THE CONSISTENCY OF VAN TIL’S METHODOLOGY

SCOTT OLIPHINT

I. Introduction

THE purpose of this article will be to trace the apologetic method of Cornelius Van Til in order to see, first of all, whether or not he was consistent in his method throughout his writings,¹ and secondly, to clarify what that method is.

In dealing with the writings of Dr. Van Til, one must be selective. It would be worthwhile to attempt this analysis using all of Van Til’s writings. Space will not allow for that here. We have, therefore, chosen the following writings as representative of different periods during the course of Dr. Van Til’s career. Because we want to trace Van Til’s method from the beginning, we will begin with his doctoral dissertation of 1927. In this dissertation, “God and the Absolute,” Van Til seeks to show that the God of theism is not identical with the Absolute of idealism. Having looked at his treatment of idealism, we will then look at his syllabus, “A Survey of Christian Epistemology” (1932). In this syllabus we will see how he has developed his position over the course of a brief four years. We will then jump a few years and look at his “standard” work, The Defense of the Faith (1955). This lays the groundwork for Van Til’s Reformed apologetic method. We will also look at the “supplement” to that book, A Christian Theory of Knowledge, to see Van Til’s analysis of J. O. Buswell and the latter’s treatment of the theistic proofs. Other works will be made use of and cited when and where they are relevant to the particular time period in Van Til’s career.

II. God and the Absolute (1927)

“Accordingly, we do not seek to prove Christian Theism but only try to show that we can find no meaning in our human experience unless there be a self-sufficient God.”² Thus Van Til gives us the purpose of his dissertation. It can readily be seen that this statement already sets Van Til radically apart from his contemporaries in apologetics. William Brenton Greene, Jr., Van Til’s own teacher in apologetics, “follows the traditional method of

¹ Such an analysis has been suggested in classes by Van Til’s successor in apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, Dr. R. D. Knudsen.
apologetics as worked out by Bishop Butler and others."\(^3\) This traditional method was one which sought to prove God's existence by man's own reason and then, from that proof, to bring in the truths of Christianity. These so-called theistic proofs were popularized primarily by Thomas Aquinas who worked out cosmological, henological, and teleological proofs for God's existence.

Van Til openly states that he will not attempt to prove God but rather show why he must be presupposed prior to any "proof." His line of argument begins with pragmatism and shows how it, beginning with the "spatio-temporal environment," is not true to its own position. We will look at Van Til's argument in order to bring out his methodology.

Van Til states for us what his method will be:

It is well to note at once the nature of the argument; it is transcendental and not formally logical. An argument for the existence of God based on formal logic would imply the ability to define God and arrive at a comprehensive rationality of all our experience. A transcendental argument on the contrary, is negative insofar that it reasons from the impossibility of the opposite.\(^4\)

Van Til seeks to argue transcendentally. He does not, in the first place, want to start with formal logic in order to prove God, but rather he wants to argue for the impossibility of the opposite. Objections could be brought against this definition of a transcendental argument, one of which Van Til immediately recognizes. "If it be said that the impossibility of the opposite is a canon of formal logic after all, the reply is that every one must use formal arguments but that the important point is to define their bearing power."\(^5\) What Van Til is saying here is important for our methodological analysis. We will clarify his point, first of all, by explaining what he is not saying. He is not saying that his transcendental argument is, at its root, synonymous with the canons of formal logic. Neither is he saying that he wants to start transcendentally but that he will be forced to end his argument with logic as his ultimate presupposition. He is not saying, therefore, that transcendental argumentation presupposes formal logical argumentation. To say this would be to say that he is using a "secondary" or "less effective" method of argument in order to bring the primary, more effective method in at a later point. Rather, he is saying that although he will be


\(^4\) Van Til, "God and the Absolute," 3.

\(^5\) Ibid. By "bearing power" Van Til means the ability of a concept, fact, proposition, etc., to come to bear on any other given fact. To put it in question form Van Til is asking, "Does logic have the inherent ability to apply and control absolutely every aspect of reality and of God?" For Van Til, God and his Word alone have the inherent ability meaningfully to be brought to bear on any and every aspect of reality and of God himself! The presupposition of the God of Scripture is unlimited in its bearing power though finite and limited in its application.
using formal argumentation in his transcendental analysis of idealism, that formal argumentation should itself be subject to a critical analysis. The assumption in formal logical argumentation is that, philosophically, a position riddled with contradiction is untenable because at bottom irrational. In other words, if one's argument assumes formal logic as its ultimate presupposition, then any (even apparent) contradiction must be eliminated for the argument to be tenable. It would seem then that one must have comprehensive knowledge if one chooses to presuppose logic as ultimate. On the other hand, if one argues transcendently (employing formal logical argumentation) then any contradiction must be reckoned with (not necessarily reconciled) as to the impossibility of believing otherwise.

Van Til wants first of all to deal with pragmatism. He wants to show that, at bottom, pragmatism and idealism are really one. The pragmatist claims that all attempts to speculate about the Absolute are merely "miasmatic exaltations of a false intellectualism which has misconstrued its own nature and powers." Pragmatism complains that any notion of the Absolute is hard put to fit into the facts of our experience. Thus pragmatism boasts its starting point as the spatiotemporal environment. Only in this starting point are we able to avoid the paradoxisms of idealism. "In spite of its insistence on the existence of the Absolute," the pragmatist says, "idealism has no warrant for positing such." Pragmatism, like theism, criticizes idealism for doing "violence to our experience." Thus both seek to rid idealism of its a priorism. Yet, according to Van Til, it is this a priorism which comes back to haunt the pragmatist. Whereas the pragmatist contends that the terms absolute and relative are meaningless because related, he is unable to prove that to be related is to be relative. He has assumed that this is the case a priori based on "Plato's abstract logic." Pragmatism, says Van Til, wants to define what reality can or cannot be based on a priori argument.

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6 Ibid., 3-4. I realize that Van Til has been seen as irrationalistic and in the camp of neo-orthodoxy because of his view of logic. There seems to be one fundamental point that Van Til is concerned to make about logic. That point is this: Logic is inherently limited because created! This is what Van Til meant in his interview with Christianity Today (December 30, 1977). When asked why he described logic as a "turnpike in the sky," he responded by saying, "You can't get on it." In other words, logic, to be applicable, must always deal with the facts of reality. A transcendental approach is all-encompassing because God as the Creator of all is not limited. God is all in all, and thus is the presupposition behind any use or application of logic. Van Til is not antilogic, he only wants logic to take its proper place as created, not Creator! See my forthcoming, "Cornelius Van Til and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics" (in Christelike Reformasie: Gister en Vandag, published by Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1990). In the first section of that chapter, I try at least to touch on some of the problems inherent in any approach that neglects to affirm the creaturely essence of logic.

