abstract impersonal law or principle that sums up the so-called "laws of nature." Van Til points out the deeper motivation behind the Enlightenment and evolutionary approaches to knowledge. Sinful men try to escape from the notion of an absolute personality because of the obvious implications it has for the individual. Extraterrestrial intelligence, vastly superior to man's, is permissible, whether it is understood as harmless and cute, as in Spielberg's ET, or as malevolent, as in some of the X-Files. In contrast with the notion of absolute personality, extraterrestrial superior intelligence does not imply that man is comprehensively responsible and therefore must stand before God's throne. Absolute personality implies that all of man's life is under authority and judgment. This is the offense of the Trinity.

To state the doctrine of the Trinity in terms that bring its offense clearly to the fore, Van Til claims that we must not merely confess that God is one Being and three Persons, we must *also* affirm that God is *one Person* and *three Persons*. The challenge to the Gospel in our day is the attempt to claim an ultimate impersonalism, to find the unity of the world in an impersonal principle or formula (or to deny unity altogether). To show the Christian God to our generation, we need to make the full implications of Nicene transparent. God is not "one Being" in the sense that there is some sort of impersonal substratum underling and unifying the three Persons. God's being cannot be thought of as an impersonal principle without denying the reality of the God of the Bible. He is thoroughly personal. Thus Van Til claims,

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[6] Ibid., p. 228.

[7] John Frame comments, "I suspect that Van Til himself would have claimed that these creeds taught his view implicitly; he certainly was not conscious of rejecting anything in them, and I do not believe that he did reject any of their Trinitarian doctrine." *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995), p. 66.

[8] *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 225.

We do assert that God, that is, the whole Godhead, is one person. We have noted how each attribute is co-extensive with the being of God. We are compelled to maintain this in order to avoid the notion of an uninterpreted being of some sort. In other words, we are bound to maintain the identity of the attributes of God with the being of God in order to avoid the specter of brute fact. In a similar manner we have noted how theologians insist that each of the persons of the Godhead is co-terminous with the being of the Godhead. But all this is not to say that the distinctions of the attributes are merely nominal. Nor is it to say that the distinctions of the persons are merely nominal. We need both the absolute cotermineity of each attribute and each person with the whole being of God, and the genuine significance of the distinctions of the attributes and the persons.[9]

It is apparent that Van Til is re-stating the traditional doctrine with modern concerns in mind. He fears any statement of the doctrine of God that allows the impersonal and ultimately mysterious to find room in the infinite expanse of God's being and therefore reminds us that there is nothing in God which is not wholly interpreted and wholly comprehended by the Persons of the Trinity. God's attributes are each co-extensive with His being. Also, the three Persons of the Trinity cannot be thought of as coming together into one in an impersonal manner. For if the oneness of God were impersonal, then the impersonal would transcend the personal and in some sense be mysterious to the three Persons themselves, with the result that the fully self-comprehending and self-complete God of the Bible would be denied. It is in the interest of preserving the truth of God as wholly personal, wholly rational and wholly transcendent that Van Til adds that we must think of His oneness as personal oneness rather than as abstract being.

The full and complete intercommunication of the Persons of the Trinity is necessary to this complete personal self-integration, so, contrary to the Eastern Church, the Holy Spirit must be understood as proceeding from *both* Father and Son. Confession of the aseity of the Son and the Spirit is essential to the full ontological equality of the three persons, without which subordinationism and/or the specter of the impersonal monad threaten. The absolute personality of God must be seen as the ultimate foundation of all that is created in order to truly confess Him as Creator and to maintain the ultimate rationality of the world. Thus, all of Van Til's observations on the doctrine of the Trinity referred to above tend in the same direction, to shield the truth of God against every possibility of the invasion of the impersonal and irrational. Van Til's formula one Person, three Persons, therefore, is the kind of refined restatement of the truth which he regarded as necessary for the preservation of the truth. There is nothing here even remotely heretical in substance. Only misunderstanding or perverse adherence to the form of words while neglecting their substance can find theological error. Van Til's formula provides for our day a desperately needed and important refinement of the traditional doctrine.

John Frame points out that Van Til's formula is Scriptural, since the Bible does speak of God Himself as a person without specifying one of the three Persons.[10] He also explains that an approach which asserts that God is one Person and also three Persons would only be a contradiction if the word "person" means precisely the same thing in each case. But that is not the case. There is a distinction between the personhood of God as one and the personhood of God as three. Thus, the formula one person, three persons is not a logical contradiction. Nor is

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[9] Ibid., p. 229.
[10] Op. Cit., p. 69.

the equivocation on the word "person" problematic, for the statement of the doctrine itself is not a link in a logical chain. What is the precise difference between the meaning of the word "person" as it refers to the one Person of God and the three Persons? Frame excuses himself from responsibility to answer.[11] If that bothers the reader, Frame points out that in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity neither the terms *hypostasis*, *ousia* nor *substantia* have been precisely defined. As far as the meaning of the terms *hypostasis* and *ousia* in Greek, they are virtually synonymous. Thus, though the Church chose to confess one *ousia* and three *hypostases*, it could have reversed the words and confessed, one *hypostasis* and three *ousia*. To make matters even more confusing, the Latin formula multiplies the ambiguity. The Latin Church confessed that God was one *substantia* but the Latin *substantia* is closer to *hypostasis* than to *ousia*. Thus, we might say that in the West God is "one substance" and in the East, God is "three substances."