7 Ibid., 4.

8 Ibid., 5.

9 Ibid., 6. The reason the pragmatist sees the concepts of absolute and relative as meaningless because related is that, as Van Til contends, pragmatism sees the absolute as defined by its relationship to the relative. Such a definition appears to relativize which is absolute. In order for the absolute not to be relative, it would have to be unrelated. Thus, from the perspective of the pragmatist, the two concepts cancel out each other.
Methodologically, what has Van Til done thus far? He has shown that the pragmatist cannot do justice to his own system of thought because it presupposes in its defense that which it rejects. Van Til goes on to show that pragmatism, by denying the validity of metaphysics which begins with our experience and seeks for the presuppositions of it... [finds] itself compelled to raise bare possibility to the highest thinkable metaphysical status. This we should not expect from a view which so zealously advocates clinging to the actual.\(^\text{10}\)

We see that Van Til is not reasoning from the impossibility of the opposite here but is seeking to show that that which pragmatism hates, it also embraces, and thus it is not a "system" at all. This contradiction is reached by laying bare the presuppositions which lie behind what the pragmatist says. It is not, therefore, simply negative! Starting from our spatiotemporal environment, pragmatism winds up with bare possibility that militates against its adherence to the actual. Not only this, one winds up in skepticism because of the sea of contingency which surrounds this supposed "actually." Thus Van Til shows that "the temporal series of experience in itself is not self-explanatory."\(^\text{11}\) It is more reasonable to hold, says Van Til, that our experience is derivative of that which is complete and actual in itself. Because of this, we can begin with the validity of human knowledge. This "does not imply a priorism but the use of our reasoning faculty upon our experience to see what presuppositions it implies."\(^\text{12}\) The pragmatist has presupposed what his system rejects. By virtue of the fact that he seeks to begin with the spatiotemporal environment alone, he cannot explain why even theism could or could not be actual. To do this it must be a prioristic.

We must begin with the validity of human knowledge, "the reality of appearances." The question then becomes, now that we have the universe, the world of appearances, what are the presuppositions behind such facts? This approach is, formally speaking, directly in line with the transcendental approach of Immanuel Kant. For Kant, a transcendental argument was, in the first place, critical. That is to say, although it was Hume who aroused Kant's interest, it was Kant who accused Hume of not going deep enough. It is not enough simply to ascribe cause and effect to our experience but rather one should ask as to the possibility of experience itself. Kant wanted to discover the universally valid conditions which make our experience possible. Now it must be said and emphasized that Van Til would not at all agree with Kant's analysis and explanation of a transcendental argument. Neither would he agree with Kant's "unity of apperception" or "transcendental-logical subject." The point is, however, that Van Til is asking the same questions within a totally different context. One must critically

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 11.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 12.
ask as to the presuppositions that lie behind any and every experience, any and every fact. In order to do this, one must also lay bare the presuppositions inherent in any and every “system” of thought. If it is the case that these presuppositions are in direct conflict with the system itself, then the system is untenable. We must remember, however, that to say that a system is untenable is not simply to say that it winds up in irresolvable antinomy. Yet the fact of the matter is that wherever an antitheistic system is shown to be contradictory, because it assumes the canons of formal logic as absolute, it will be forced to abandon some, if not all, of its supposed “facts.”

Van Til agrees with Watson that “the least bit of coherent experience presupposes complete rationality.” The possibility of rational experience presupposes absolute rationality.

We would not be able to bring the two together if they were not at bottom related; the rationality we possess would be meaningless without God. . . . Hence we shall from now on say that we must presuppose the Absolute of Theism if our experience is to have meaning, not forgetting that we were driven to this presupposition by a transcendental argument that began with nothing more than what Pragmatism also takes for granted, namely, human organisms in a spatio-temporal environment.

Van Til goes on to explain what we mentioned earlier in our discussion. The transcendental argument, as Van Til employs it here, is not, in the last analysis, a restatement of formal logic. When Van Til speaks of complete rationality as the basis for all human experience, he does not for a minute mean that man could attain to this rationality. He does not see “reality” as of one type to which both God and man are subject. Rather, he posits this complete and comprehensive rationality in order to (1) do justice to the theistic position and (2) exclude possibility as ultimate. Obviously, (2) follows from (1). As Van Til explains later on in this dissertation, we know that all logical difficulties are resolved in the Absolute of theism. “The pivotal question is after all; what sort of God exists and is presupposed.”

This is the all-important question as Van Til analyzes the Absolute of idealism and sets it over against the God of theism. For Van Til’s purpose in his dissertation, the self-sufficiency of God is what must be emphasized. If the Absolute is, by definition, timeless, what relation, if any, does it have

13 Ibid., 14.
14 Ibid. When Van Til says that he “began with” and that the pragmatist “takes for granted” the spatiotemporal environment, he wants to emphasize the fact that what the pragmatist uncritically presupposes, i.e., the spatiotemporal environment, Van Til gets behind by his transcendental analysis.
15 See ibid., 2-3.
16 Formal logic, to Van Til, was that which was put forth by B. Bosanquet. Though it differs somewhat from later analytic philosophy as set forth, for example, by B. Russell, I am not convinced that there is any fundamental difference.
17 Ibid., 46.
to the world? Is our time experience an aspect of timeless reality? This becomes Van Til's criticism of idealism. It does not do justice to time or to change. It is caught in conflict. If the Absolute is beyond time, how then can it (he) relate to our time experience? If it relates to our time experience at all can it remain Absolute? If it does not, is it, therefore, the Beyond? These questions are unanswerable on idealism's own basis. It is theism's contention that its God "is a concept obtained by transcendental argument and therefore necessary for the reality of time experience." Bosanquet, whom Van Til deals with in this dissertation, is criticized for positing the Beyond as a part of the whole of reality. Yet if it is a part of the whole, in what sense is it Beyond? As Van Til sums up his criticism of idealism thus far he says that

> Idealism has by its *a priori* logic foreclosed the possibility of doing justice to temporal experience and for that reason has not been able to develop the necessity of an Absolute by transcendental argument. Still feeling the need very strongly for an Absolute it has sought to find one on the basis of *a priori* and formal logic only.

Thus idealism was not able, *because of its faulty method*, to conclude for the Absolute of theism. Because idealistic thought saw diversity to be as fundamental as unity (which in itself is not bad) it saw man and the temporal universe as necessary to the Absolute. Thus, both were contained within the whole by way of synthesis.

Van Til wanted to argue transcendentally in his dissertation. His definition of this type of argument was to show his opponent the impossibility of holding the opposite position. The impossibility was based on the necessity to fit any "system" into our temporal experience. Pragmatism was not able to do this because of its *a priorism*. This *a priorism* it sought to reject. Yet in seeking to interpret experience and knowledge in terms of the facts, it was not able to ask as to the very possibility of those facts. The system rejected itself by virtue of its own method. Having rejected pragmatism, Van Til sought to show that, because idealism's Absolute is correlative to our temporal experience, it was not, in the last analysis, and based upon idealism's *own* presuppositions, Absolute. Therefore, idealism could not do justice to our time experience. It, too, was not transcendental in its approach. Although it sought for unity of experience based on the Absolute unity behind all experience, it did not recognize that behind this idea of unity was also correlative diversity and that the two were of one type. Thus either our experience is diverse and the Absolute because correlative is also changing, or change is an illusion for which there is no accounting. In his transcendental argumentation Van Til is rigorous. He shows that those who

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18 Ibid., 24.
19 Ibid., 27.
20 Ibid., 28.
do not presuppose God destroy their own systems and are unable to do justice to man’s temporal experience. His argument, though it argues for the impossibility of the opposite, can be more specifically stated as an argument by presupposition. That is to say that positively Van Til presupposes God as (1) self-sufficient and as (2) Creator, in order to do justice both to the “Absolute” which idealism is searching for and to time and temporal experience. It is important to Van Til that the Absolute of theism be self-sufficient and Creator and it is equally important that he not be modified.21

Van Til, therefore, in his dissertation, argues for the necessity of presupposing the God of theism. This, as we have seen, he labels a transcendental argument, i.e., given any fact, any experience, one must ask as to the presuppositions lying behind it. That presupposition, because of the impossibility of the opposite, can only be the God of theism.

If then the rationality and coherence of human experience needs an Absolute as the Idealist has always maintained against Pragmatism because absolute origination of the whole of reality and infinite regress are unacceptable, the Absolute of Christian Theism would appear philosophically the most tenable since it involves as a conception no greater logical difficulties than the Absolute of Idealism while it does not do violence to our experience of time. . . . Theism has sought to do justice to both [rationality and time] in the notion of its God as Absolute with its concomitant of temporal creation.22

III. Early Van Til

Van Til’s first published syllabus was entitled, “The Metaphysics of Apologetics” (1932). This syllabus has since been reprinted under the title A Survey of Christian Epistemology. Because of the importance of this syllabus with regard to Van Til’s method, we will look at it to see whether or not there has been significant change since his dissertation. One reason for choosing this particular syllabus is that, as stated above, it is his first published syllabus. Another, more important reason is that Van Til devotes a good amount of time, specifically, to method.

In the first chapter of this syllabus on Christian epistemology, Van Til discusses epistemological terminology. His reason for doing this is to show that epistemological terms cannot be used in the same way by both theist and antitheist. Van Til contends that “every system of thought necessarily has a certain method of its own.”23 This is an important point to remember in our analysis of Van Til’s method. First, it is important to understand that Van Til himself sees all systems as employing certain methods. One of the tasks of his apologetic, therefore, is to seek to discover the “how to” of a particular system. Second, Van Til sees himself as employing, “necessarily,” a certain method of his own.

21 Ibid., 43.
22 Ibid., 65.
Every method is determined by the conception of knowledge to which a certain system holds. For the antitheist, as Van Til calls him, knowledge of a fact is supposedly obtained without asking the question of whether or not God exists. For him, man can have true knowledge of a fact with or preferably without the "fact" of God's existence. The starting point of knowledge is man himself and the choice of method is solely determined by him. The theist, on the other hand, knows that knowledge of any fact presupposes the existence and knowledge of the God who created that fact and the Christ who interpreted that fact in Scripture. For any fact to be truly known it must be seen as exhausted in its relation to the plan of God. That is, the God who created that fact also exhaustively knows that fact in itself and in its every relation.²⁴

With this conception of knowledge, says Van Til, "it will appear which method a Christian would naturally be bound to use. That method we may perhaps best designate as the method of implication."²⁵ What does this method entail?

It must be said at this point that Van Til has taken seriously the idealism of his day. It was idealism that contends that all finite facts have their meaning only in relation to the Absolute. It was idealism that promoted the importance of presuppositions in all thought. It was accordingly idealism that claims to have a method of implication. Time and again, in his early writings, Van Til refers to Bosanquet's work, Implication and Linear Inference. Yet at the same time it must be said and emphasized as all-important that Van Til was critical of all that idealism held to be true! That is to say, Van Til took that which was formally true in idealism (due to common grace) and transplanted it into the Reformed Christian faith and there he nurtured and watered it to fruition because only in Christian "soil" could these formally true ideas have their proper growing place. When he uses arguments, terms, and methods of idealism, therefore, we must see them as surgically removed and then transplanted into the light of scriptural truth.

The method of implication as Van Til explains it is just this, that "we seek to implicate ourselves more deeply into a comprehension of God's plan in and with every fact that we investigate."²⁶ Along with this idea of the method of implication are the correspondence and the coherence theories of truth.

In Van Til's day, the correspondence theory of truth had fizzled and the coherence theory was having its day.²⁷ It was the coherence theory of truth

²⁴ Ibid., 4-5.
²⁵ Ibid., 6.
²⁶ Ibid., 7. By "implication" Van Til means the same thing as "transcendental" yet with a subtle twist. He wants, by using the word "implication," to emphasize the process of relating those things (implicating, if you will) with which we come into contact to the plan of God (transcendental). This "relating" can only be done when God is seen as the presupposition behind every fact.
²⁷ Ibid., 3.
that was put forth by idealism. The error of the correspondence theory of truth was that, in wanting a correspondence between an object and an idea of that object in the mind, it gave independent significance to both the object and the idea. Thus both could be known independently. The coherence theory of truth, however, said that "the mind and the object of which it seeks knowledge are parts of one great system of reality and one must have knowledge of the whole of this reality before one has knowledge of any of its parts." This latter notion approaches what Van Til is after in this syllabus. We can have no true knowledge of any one fact apart from its context. For the Christian, its context is the Creator God from whom and through whom and to whom are all things. Yet though Van Til's position is similar to the coherence theory of truth, he wants to call his position in epistemology a "Correspondence Theory of Truth." Why is this the case?