The point of all of this is not to fault the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. On the contrary, Frame is affirming it, while reminding the reader that, "We cannot say precisely or exhaustively how *ousia* in God differs from *hypostasis*, or *prosopon*, or, for that matter, *substantia* or *persona*. . . . we are not equipped by revelation to dissect the Trinity or to perform any quasi-scientific, minute analysis of it. Scripture tells us that God is one, that the three are fully God, and that they enter into various personal relationships with one another. From these teachings we may draw implications and applications, up to a point. But there is a point at which our reason must admit its weakness and simply bow before God's majesty."[12] How could it be otherwise if the God of the Bible is the absolute Person Scripture declares Him to be?

The One and the Many

Van Til is perhaps the first theologian to explicitly relate the doctrine of the Trinity to the Greek philosophical problem of the one and the many.[13] To illustrate the problem, he refers to the ancient Greek philosophers Parmenides and Heraclites. For Parmenides only the unchanging is real and fit to be an object of knowledge. Change is mere superficial appearance. Underlying all change is the changeless and really real. Ultimately, every diverse form is an aspect of the one underlying and true reality. However, for his rival, Heraclites, all is flux. War and strife are the basic realities. There is no substratum. Nothing underlies the appearance of constant change that confronts us in the world of our experience. The everlasting flow of all things is the whole and only reality. The problem, then, is, what is really real? What is the nature of reality? Is reality ultimately a static one? Or, is reality ultimately the constantly changing many?

Van Til explains the problem in opting for either of these views.

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 70.

[13] Colin Gunton certainly did not derive from Van Til his doctrine of the Trinity as the solution to the problem of the one and the many, even though he explains the Greek background of the problem by reference to Parmenides and Heraclites, just as Van Til does. It seems so natural to relate the Trinity to the one and the many that I suspect that one might find other theologians in church history offering at least the seeds of such an approach. For Colin Guntun's very well-stated argument of this point, see: *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). As before, I am indebted to John Frame for the discussion of this aspect of Van Til's Trinitarianism. Op. Cit., pp. 71 ff.

The *many* must be brought into contact with one another. But how do we know that they can be bought into contact with one another? How do we know that the many do not simply exist as unrelated particulars? The answer given is that in such a case we should know nothing of them; they would be abstracted from the body of knowledge that we have; they would be *abstract* particulars. On the other hand, how is it possible that we should obtain a unity that does not destroy the particulars? We seem to get our unity by generalizing, by abstracting from the particulars in order to include them into larger unities. If we keep up this process of generalization till we exclude all the particulars, granted they can all be excluded, have we not stripped these particulars of their particularity? Have we then obtained anything but an *abstract* universal?[14]

We can restate this in simple terms with a concrete example. If the many are ultimate, then knowledge is impossible, for knowledge depends upon the unifying power of words. Every word expresses a unity of some sort. The word "dog," for example, brings together many particular "dogs" into a single group and identifies them as a God-created group. If each and every dog were independent without relation to the whole, we could not know anything about dogs in general. If the *many* were ultimate, we could not know anything about anything, for every word that we use — verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs alike — all presuppose the idea that there are categories, unities. Thus, even if we gave up on the idea of speaking about dogs and decided only to try to speak about Rover, what could we say? Rover is brown. What is brown? When we predicate brownness of Rover is that similar to brownness when we predicate it of another dog? Is predication itself the same kind of thing when we speak of another dog? Clearly the *many* must be able to be brought into some sort of relation to one another in order for knowledge to be possible.

By the same token, however, the *many* must also be distinguishable. If we say that the *one* is ultimate, then whatever may be said about Rover or about dogs is not really real. Rover is an aspect of something larger, and not just the category dog. For dogs and stars and hot dogs are all just different aspects and manifestations of the one really real reality. Whatever we say about Rover, therefore, is only meaningful or relevant insofar as it is relatable to that ultimate *one*. We see once again, however, that language breaks down. For just as each word is a unity, each word must also be distinguishable from other words in order to bear meaning. When all things dissolve into the *one*, words bear no meaning and knowledge is impossible.

Van Til pointed out that in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity there is a solution to this fundamental metaphysical dilemma, which lies at the heart of every philosophical problem in the history of Western thought. In God, the *three* are not more ultimate than the *one* and the *one* is not more ultimate than the *three*. God was not first *one* and then *three*, or first *three* and then *one*. The *one* and the *three* are perfectly and wholly expressed and integrated. Neither does God's threeness compromise His oneness, nor does His oneness compromise His threeness. God's oneness and threeness are equally ultimate and perfectly integrated in absolute harmony. God Himself in His Triune glory is the Christian "theory of everything," the final answer to each and every dilemma of human thought.

There is a sense in which this seems obvious. If the one and the many is a problem, and if God is both one and three, then obviously God is the solution. However, for whatever reasons,

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[14] Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, p. 25-26, quoted in John Frame, Op. Cit., p. 71.

this has not been emphasized in the history of Trinitarianism, and the result is that the doctrine of the Trinity has not seemed relevant. Van Til, by relating the doctrine of the Trinity to the problem of the one and the many, clearly places the doctrine of the Trinity at the foundation and center of all thought about any and every subject. And, since the doctrine of the Trinity itself is a mystery that can only be known through Scripture, the harmony of the created one and many also transcend our ability to discern by mere human reason. Thus, it is through special revelation in Scripture that the harmony of the one and the many for human society, too, can be properly understood. In this way, Van Til ties Trinitarianism to revelation not only for the knowledge of God but also for the Christian life.