In Van Til's doctoral dissertation, he makes the statement that "coherence must be the basis of correspondence." This is in line with his method of reasoning. Coherence must be the basis of correspondence because coherence lies in God alone. God alone is the basis for all our knowledge (correspondence) of any fact. Now all of this is of direct importance in our discussion of the method of implication. If it were the case that we held to a correspondence theory of truth alone, we would simply use the method of linear inference. In this method, we would not concern ourselves with eternal categories in our interpretive activity. That is, interpretation of any fact and addition of truth would be done with reference to finite categories alone! Because our (Christian) correspondence theory of truth in epistemology has as its basis a coherence theory of truth, i.e., in the God of Christian theism, the relation of one fact to another fact can be known only upon the basis of all facts being exhaustively known by God.

Thus we can, indeed, implicate ourselves more deeply into the relation of fact to fact if we see this relation as exhausted in God. Not only this, our correspondence theory of truth must also be seen as a correspondence between our knowledge of a fact and God's knowledge of that fact. Thus it is not enough to say that based on coherence (in God), we have correspondence (with factual relations). We must also say that our correspondence (among facts) is dependent also on our correspondence with God's knowledge of those facts. Thus the Scriptures are indispensable! It is in the Scriptures alone and in the Christ of Scripture that we have God's revelation to us. Therefore, it is Scripture alone that can give us insight into God's coherence (but never that coherence itself) and determine our correspondence or lack thereof with the facts. This method of implication, says Van Til, "may also be called a transcendental method." This, of course, is

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28 Ibid., 2.
29 Ibid.
30 Van Til, "God and the Absolute," 37.
31 Van Til, SCE, 10.
consistent with the method employed in the dissertation! This transcen­
dental method is, according to Van Til, the combination of both the in­
ductive and deductive elements as these are understood in a Christian context.

To combine these elements is to have a truly transcendental argument. The combination of these elements for a Christian runs somewhat like this: All facts that are investigated must be seen first of all as created and there­fore interpreted by God. Thus we have the “general” controlling the “par­
ticular.” That is to say, even when we investigate a fact, we already know much truth concerning it. We know that in our investigation we cannot come up with a “truth” that does not correspond to God’s truth. We know also that this fact and its relations are all exhaustively known and inter­preted by God. Thus we have a deductive element in our investigation. This deductive element presupposes, to some extent, an a priori method if we remember that by a priori we do not mean what the antitheist means. Inductively, we might say that as we investigate a fact we must relate it to other facts that are related to other facts, all of which are related to God. This reasoning starts from the more particular and works its way up to the “general.” Yet it must always be said that both the inductive and deductive element in our investigation must presuppose the God of Scripture: “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.” Here we have a more positive statement than was given in the dissertation as to the definition of a tran­
scendental argument. It is to this method of argument that we now turn.

Van Til sees the transcendental argument and the method of implication as synonymous. It is not as though Van Til has added to or taken away from the method employed in his dissertation. Quite the contrary, he has merely explained by way of a “logical” method what the transcendental method seeks to do. Moreover, in his syllabus on “Christian-Theistic Evidences” (1935, unpublished), he again identifies the method of implication with the transcendental method: “Older theology’s method was linear inference—finite laws are assumed to have independent significance. Our method is one of implication—no meaning allowed to a fact or a law until the fullness of its relations have been traced.” Earlier in the same syllabus he had said, “Our argument for Christianity is the same as for Theism. We do not prove theism by linear inference but by the transcendental argument of presup­position.” Thus linear inference is contrasted with both the transcenden­tal method and the method of implication. Not only that, the latter quote sounds strikingly similar to the quote from his dissertation dealing with its

32 Ibid.
33 The reason that we call this a “logical” method is that it is developed by B. Bosanquet. This does not mean the other method is illogical.
35 Ibid., 44.
We conclude, therefore, on the basis of this analysis, that Van Til thus far has not significantly changed his apologetic method! The reason for inserting the word "significantly" is that Van Til has changed his method with regard to explanation and elaboration. While remaining transcendental in its thrust, the argument has also developed and expanded.

The most significant addition to Van Til's transcendental argument in this syllabus on Christian epistemology is his explanation of analogical as opposed to univocal or equivocal reasoning. In our reasoning, he says, we must always keep the Creator/creature distinction foremost in our minds. Van Til expresses this by saying that we must always reason analogically.

The necessity of reasoning analogically is always implied in the theistic conception of God. If God is to be thought of at all as necessary for man's interpretation of the facts or objects of knowledge he must be thought of as being determinative of the objects of knowledge. In other words, he must be thought of as the only ultimate interpreter, and man must be thought of as a finite reinterpreter.

Since, therefore, our argument is transcendental, our reasoning cannot be seen as of one type. We will remember that this was Van Til's contention even in his dissertation. It was not, however, as fully developed as it is here. When we speak of our method of deduction or of induction, we cannot therefore assume that the categories employed are of the same type. Because as Christians we seek to reason analogically, we must see the process of cause and effect as presupposing God who created and controls all things. This is not the same as saying God is the "ultimate cause." The doctrine of creation ex nihilo entails much more than that God was the "cause" of the universe. Again, we must keep our conception of the God of the Scriptures foremost in our minds. If we argue univocally that God was the first cause we have in effect made him correlative to the universe. Thus God as cause and the universe as effect are contained within the one process. It is this kind of reasoning which the Christian must avoid by reasoning analogically.

This concept of analogical reasoning as put forth by Van Til has caused some controversy over the course of his career, the first of which occurred at the fourteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church concerning the ordination of Dr. Gordon H. Clark. We will look at this controversy briefly in order better to clarify Van Til's position on analogical reasoning. We will refer to Van Til's syllabus entitled, An Introduction to Systematic Theology. This syllabus was originally written some four years after the epistemology syllabus and thus is within our time frame (early Van Til).