Here is where Van Til's insight really pays off. If the ultimate solution to the problem of the one and the many is something that transcends our understanding and can only be known through God's special revelation of Himself, then we should not be surprised if we must turn to the Scriptures and the commandments of God to find the practical, everyday solution to the many different ways concerns of unity and individuality come into conflict. The temporal one and many find harmony only in the revelation given by the God who is Himself the eternal One and Many. Christian social theory and ethics are tied to the Bible because only in faithful obedience to God's special revelation can we realize the harmony of the one and many. God transcends our understanding. We cannot fathom the full meaning of the harmony of the one and many in God. We can only confess the truth that is revealed in Scripture. In the same way, there are no basic principles from which we can deduce the harmony of the one and many in human society. What we need is detailed concrete revelation of God's will and the Holy Spirit of God, guiding us in wisdom to apply God's word to our situation.

The doctrine of the Trinity in Van Til, therefore, is profoundly practical. The fact that everything in the world in one way or another is related to the problem of the one and the many means that Trinitarianism is the most applicable doctrine of all. Every issue, every debate, every daily activity is part of a larger whole and must be seen to fit into some greater scheme of meaning for it to have meaning. At the same time, any larger view must be applicable to the particulars or truth dissolves in an abstract one. With the Bible itself as our standard for applying the implications of Trinitarian ethics to daily life, we have a perspective that is both concrete and specific while at the same time linked to a larger and comprehensive vision.

Trinity, Incomprehensibility, Analogy, and Logic

Van Til understood the doctrine of the Trinity as the center of Christian theology and philosophy. The whole project of human knowing is inescapably a project of man conforming to God, man's knowledge and thinking conforming to God's knowledge and revelation. This leads in two apparently different directions at once. On the one hand, revelation from God means that knowledge is possible. On the other hand, because God is a Trinity and therefore ultimately incomprehensible to us, we confront a paradoxical and *apparently* contradictory reality. If we cannot fully comprehend God, it follows that we will not be able to fully comprehend His plan either. Both Van Til's emphasis on knowledge as logical and systematic and his emphasis on the limitations of logic and deduction come from his Trinitarianism.

Incomprehensibility

All orthodox Christians agree that God is incomprehensible. It is crucial to our very conception of God. But not all orthodox Christians agree on what it *means* that God is incomprehensible. For Van Til, affirming God's incomprehensibility is essential to maintaining a proper distinction between God and the creature. This means that for him, the distinction between the knowledge of God and that of man is *qualitative*. In contrast, another Reformed thinker, Gordon Clark, charged that Van Til's understanding of God's incomprehensibility leads to skepticism since man's knowledge is only "like" God's knowledge not identical to God's knowledge. For Clark, the difference between the knowledge of God and that of man is better described as *qualitative*. God knows more than man, but when both man and God know some truth, their knowledge must be identical in order for them to be both knowing the same thing. The difference between Clark's concern about the problems of skepticism and Van Til's concern with preserving the Creator-creature distinction led to a serious theological controversy in the 1940's. The best analysis of the controversy is that of John Frame,[15] who defines the issues clearly and points the way to a solution.

Frame outlines in detail the continuities and discontinuities between the knowledge of God and man. He shows that Van Til and Clark can be reconciled by a more nuanced and exact consideration of the issues. Among other things, it becomes clear that if knowledge in God is a systematically related network of truth — which is what the equal ultimacy and thorough integration of the one and the many in God implies — then quantitative difference without qualitative difference is not really conceivable. If, for example, man knows "a" and "b" and their relations, the addition of one more point of knowledge "c," complicates the knowledge of "a" and "b" as well, for "c" is presumably related to each of them and may be related also to the relations between them. For man to be ignorant of "c" means that his knowledge of "a" and "b" cannot be the same as God's. Thus, *quantitative difference between God's knowledge and man's necessarily implies qualitative difference as well.*

Eschatology illumes this point from a slightly different perspective. If the Triune God, whose being transcends our comprehension, created all things and controls all things in terms of a plan that reveals His glory, then all knowledge is complicated by the fact that it holds a place in the unfolding plan of God. We certainly cannot know *how* each and every fact is part of the whole system, but if all facts are part of God's plan, then each and every fact *does have* a place in the whole. However, the whole itself cannot be known until the end of history. Before then, I could not possibly know the full implications of any fact. But of course, the end of history does not mean the end of the meaning of history. Therefore, because history flows into eternity and its relevance is not self-enclosed, I will not be able to know the full implications of any fact even at the end of history. Add to this what we said above, that every fact is part of a system in which all facts are integrated. Facts that we may never come to know in the whole course of human history or that will not become apparent until near the end of the process may significantly qualify facts we do know — changing our perspective in ways that may be more important than we can imagine from our place in the unfolding process.

Thinking about the issues of knowledge in this way could lead to skepticism. And if there were no revelation from God, skepticism would not appear altogether absurd. But God has revealed Himself in Scripture and in all the creation. Even though we cannot know any fact

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[15] *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), pp. 19ff.

wholly, we can have true knowledge, for God has revealed Himself to us and told us what is true. When a father says to his little child that eating fruit is good for him, the child can believe the father and accept his words as true. He can obey his father and eat the fruit with a child's level of understanding. But of course, the father has things in mind that the child will not be aware of for many years. Does that mean the child does not really know? Not at all, he trusts his father and knows because his father told him so. In the same way, knowledge for man who has been created in the image of the Trinitarian God can only be limited knowledge. To know anything at all truly, man must become like a little child and cheerfully trust in the Word of his heavenly Father. When he does this, he obtains knowledge which is true, but not exhaustive.

Of course, the best illustration here is the doctrine of the Trinity itself. It is not possible for us to conceive what it really means for unity and diversity to be equally ultimate, no matter what formula we use to express the doctrine of the Trinity. It is commonly said that the assertion that God is one in one sense — being — and three in another sense — personhood — involves no contradiction. No doubt that is true. But that still does not make the idea comprehensible. For there to be one God who is at the same time three Persons is unfathomable. It transgresses the "rule" of creation that one personal being is one person. It sounds to the non-Christian like the assertion of a transcendent multiple personality disorder. The Christian believes the doctrine of the Trinity because Scripture teaches it, and in Scripture, we have heard the voice of our heavenly Father speaking to us with infallible authority. We trust the Scripture and its teaching because we are not able *not* to trust it. We confess that we are confronted with mystery, but the mystery is not a burden to the believer. We see the mystery of Triune God not only as beautiful in itself and thoroughly rational, but also as the only possible ground for beauty and rationality.

Analogy

The incomprehensibility of God and His plan is the ultimate reason for Van Til to conclude that man's knowledge is "analogical." Our knowledge is partial, based upon what God has revealed in both special and general revelation, but it may be true to the degree that it conforms with God's self-revelation. It cannot be qualitatively the same as God's knowledge. It can only be *like* God's knowledge. This brings us back to the controversy between Van Til and Gordon Clark. For Clark, the idea that our knowledge is qualitatively different — analogical rather than univocal — means that we really cannot know anything.

Frame offered a solution to the differences that arose between Van Til and Clark suggesting in detail how God's knowledge and man's differ and concur. First, the knowledge of God and man differ in the following respects.[16]

1. God's thoughts are uncreated and eternal. Ours are created.
2. God's thoughts ultimately determine what comes to pass. He causes truth by what He thinks to be truth. Our thoughts do not.
3. God's thoughts are self-validating. They serve as their own criteria of truth. Our thoughts can never be self-attesting.
4. God's thoughts always bring Him glory and honor. Our thoughts bring glory and honor only to the degree that they win His blessing.

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[16] The following list is a simplified form of the list in John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, pp. 22-25. The items on the list are the same as Frame's. It may be that by simplifying I have accidentally distorted Frame's points. But the essential ideas are clear enough, I believe, even in abbreviated form.

5. God's thoughts are original. Ours at best are copies.
6. God does not know by revelation. We can only know by revelation.
7. God has not revealed all truth to us. Our knowledge is therefore partial.
8. God possesses knowledge in different ways from us. He is immaterial and therefore not dependent upon sense perception. He does not reason through a process of induction or deduction. He does not forget. His knowledge has been described as an "eternal intuition."
9. God reveals truth to us in creaturely terms. We do not assume that His knowledge is limited by the constraints of human language, for example.
10. God's thoughts all together constitute perfect wisdom. They agree with one another in a complete and perfect system. This cannot be true of our thoughts.
11. God's knowledge is "qualitatively" different. We may know what He has revealed to us, but even that knowledge fills us with wonder and awe. What we know instead of giving us the sense that we have fathomed all fills is with a deep sense of our inadequacy and His greatness.
12. There are other ways, no doubt, that God's knowledge differs from ours, ways we cannot specify simply because He is transcendent and beyond our reach. We could not fully expound God's knowledge unless we could comprehend it.

Frame also suggested a list of continuities between our knowledge and God's.

1. God's knowledge and man's are bound to the same standard of truth.
2. God and man think about the same objects, including the same propositions. I know that Jesus rose from the dead. God knows the same truth.
3. Man's knowledge may be true in the sense that it will not mislead him. In this sense, also, God's knowledge is true.
4. Man knows all sorts of things. There is reflection of God's omniscience in the breadth of human knowledge.
5. We know other things by knowing ourselves. This reflects God's knowledge in that He knows all things through the knowledge of Himself. There is something similar between our knowledge and His in this respect also.
6. God's knowledge as self-attesting is reflected in the fact that we choose the norms for knowledge that we submit to.
7. Our knowledge reflects God's creativity in a secondary sort of way. When we "know" something that is a lie, it has ramifications in the world. It changes our own minds and the relationships we have with others.

When Frame says that God's knowledge and our both may have the same object, the point seems to be that there is a very real, even though limited, sense in which we can speak of God's knowledge and man's being univocal. What Frame does, I think, is suggest limits to univocality. God knows that 1+1=2. Insofar as we are only speaking of the bare proposition, man's knowledge and God's may be univocal. However, nothing but epistemological bias suggests that God knows any single proposition in the simple way that we do. By pointing out the essentially multifaceted character of knowledge, Frame helps the reader understand what Van Til means by affirming that our knowledge is *analogous* to God's and why Van Til prefers not to speak of univocal knowledge.

It seems to me that Frame's discussion could have gone further in consideration of the Trinitarian character of God's knowledge. For example, when we speak of God's knowledge, it

is important to remember that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mutually indwell one another. Whatever one Person knows, He knows in fellowship with the other two. When we think of God's knowledge as self-attesting and self-validating, we should think of the Trinitarian character of God's knowledge. For everything that God knows, there are three witnesses whose knowledge is altogether consistent.