In the fourteenth General Assembly, Clark's Answer to the previous Complaint was that the complainants (of whom Van Til was one) taught that

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36 See n. 2.
37 Van Til, SCE, 203.
38 Though the "Clark case" happened in the 1940s, the thrust of the case is consistent with the intent of the syllabus on systematic theology and thus was inserted by Van Til in a later revision. We refer to it here in order to elaborate on the principle of analogical reasoning.
man could have only an analogy of the truth. The point at issue seems to be that of identity of content in both the divine and the human mind. Clark would say that there is such identity. Van Til would say there is not. It would seem that what Clark wants to safeguard is that what man knows, because he knows by analogy, could be contradictory to what God knows if indeed there is no identity of content. That is, man could “know” that Christ rose from the dead and God, because the content of what he knows is different, could know that Christ did not rise from the dead. Although there was much controversy on this matter between these two men of God and, most unfortunately, some division between the two, the point at issue is basic.

Is it the case that analogical reasoning allows for contradiction between God and man? Is there nothing to “bridge the gap” between what God knows and what man knows? Van Til wants to maintain at every point the Creator/creature distinction. Thus when God tells man something, man knows it to be true. To use the above example, when God tells man that Christ rose from the dead, man knows that Christ rose from the dead! Does God know the same thing? Yes and no.

The Reformed faith teaches that the reference point for any proposition is the same for God and for man. It holds that this identity of reference point can be maintained only on the presupposition that all human predication is analogical re-interpretation of God’s pre-interpretation. Thus the incomprehensibility of God must be taught with respect to any revelational proposition. If it is not so taught there is no identity of reference point between one mind and another mind.

The difference is qualitative, according to Van Til. The reference point is the same, but the knowledge of such is qualitatively different. The “bridging of the gap” is the reference point itself which man sees as created and God sees as Creator. When God says that Christ rose from the dead, the reference point in this case, Christ, is the same for God and for man. Yet as man sees Christ he does not know him exhaustively but only as he is revealed. Yet Christ knows himself and God knows Christ exhaustively. Let us take a less complex example: If we say, “The rose is red,” could God know that the same rose is green or that the lily is red? Not at all! Roses and redness as referents are the same for God and for man. Yet the knowledge of a rose and of redness is, for God, eternal, absolute, exhaustive, and original. The implications of this are beyond our comprehension. The knowl-


40 Ibid., 171. I have argued elsewhere that at least part of what Van Til means by “reference point” is that of which we have knowledge, the “thing” itself. Because all “things” are created by God, our knowledge of a thing is creaturely. God’s knowledge is Creator-knowledge (with all that it entails). The referents are always the same and are known by man only because God, man’s Creator, created them.
edge of a rose and of redness for man, *if it is true knowledge,* must be seen as completely and exhaustively dependent, finite, nonexhaustible by man and, at bottom, mysterious (because exhausted only by God, who cannot be comprehended). Were we to reason univocally we would have to say that since redness and roses are the same in content *at some point* between God and man, then, potentially at least, they can be the same in content at every point and thus the assertion of the former leads to the latter and both erase the Creator/creature distinction. Now it is important to understand that this controversy all the while assumes man’s dependence on the revelation of God. Accordingly, even true knowledge of a rose is different for man and for God because man’s *true* knowledge is analogical to God’s true knowledge. Analogy, then, takes the Creator/creature distinction seriously from the beginning. Thus, we have the development of Van Til’s analogical reasoning in his own transcendental argumentation.

Along with the above-mentioned addition to Van Til’s transcendental argument, we have a further elaboration, in his epistemology syllabus, on what he means by reasoning from the impossibility of the contrary. We will remember that this was his definition of a transcendental argument in his dissertation. It is interesting that he connects this kind of reasoning with his distinction of univocal/analogical reasoning.

We must point out to [our opponents] that univocal reasoning itself leads to self-contradiction, not only from a theistic point of view, but from a non-theistic point of view as well. It is this that we ought to mean when we say that *we must meet our enemy on their own ground.* It is this that we ought to mean when we say that *we reason from the impossibility of the contrary.* The contrary is impossible only if it is self-contradictory when operating on the basis of its own assumptions.41

Arguing from the impossibility of the contrary means placing yourself on your opponent’s position to show its inconsistency and its self-contradiction. It is important to understand, however (and here we have the thrust of Van Til’s argument coming out most strongly), that this self-contradiction is seen by Van Til not as an end in itself, but as a refutation of the opponent’s position *only on the basis of his own assumed logical consistency!* That is to say, it is not enough simply to point out antinomies and contradictions within a system. The non-Christian could point at apparent contradictions in a Christian system of thought. Yet based on the assumption of the non-Christian, self-contradiction proves to frustrate the position of the non-theist. This is all important! Because Van Til’s method here is transcendental, he is not concerned only with consistency. He is concerned with laying bare the presuppositions of all non-Christian thought and with showing, on the basis of these presuppositions, how their opposites are also affirmed within the system itself. Thus the system is not a system and rejects itself again.

41 Van Til, SCE, 205.
Now this argument from the impossibility of the opposite Van Til also
calls *ad hominem*. It is this type of argument which he uses against idealism
in his dissertation.\(^{42}\) It is this kind of argument which he elaborates on in
the same paragraph as the quote above.

It is this too that we should mean when we say that we are arguing *ad hominem*.
We do not really argue *ad hominem* unless we show that someone's position involves
self-contradiction, and there is no self-contradiction unless one's reasoning is
shown to be directly contradictory of or to lead to conclusions which are con­
tradictory of one's own assumptions.\(^ {43} \)

In other words, self-contradiction cannot stand by itself as the presuppo­
sition behind every untenable position. It is only useful when applied to
one's own assumptions. Thus every non-Christian system is, by definition,
self-contradictory because it assumes the fact of God's nonexistence in a
God-created universe. Accordingly, says Van Til,

It will be seen that when we reason *ad hominem* or when we say that we place
ourselves upon our opponent's position we are still reasoning analogically. We would
not be reasoning analogically if we really placed ourselves upon our opponent's
position. Then we would, with him, have to reason univocally, and we would
drown with him.\(^ {44} \)

Transcendental argumentation (laying bare the presuppositions behind
any position) entails arguing *ad hominem* from the impossibility of the con­
trary and reasoning analogically to show the self-contradiction of any non-
theistic position based on its own assumptions.

Yet one more thing must be added to this idea of self-contradiction. Such
an argument must never be done in the abstract. It is exactly this which the
nontheist does. If, as a Christian, we show that a non-Christian system
contradicts itself, even this idea of contradicting itself can be given no
connotation except upon the truth of the theistic position. One cannot
argue in a vacuum. One cannot argue, *at any point*, except upon the basis
of the Creator/creature relationship. This is what Van Til means when he
says that, "in order to bring this argument as closely to the non-regenerate
consciousness as we may, we must seek to show that the non-theist is self-con­
tradictory upon his own assumptions [as we have said] as well as upon
the assumption of the truth of theism."\(^ {45} \) This reminds us that all our
argumentation must be done analogically, based on the presupposition of
God. Thus as we show a non-Christian position to be self-contradictory, it
is such, not only based on its own assumptions, but based also upon our
assumption of the truth of the Christian position. Not only that, if the

\(^{42}\) Van Til, "God and the Absolute," 28.
\(^{43}\) Van Til, *SCE*, 205.
\(^{44}\) Ibid.
\(^{45}\) Ibid., 206.
nontheist saw the truth of the latter assumption, i.e., that his position con-
tradicted the truth of Christian theism, he would at the same time see the
truth of the Christian position and the untenability of his own. Thus, the
nontheist "cannot even be self-contradictory upon a non-theistic basis, since
if he saw himself to be self-contradictory he would be self-contradictory no
longer."46 This is what reasoning ad hominem, from the impossibility of the
contrary, entails.

Finally, Van Til elaborates on his transcendental method by affirming
that one need not deal with "religious" discussion at the outset. This is most
important to realize when we are discussing Van Til's apologetic method.

Is it true that Van Til "believes he can begin with God and Christianity
without first consulting objective reality,"47 as Clark Pinnock charges? Or
is it true that, by virtue of Van Til's method, he "eliminates all possibility
of offering a positive demonstration of the truth of the Christian view,"48 as
J. W. Montgomery says? We would think that this representation of Van Til
is a gross mis-representation. Those who have made such charges have
either misread his works or, even worse, not read them at all. In the very
syllabus which we have been considering Van Til states clearly that we
should be willing to start anywhere and with any fact. The very conviction
that there is not a single fact that can really be known unless it is interpreted
thetically gives us the liberty to start anywhere, as far as a proximate
starting point is concerned. "If we thought that the fact of God's existence
had no significance for physics, we would have to seek to bring our oppo-
nents at once into contact with the more specifically religious problem. But
that is exactly what we need not do."49 As one looks at the facts, e.g., the facts
of physics, one need only look at those facts and challenge the nontheist to
make them intelligible. Doubtless, he will attempt this intelligibility by
relating the facts of physics to other facts. Nevertheless, these latter facts
must also be made intelligible by the non-Christian.

In other words, we believe it to be in harmony with and a part of the process of
reasoning analogically with a non-theist that we ask him to show us first what he
can do. We may, to be sure, offer to him at once a positive statement of our
position. But this he will reject at once as being quite out of the question.50

Our task can be, if we wish, to start, proximately, where the unbeliever
starts. This is the inductive aspect of a transcendental argument. It would
seem that both Pinnock and Montgomery have seen Van Til's argument as
pure, abstract deduction, that is, always starting with God in some sort of
a priori fashion, and have not seen his method as transcendental (in the way

46 Ibid.
47 Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til
48 Ibid. See the chapter by J. W. Montgomery, "Once upon an A Priori," 357.
49 Van Til, SCE, 204, emphasis mine.
50 Ibid.
Van Til describes it) and thus as able to utilize both a theistic deductive approach as well as a theistic inductive approach. Van Til, on the basis of his method, can start with the facts of a priori reasoning (e.g., in idealism) or with the facts of physics! Yet he will not for a moment reason univocally with regard to these facts, but always analogically.

Van Til's method has remained consistent up to this point. He has remained transcendental in his analysis of non-Christian thought. In remaining transcendental, however, he has not been stagnant. He has developed his method with penetrating precision. The three developments that we discussed are, first and foremost, his analysis of univocal versus analogical reasoning, the latter of which, as we have tried to show, is consistent with his overall method. Second, he has shown us in more detail what he means by reasoning from the impossibility of the contrary position and placing ourselves in our opponent's position, reasoning ad hominem. Third, we have seen that Van Til's method is not simply presuppositional at the outset but can be, for example, theistically inductive because of the doctrine of creation. These three factors are of great importance as we proceed in our analysis.

IV. The Defense of the Faith

As we continue our analysis of Van Til's method, we turn to his two works, The Defense of the Faith, first published in 1955, and its "supplement," A Christian Theory of Knowledge, published in 1969. These two works are concise enough to show us whether or not Van Til has been consistent in his methodology since the publication of his two syllabi on epistemology and systematic theology. Though the time span between the last section and this has been some twenty years, these two works provide for us somewhat of a summary of Van Til's development as an apologist. The question becomes, has Van Til remained consistent over the past twenty years?

The transcendental argument, as we discussed previously, was also called an argument by presupposition.\(^{51}\) By arguing from the impossibility of the opposite, one must first of all assess the opposite as to its consistency with its own presuppositions, thus laying those presuppositions bare, and then establish "credibility" of one's own presuppositions.

As we turn to Van Til's work, The Defense of the Faith, we see that this argument by presupposition is the very method which Van Til seeks to employ. "The natural man must be shown that on his presupposition or assumption of man's autonomy human predication has no meaning at all. But this negative task cannot be accomplished except on the presupposition that in Christ life does have meaning."\(^{52}\) This, of course, sounds similar to

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\(^{51}\) See Section II.

Van Til's explanation of his method in his dissertation. We will remember that he spoke of his transcendental argument as being "negative." Yet it was also positive in that it sought to show that "without the conception of a self sufficient God our human experience would be meaningless." The first statement quoted above is merely another way of stating the impossibility of the opposite, the negative aspect of a transcendental argument. To say that the natural man can make no sense of his own position, his own predication, is to say that, on his own basis, his position is untenable. The latter statement in the above quote is simply the positive aspect of the transcendental argument. Only on the basis of true presuppositions can one show the impossibility of false presuppositions. There is, therefore, also the task of showing one's own presuppositions to be true. This, again, is done transcendentally. That is, one must show what makes one's presuppositions tenable by showing how they alone "fit the facts" of experience. One must give an account of the presuppositions behind the argument.

Probably the most striking fact in Van Til's discussion of method from this point on is that he rarely speaks of his method as transcendental. This could be the basis for the criticism lodged against Van Til that he moved away from a transcendental approach. The reasons for Van Til's shift in terminology are not apparent. One can only speculate as to the cause of terminological shift. It must be said, however, that although Van Til's terminology has changed, the substance and method of his argumentation have not!

Van Til now asserts that a consistently Christian method of apologetic argument, in agreement with its own basic conception of the starting point, must be by presupposition. To argue by presupposition is to indicate what are the epistemological and metaphysical principles that underlie and control one's method.