At the same time, Father, Son and Spirit have different perspectives on the things they share. The Father, Son, and Spirit all know the cross and they all know it in multiple ways. Their mutual indwelling means that the Father's knowledge of the cross includes sharing the Son's knowledge, but the full and complete sharing of all things through mutual indwelling must not be thought to rule out the reality of their distinct perspectives, for that would eliminate the meaning of their personhood. Only the Son actually experienced death for sin. Only the Father actually experienced the self-sacrificial pain of giving the Son. Only the Spirit suffered with the Son by indwelling the Son and enabling the Son to suffer.

How is it that by virtue of their mutual indwelling the three Persons share all things without limit, without defect, without mystery, while at the same time they also have something that might be called an individual perspective? We are simply confronting the mystery of the Trinity, the incomprehensibility of the one and the many, in another realm. We are back to the place that we can only confess and adore. This is part of what Frame is referring to in point 11 of his exposition of the differences between God's knowledge and ours, but Frame has not brought in the Trinitarian dimension. Doing so would have clarified the social character of human knowledge and added another perspective on the similarities and differences between our knowledge and God's. In fact, the Trinity probably can and should be related to each of the points in Frame's list. His discussion is excellent, but it is more of a stepping stone than a destination.

Logic

If Christian faith is Trinitarian, Van Til claims, then the Christian doctrine of logic must be different from the non-Christian.[17] This does not mean that Christians deny induction or the law of non-contradiction. In fact, Van Til would insist that it is only within the context of Christian confession that these "laws" can be saved from self-destructive irrelevance. If God is true, a God who never lies or contradicts Himself, then what is called "the law of contradiction" is simply a description of His character.

It is not difficult to bring the whole discussion of logic into a Trinitarian context and restate the "laws" of thought as descriptions of the faithfulness and honesty that subsists in the mutual love of the Persons of the Trinity. The problem with the laws of logic as they are traditionally conceived and applied is that they are often used as a standard by which to judge God and His self-revelation. The issue here is obvious. If God's knowledge transcends ours in ways we cannot altogether define or even comprehend, then the laws of logic, however legitimate they may be in a limited way, cannot be applied as a limit to God's self-revelation. The very attempt to limit God's revelation by the laws of logic would be an attempt to erase the distinction between God and man and between God's knowledge and man's.

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[17] Vern Poythress deals with the laws of logic in an important article in the *Westminster Journal*, "Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til's Idea of Analogy," vol. 57, no. 1, Spring 1995, pp. 187-220.

Those who deny the Trinity appeal to the laws of logic. And it is presumably because of the logical difficulties of the doctrine of the Trinity that most apologists prefer to argue for the existence of God, without reference to the doctrine of the Trinity. Van Til, however, by insisting on a Trinitarian approach to knowledge, in effect gives the enemies of the truth a greater field for play. He not only brings up the mystery of the Trinity from the beginning, he also claims that apparent contradiction is hiding under the covers of every fact and truth. It only requires sufficient investigation and consideration for us to come to the place that we confront the limits of our understanding. Because the world was created and is ruled by the God who is one and many, and because every fact and truth is conditioned by its place in His perfect plan, there is mystery in all things. The specter of contradiction haunts the whole realm of knowledge and no laws of logic can exorcise it.

What is the point of the laws of logic, then? The laws of logic are *tools* that help us think, not standards to which God's revelation must submit. Used as tools in submission to the truth of Scripture and revelation, the laws of logic help us to think like God thinks, since rightly understood they are simply expositions of the faithfulness and love that characterize the communication of the Persons of the Trinity. When we trust His faithfulness in our thought and therefore submit to the truth of His revelation, even when we cannot fathom it, we are imitating, on a creaturely level, the perfect trust of the Persons of the Trinity for one another. In the case of the Persons of God, perfect trust is united with perfect mutual indwelling, an interior sharing of their thoughts and an absolute mutual understanding that we cannot attain. The indwelling of the Spirit of God in us does, however, bring to us something of the fellowship of the truth that appertains within the Trinity. Logic as a tool of thought can enrich our fellowship with God and lead to a deeper enjoyment of His truth, as an idol, it undermines not only our relationship with God, but all knowledge.

Trinitarian Apologetics

Van Til offered an approach to Christian apologetics that was new in two important respects. First, he adopted the Kantian transcendental form of argumentation to Christian apologetics. I describe this briefly in the following section. Second, what is most important about his transcendental argument is that Van Til presents the Triune God Himself as the transcendent ground of knowledge. Christian apologetics traditionally argued for the existence of "God," not the Triune God. Van Til was the first theologian in modern times to place Trinitarianism at the very center of Christian apologetics. Even if his attempted form of argumentation is not considered successful, his insistence that we argue for the Trinitarian God from the beginning has revolutionary implications for apologetics.

Transcendental Argumentation

Van Til recommended the use of a transcendental argument to prove the truth of Christianity. A transcendental argument is thought to differ in structure from a deductive argument[18] of the sort used by the Enlightenment rationalists, who attempted to deduce

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[18] This is debatable. Not everyone agrees that the transcendental form of argument actually works or is really distinct from other sorts of argumentation.

knowledge from self-evident truths. The problem with the rationalist approach became evident when philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz came to radically different conclusions. Self-evident truths and the deductions that can be legitimately inferred from them did not lead to a commonly recognizable truth. In contrast to the rationalists, empiricists like Locke recommended that the house of knowledge be built up from the foundations of common sense and observation. Empirical verification was thought to be the test of truth. However, this method, too, led to embarrassingly different results. Not only that, as an epistemological methodology, it failed its own test for knowledge. There is no empirical method for testing the truth of the proposition that truth can only be known by observation and verified empirically.