This is in agreement with Van Til's approach in his dissertation. The only difference might be that in his dissertation Van Til was concerned to critique "systems" of philosophy, i.e., pragmatism and idealism. Because of his more limited concern in this book, Van Til focuses primarily on other methods.

"The method of reasoning by presupposition may be said to be indirect rather than direct." This seems to be a new twist to Van Til's approach. Yet as we look at what he means by "indirect" we will see that it is merely a matter of emphasis rather than a change in method. By indirect approach Van Til means that

53 Van Til, "God and the Absolute," 3.
54 See n. 1.
55 Ibid., 99.
56 Ibid., 3.
57 Ibid., 100.
the Christian apologist must place himself upon the position of his opponent, assuming the correctness of his method merely for argument's sake, in order to show him that on such a position the "facts" are not facts and the "laws" are not laws. He must also ask the non-Christian to place himself upon the Christian position for argument's sake in order that he may be shown that only upon such a basis do "facts" and "laws" appear intelligible.\(^\text{58}\)

Van Til wants to maintain and, as far as we have shown, has always wanted to maintain, that one cannot simply argue for uninterpreted facts by an appeal to more, and more "reliable" uninterpreted facts. Neither can one argue against abstract laws by an appeal to more abstract laws. One must place one's self upon the foundation of those who speak of uninterpreted facts, for argument's sake alone, in order to show the impossibility of the existence of any uninterpreted (brute) fact. The argument, therefore, is not simply one of brute fact against brute fact, neither is it one of abstract law against abstract law, but rather it is one of ascertaining the possibility of any fact or law at all! This is done by analysis of presuppositions, or, as Van Til puts it, the placing of each upon the other's foundation.\(^\text{59}\) Which method, which starting point, which conclusion is alone tenable? This is what an argument by presupposition asks. Thus, "the starting point, the method, and the conclusion are always involved in one another."\(^\text{60}\) To argue for a truly biblical method of apologetics is to argue for a truly biblical starting point. The two may not be separated from each other. One starts with the God of Scripture and thus one's method always presupposes the God of Scripture. The indirectness, therefore, lies in the fact that one "digs deeper" into the position than the mere declaration of brute fact.

In our analysis of Van Til's transcendental method in Section III, we saw that with regard to the inductive element contained within that method, it was legitimate to speak of a fact in relation to another fact without, at the outset, bringing in the specifically "religious problem." As Van Til stated in the epistemology syllabus, we can start with any fact and challenge our non-Christian friend to make it intelligible. This is an indirect approach! Not only that, Van Til himself says in the book now under discussion that "induction and analytical reasoning [are] part of one process of interpretation."\(^\text{61}\) Both arguments must presuppose the God of Scripture to be intelligible at all. Thus, "every bit of historical investigation, whether it be

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 100-101.

\(^{59}\) We would mention here briefly that this method is quite different from the methods of the Shadoks and Gibis in J. W. Montgomery's "Once upon an A Priori" (Jerusalem and Athens, 380-81). Montgomery concludes that all we are left with is dogmatic shouting of presuppositions. If one is truly presuppositional, as we have outlined it, one analyzes others' as well one's own presuppositions in order to see which really fit "the world." Montgomery makes his position seem somewhat tenable by positing two actual worlds. This not only breaks down the analogy (because two physical worlds do not exist) but destroys his own argument.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 101.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 199.
in the directly Biblical field, archeology, or in general history, is bound to confirm the truth of the claims of the Christian position." In other words, the facts are not able to deny the Christian position! Having said this, Van Til asserts that he "would not talk endlessly about facts and more facts without ever challenging the nonbeliever'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 theistic position." On the basis of this quote, we could say that the transcendental approach can and must contain and control all approaches to any fact! This is the case because, as we have seen, we cannot simply use formal logic, induction, deduction, or any other method without first asking as to the possibility of the methods themselves. Once it has been established that the presupposition behind the methods must be the God of Scripture, then we are not able at the same time to say that the methods may contradict or deny the very presuppositions upon which they rest—hence, Van Til's illustration of the little girl who sits on her daddy's knee and slaps him in the face. It is by virtue of the knee holding the little girl up that she is able to slap her daddy. To take the knee out from under the little girl would cause her to slap in the void. We cannot say that the little girl's slap is able to prove or assume that the daddy's knee is not supporting her. The slap itself is possible only because she sits on her daddy's knee! Thus the support of the daddy is presupposed in the slap itself. This is an illustrative example of the transcendental thrust of Van Til's method. Though it is not explicitly spelled out as "transcendental" in the present work, there is such similarity between the present approach labeled "argument by presupposition" and the previous approach termed "transcendental" that the two approaches are identical.

One final remark on Van Til's approach as an "indirect" approach. It will be remembered that Van Til's main contribution to an elaboration of his transcendental method was his analysis of analogical reasoning as opposed to univocal reasoning. This adherence to analogical reasoning is directly in line with an indirect approach. When one attempts to reason univocally one assumes, by definition, that reality in some sense is of one type. Therefore, when discussing ontology or cosmology or even trees, one assumes that these categories are the same for God at every point as for man. Analogical reasoning, however, is based upon a dualistic conception. This is not dualism. It only affirms that reality is in its essence created and that it is dependent upon the God who created it. To assume this at the outset of our reasoning is to assume that we cannot in any way know directly (originally) as God knows. We know only indirectly, as God reveals that which he already knows completely and exhaustively. Our knowledge, therefore, is indirect, derivative. Again, as we saw in the syllabus on epistemology, the referents are the same but the knowledge of those referents is not. It must be remembered that we are not speaking of knowledge or of

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62 Ibid. Notice that Van Til affirms the validity of a fruitful historical apologetic.
points of reference in the abstract. God says, “I am eternal.” The same words are in God’s mind, and, because revealed to me, in my mind also. Yet what God knows of himself and eternity is self-contained, “analytic,” as Van Til says. What I know of God and his attribute of eternity is time-conditioned, marred by sin, derivative, and incomplete. Nevertheless, it is true because it has its source in the character of God himself. To return to our main point, the indirectness of which Van Til speaks in this present work is according to his transcendental method and the correlative analogical reasoning as that was put forth and elaborated on in the previous section. As Van Til said then, so he continues to say, “Every fact in the universe is what it is by virtue of the place that it has in the plan of God.”