For the philosopher David Hume, this predicament led to systematic skepticism, a conclusion that deeply troubled Immanuel Kant.

> Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.[19]

Greg Bahnsen, who has provided the most exhaustive introduction to Van Til's apologetic, summarizes, "It was scandalous, said Kant, to philosophy and human reason that 'if anyone thinks good to doubt' the existence and nature of things outside us, 'we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof' and must accept those things 'merely on faith.'"[20] Kant proposed a new method for approaching the basic problems of knowledge, a "Copernican revolution" in perspective. Rather than trying to find a new answer, Kant changed the question. Kant's question was, in Bahnsen's words, "Under what conditions is it possible, or what would also need to be true in order for it to be possible, to make sense of one's experience of the world? To seek the transcendental conditions for knowing is to ask what is presupposed by any intelligible experience whatsoever."[21]

What does this means in concrete terms? What does it mean to say that the transcendental argument asks about preconditions necessary for any knowledge, not simply the basis for some single fact or set of truths? Let us consider the example of two antithetical propositions.

1. Jesus Christ must have risen from the dead.

2. Jesus Christ could not possibly have risen from the dead.

The transcendental approach that Kant introduced and Van Til endorses as a *method* does not directly address these two propositions, or attempt to deductively or inductively prove one or the other. Kant asks: what kind of a world makes either of these propositions rationally

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[19] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, quoted in Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), p. 498. My entire discussion of the transcendental argument is heavily dependent on Bahnsen's presentation, beginning on page 496.

[20] *Van Til's Apologetic*, p. 498.

[21] Ibid., p. 499. Bahnsen points out that Van Til utterly rejected Kant's *specific* method for justifying knowledge. It was his general method, his approach, that Van Til considered legitimate. Just as it would be inaccurate and odd to accuse everyone who relies on deduction of compromise with Aristotle, it is not true to the facts to accuse Van Til of being tainted with Kantianism.

conceivable? Van Til believes that Kant has asked the right kind of question. The answer, according to Van Til, is that we could only make rational sense out of either of these propositions if Christianity is true. Thus, in order for the second proposition to be able to meaningfully communicate, it must be false. Neither the assertion of the resurrection nor the denial of the resurrection make sense unless the resurrection is true. If this argument can be successfully made, it is obviously quite powerful. However, it is easier asserted than demonstrated.

Van Til never spells out his argument in detail. John Frame expressed doubt that the transcendental approach to argumentation is in reality different from traditional forms of argument, except in the way things are stated. In other words, according to Frame, it is a different form, not really a wholly different approach. Whatever can be stated in the form of a transcendental argument can be restated in deductive form as well. Also, David Byron, on the Van Til email list, pointed out that in order for Van Til's argument to stand, the Christian and the non-Christian would have to agree on the preconditions for knowledge.[22] Since all men reason in terms of their basic worldview, this hardly seems likely. In addition, even if we supposed that the Christian and the non-Christian could agree on the transcendental conditions for knowledge, there is nothing to prevent the non-Christian from simply setting up his own imitation religion, borrowing whatever preconditions for knowledge that the Christian may define.

Though the debate is not yet over, it seems likely that Van Til's transcendental argument cannot accomplish as much as Van Til intended. Van Til sought an argument that was rational, not fideistic, one which could demonstrate the truth of Christianity, not merely its probable truth, which is as far as traditional apologetics attempted. My own tentative conclusion is based upon the fact that man, being finite, must reason by faith. He cannot in the nature of the case intuitively grasp the whole realm of truth and directly know the answers to the ultimate questions that he faces. As Kant said, we face problems that transcend all our powers. At the same time, being made in the image of God, man has the god-like power of choosing what he will believe. In a secondary way, by deciding to believe in a particular religion or view of the world, he is creating his own world. No argument therefore can *compel* man, for he is the image of God and can choose his own truth. This does not mean that the argument for Christianity is not rational, nor does it suggest that Christianity is only *probably* true. It means that *argumentation* cannot transcend the worldview framework in which it functions.

Finally, we have to also keep in mind that truth is personal and God has revealed Himself. Non-Christian men are not ignorant of God nor can they escape the totally personal revelation of the Triune God, for the one True God reveals Himself in and around the non-Christian man, too. This means that when we reason with non-Christian men, we are not talking to them about a God they do not know nor are we trying to prove a truth that they cannot comprehend. Their worldviews blind them only in so far as they prefer darkness to the light shining all around them.

Trinitarian Apologetics

Whatever we may think about the problems of the transcendental argument, we must not miss the specifically Trinitarian nature of Van Til's apologetic — something which might be lost in the debate about the validity of the transcendental argument. Because the ancient philosophical problem of the one and the many lies at the heart of every major epistemological

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[22] http://members.tripod.com/~vantillian/david-byron.html This site contains David Byron's archives in which Byron deals with many issues relevant to Van Til's theology and apologetics.

dilemma and because its solution is found only in the Trinity, Van Til emphasized the significance of the Trinity for apologetics. As he shows, the problem of the one and the many relates to questions about the relationship of change and stability, chance and determinism, facts and laws, love and logic — which means that an apologetic which emphasizes the problem of the one and the many actually has a broad range. It is not at all limited to issues of ultimate metaphysical import.

This approach makes Van Til radically different. Most apologists save the doctrine of the Trinity for last, after attempting to prove that theism is highly likely, a more reasonable belief than atheism. Having demonstrated the likelihood of theism, they move on to the next argument, the proof that the Bible is true, or that Jesus really did rise from the dead, or whatever, thus building the house of Christian truth block by block. Van Til criticizes this approach as "blockhouse" methodology. Epistemologically, it should be clear that no one actually reasons in the way traditional apologetics approaches the proofs of Christianity. It is an entirely hypothetical procedure. We do not acquire truths one at a time, outside the context of a religious worldview. Van Til's critique of traditional apologetics is a critique of the whole Enlightenment approach to reasoning and argumentation, as well as a critique of Thomas Aquinas[23] and his modern followers.

Instead of attempting to address the basic issues in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics as independent problems, Van Til challenges the non-Christian worldview as a whole. He proposes a single argument with two sides — allow me to emphasize that it is not two different arguments, but simply two sides to one coin. There is no special order, therefore, in which the argument should be stated, and since Van Til is interested in worldview as a whole, it doesn't really matter what particular issue the conversation between Christian and non-Christian begins with or focuses on. Everything is related. Whatever the non-Christian is interested in, whatever he or she wishes to talk about, that is the point where the conversation may begin. Van Til does not have to wait for the non-Christian to be willing to talk about God, or the Bible, or the resurrection.

With that in mind, let us look briefly at his double-barreled argument. First, there is a negative side. In this, Van Til offers an internal critique of whatever non-Christian worldview he is dealing with. All non-Christian worldviews break down when they confront the problem of the one and the many, but few non-Christian thinkers address the problem directly. Van Til shows how the issues they do address relate to the problem of the one and the many, and then demonstrates how their viewpoint crumbles because of inconsistencies and arbitrariness.

Second, the positive side of Van Til's approach attempts to show the non-Christian how Christianity offers a solution to the problems his view faces, one which is grounded in the knowledge of the Christian God. He invites the non-Christian to stand on Christian ground for the sake of argument. He presents the Christian worldview as a whole, showing how it answers issues that the non-Christian worldview cannot. The aim of the positive side of the apologetic argument (presentation) is broader than just the solution to particular problems. Van Til seeks to demonstrate that the Triune God is "the only possible presupposition for the possibility of predication."[24] The only adequate argument, according to Van Til, is one which establishes that Christianity alone offers a truly rational ground for knowledge and life. Here, as we pointed out

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[23] I mean a critique of Aquinas as traditionally understood. There is a real question about whether either Roman Catholic or Protestant thinkers have done justice to Aquinas, but that is not relevant to the present issue.

[24] *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 229.

above, some find that his argument may fall short. But the idea of presenting Christianity in its fullness as a worldview is important, whether it constitutes what has been traditionally regarded as a rational argument or not. To state this in different words, whether or not Van Til was able to accomplish his aim of establishing an argument for Christianity that gives rationally compelling proof that Christianity alone provides the necessary preconditions for knowledge, *he certainly did succeed in showing the comprehensive importance of the doctrine of the Trinity for the Christian worldview.* His method of internal critique is simply showing how non-Christian thought breaks down because it lacks the Triune God at the heart of its system. A Van Tillian internal critique of a non-Christian system of thought might be termed a Trinitarian critique. When he offers a positive presentation of the Christian worldview, he always places the doctrine of the Trinity — or, better, the Triune God of love Himself — in the central position of his argument, for everything in the Christian worldview goes back to the question of God.

Trinity and Covenant in Van Til

Van Til seldom emphasized the covenantal nature of the Trinity and as far as I can tell his expositors have not given it attention as an aspect of his system. Van Til did make at least one quite explicit statement of the covenantal character of the Trinitarian relationships and implied a covenantal relationship in other places. Since he was a diligent student of Abraham Kuyper, it seems likely that Van Til picked up his view of the covenant among the Persons of the Trinity through Kuyper's writings. Be that as it may, Van Til's doctrine of the Trinity included two ideas which both point to covenantal relationships among the persons of the Trinity. First, Van Til spoke of the traditional notion of *perichoresis* in language that seems distinctly covenantal. Second, Van Til spoke of covenantal representation in language that explicitly shows that he saw such representation in the relationships of the Persons of the Trinity.

Indwelling and Covenant

Perichoresis is the traditional word to describe the mutual indwelling of the Persons of the Trinity. Van Til expressed this indwelling as the persons of the Trinity being "mutually exhaustive of one another." For Van Til, the mutual indwelling of the Persons of the Trinity means the Three "have one mind and will" and "a common consciousness."[25] Cornelius Plantinga speaks in similar language.

> Each member is a distinct person, but scarcely an individual or separate person. For in the divine life there is no isolation, no insulation, no secretiveness, no fear of being transparent to another. Hence there may be penetrating, inside knowledge of the other as other, but as co-other, loved other, fellow. Father, Son, and Spirit are 'members one of another' to a superlative degree. . . . There is in the divine life a mysterious, primordial in-ness or oneness relation that is short of a oneness of person but much closer than mere common membership in a class.[26]

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[25] *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), p. 220.
[26] Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," *Calvin Theological Journal,* 23, no. 1 (April, 1988), pp. 50-51.

Though Plantinga and Van Til do not use the word "covenant," they are both describing the community life of God that is grounded in the covenantal bond. Van Til often refers to the three Persons of the Trinity being "mutually exhaustive" of one another, that is, indwelling one another so perfectly that each is wholly known to and open to the others. While he does not unambiguously state that *perichoresis* is a covenantal truth, Van Til is clear about representation being covenantal and the similarity of the language that he uses to speak of *perichoresis* and representation suggests that he may have regarded them both as expressions of a covenantal relationship among the Persons of the Godhead.

Representation and Covenant

To restate the point: since for Van Til, the notions of representation and indwelling seem to be related and representation is a covenantal notion, it seems probable that in Van Til's thought indwelling is a covenantal notion also. In any case, Van Til expounded the notion of representation in a manner that implied that God's covenant with man reflects a covenant among the Persons of the Trinity.

> It were quite legitimate and true to say that the foundation of all personal activity among men must be based upon the personality of one ultimate person, namely, the person of God, if only it be understood that this ultimate personality of God is a triune personality. In the Trinity there is completely personal relationship without residue. And for that reason it may be said that man's actions are all personal too. Man's surroundings are shot through with personality because all things are related to the infinitely personal God. But when we have said that the surroundings of man are really completely personalized, we have also established the fact of the representational principle. All of man's acts must be representational of the acts of God. Even the persons of the Trinity are mutually representational. They are *exhaustively* representational of one another. Because he is a creature, man must, in his thinking, his feeling and his willing, be representative of God. There is no other way open for him. He could, in the nature of the case, think nothing at all unless he thought God's thoughts after him, and this is representational thinking. Thus man's thought is representative of God's thought, but not exhaustively representative.
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> The doctrine of original sin is based upon this purely theistic, because purely biblical, concept of representation. Since the whole being of God, if we may in all reverence say so, is built upon the representational plan, it was impossible for God to create except upon the representational plan.[27]

In another place, Van Til states that the notion of the Persons of the Trinity being mutually representational is the very essence of the covenantal idea.

> It may even be said that *Calvin's covenantal idea is Theism come to its own.* The covenant idea is nothing but the representational principle consistently applied to all

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[27] *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, no date), pp. 78-79. Paraphrasing Van Til, we might say that since the whole being of God is built upon the covenantal plan, it was impossible for God to create except on the covenantal plan.

reality. The foundation of the representational principle among men is the fact that the Trinity exists in the form of a mutually exhaustive representation of the three Persons that constitute it. The emphasis should be placed upon the idea of *exhaustion*. This is important because it brings out the point of the complete equality as far as ultimacy is concerned of the principle of unity and of diversity. This mutual exhaustion of the persons of the Trinity places one before the choice of interpreting reality in exclusively temporal categories or in eternal categories. The demand of the doctrine of the Trinity, when thus conceived is that reality be interpreted in exclusively eternal categories inasmuch as the source of diversity lies in the Trinity itself and could never be found in a sense world beyond God. Hence the problem of the one and the many, of the universal and the particular, of being and becoming, of analytical and synthetic reasoning, of the a priori and the a posteriori must be solved by an exclusive reference to the Trinity.[28]

Van Til's emphasis here on the exhaustive nature of the representation of the Persons of the Trinity is precisely the sort of emphasis seen in his statements on the mutual indwelling of the Persons of the Trinity; the two seem obviously related.[29] Because the Persons of the Trinity mutually indwell one another, perfectly and wholly, they also mutually represent one another. This, according to Van Til, is the essence of the covenant. Van Til did not develop this into a systematic doctrine or attempt to integrate it into the whole of his theology. But the fact that it appears in his writings is worthy of note.

Conclusion

Van Til offered important contributions to Trinitarian theology. Each of the five areas above suggest significant insights into the doctrine of the Trinity, insights that are not necessarily original with Van Til but which he stated in his own original manner in the context of his own specific approach. Van Til appears to be re-phrasing Charles Hodge, for example, when he refers to God as one Person and three Persons. But Hodge did not employ the intentionally paradoxical language that Van Til did. Van Til is probably borrowing his notion of the Trinitarian covenant from Abraham Kuyper, but the emphasis on representation is, so far as I can tell, new.[30] While it is hard to imagine that there is no one in the history of the Church prior to Van Til that has specifically related the doctrine of the Trinity to the Greek philosophical problem of the one and the many, there is certainly no one before Van Til that brought much attention to the issue.

However, Van Til's greatest contribution, in my opinion, is not to be found in any of these specific insights themselves, but rather in the fact that he insisted that the Triune God Himself must be the true center of our theology and apologetics. Bare theism and every form of impersonalism and abstract thought are rejected. Van Til claims that the only God who can be

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[28] *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, p. 96. He goes on to say, "It was upon this foundation of a truly Trinitarian concept that Calvin built his conception of covenant theology." P. 97.

[29] See: *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967, 3rd revised edition), p. 25, and *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), pp. 220 ff.

[30] Van Til read Kuyper in Dutch, of course, giving him access to much more material than I can check.

wholly Personal God is the Tri-personal God of the Bible. It was Van Til's emphasis on the Trinity that has passed on to his heirs. Because of Van Til's teaching, men like John Frame offer Trinitarian systematic theology and apologetics, James Jordan offers a new and distinctly Trinitarian approach to Biblical, systematic, and practical theology, and Vern Poythress offers a Trinitarian approach to mathematics, philosophy of science, linguistics and hermeneutics — to name only a few prominent men who have been influenced by Van Til. The doctrine of the Triune God is again being seen to be the heart of the Christian worldview, with the advantage that we not only have a God-centered system of thought, but one that makes fellowship in the family of God, faith, and worship epistemologically fundamental. This is Van Til's legacy.