We will look briefly at Van Til’s analysis of Dr. J. O. Buswell. Because Buswell attempts to remain true to the Reformed faith and, in spite of that, explicitly rejects Van Til’s presuppositional approach, it will interest us to see how Van Til himself evaluates Buswell in light of the former’s own method. We will look briefly, then, at Van Til’s A Christian Theory of Knowledge.

Although Van Til quotes Buswell as affirming that “the primary presupposition of the Christian religion is, of course, Jesus Christ,” Van Til nevertheless sees a problem with Buswell’s method. The problem is that “the laws of logic are implied in the Christian’s basic presuppositions.”

This is the case because Buswell wants his presuppositions to be “a conclusion arrived at on the basis of what we consider good and sufficient reasons.” From what we have said thus far, it will be readily recognized that what Buswell means by presupposition and what Van Til means by presupposition are two different things. For Buswell, presuppositions are “arrived at,” and according to Van Til’s analysis of Buswell, they are arrived at through the method of inductive reasoning. Yet, for Van Til, presuppositions play a much more basic role. They are not in any way simply a conclusion to an argument. To the contrary, one must start with and indeed does start with one’s presuppositions. Thus, for Buswell, it is not Jesus Christ who is the determinative starting point for all knowledge, rather it is the inductive method which determines that “presupposition.” Van Til’s criticism of Buswell is in line with his own transcendental approach. “For Buswell,” he says, “presuppositions are not the conditions which make experience intelligible.” This statement is explicitly reminiscent of Van Til’s own analysis of a transcendental argument. We cannot simply arrive at our presuppositions. To do so would be to deny, at some point, an argument by

64 Ibid., 204.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
presupposition. That is, if we arrive at our presuppositional argumentations then we have employed a method other than one of presuppositional argumentation. We must, of necessity, start with our presuppositions and arrive at our presuppositions. The two are correlative. We must not try to have one without the other. A presupposition for Van Til is not simply a theoretical axiom but is a platform, a position upon which one must stand in order further to conclude that which is in line with the former.

This brings up the sticky point of circular argumentation. Contrary to being a hindrance to the transcendental argument, circular reasoning is necessitated by the argument itself. We quote first from The Defense of the Faith, then from the epistemology syllabus, to show that Van Til has been consistent in this area as well.

To admit one's own presuppositions and to point out the presuppositions of others is therefore to maintain that all reasoning is, in the nature of the case, circular reasoning.

Unless we are larger than God we cannot reason about him any other way, than by a transcendental or circular argument. The refusal to admit the necessity of circular reasoning is itself an evident token of opposition to Christianity.70

A little earlier in the same paragraph Van Til identifies circular reasoning with the method of implication. Thus, the method of implication, the transcendental argument, argument by presupposition, all necessitate circular reasoning because all are essentially the same method. This is the case because presuppositions are "ultimates." That is, one may not "get behind" them but they alone are what make any fact intelligible.

Buswell, on the other hand, wants a purely inductive method. In this method, says he, "facts are observed and implications of facts are inferred, leading to more or less probability in conclusions, with more or less cogency."71 The implications of this conclusion are dangerous for the Christian. Because Buswell wants to employ the method of induction, one might even say of linear inference, he can do no more than conclude for a god who probably exists. This god, depending on the cogency of the argument, may or may not exist. Buswell has not asked as to the possibility of any fact and of every fact because he has sought for abstract induction. He has not even asked as to the possibility of his own method. Thus he has not been transcendental. His conclusions are as unbiblical as his starting point and his method. While thinking that the ontological, cosmological, teleological, anthropological, and moral arguments for the existence of God are valid in themselves, he has failed to ask as to the origin and meaning of being, the world, purpose, man, and ethics. Thus he is left with a finite god whose existence is only probable even after the "proofs" have been given.

70 Van Til, The Defense of the Faith, 101; SCE, 12, emphasis mine.
71 Quoted by Van Til in A Christian Theory of Knowledge, 279, from Buswell's Systematic Theology 1.78.
We must conclude our brief summary of Van Til’s method in the above mentioned works. It should be obvious that Van Til has not changed his method or the substance of it at any point in his career thus far. As we have seen, though the name of the method is different, “argument by presupposition” is the same as “transcendental argument.” Van Til still affirms up to this point in his career that it is the God of Scripture who alone can give predication any intelligible meaning and who alone must be the original interpreter of any and every fact of the universe.

V. Conclusion

H. G. Stoker, in his article in Jerusalem and Athens, told Van Til that

by using your transcendent method, . . . [you] investigate the very ultimate conditions of human knowledge as they concern God and so forth, and criticize chance and brute facts as the ultimate conditions of the non-Christian philosophies and empirical sciences concerned. In this respect your theory of knowledge has attained a depth (or should I say a height) that the transcendental theory of Dooyeweerd—from the nature of his procedure—does not attain.

The primary controversy in the short debate between Dooyeweerd and Van Til dealt with the fundamental problem of method. Dooyeweerd held that his method was truly transcendental while charging that Van Til’s was simply transcendent (i.e., uncritical of its own position) by failing to ask as to the presuppositions which are at the root of that position. Van Til’s method is, according to Dooyeweerd, dogmatic.

It is for that reason that we quote Stoker above as affirming the transcendental character of Van Til’s approach. As late in his career as 1971, when Jerusalem and Athens was published, Van Til has remained consistent with his fundamental approach first set forth in 1927!

A study of Van Til’s answer to Dooyeweerd in Jerusalem and Athens will confirm that Van Til is still concerned to argue transcendentally. One quote from that answer will suffice.

You see then, Dr. Dooyeweerd, that I hold two points about Christian apologetics which apparently you do not hold. In the first place I believe that Christian apologetics, and in particular Reformed apologetics, is not really transcendental in its method unless it says at the outset of its dialogue with non-believers that the Christian position must be accepted on the authority of the self-identifying Christ of Scripture as the presupposition of human predication in any field.

72 Geehan, Jerusalem and Athens, 36-37.
Then second, I believe that a Christian apologist must place himself for argument's sake upon the position of the non-believer and point out to him that he has to presuppose the truth of the Christian position even to oppose it. I saw a little girl one day on a train sitting on the lap of her "daddy" slaaping him in the face. If the "daddy" had not held her on his lap she would not have been able to slap him.74

Van Til can only be seen as consistently applying his penetrating and ingenious method to unbelief throughout his career!

We conclude that Van Til, while developing, expanding, and elaborating his approach throughout his career as an apologist, never wavered from his fundamental conviction that God is the presupposition behind all thought and all life. Whatever man thinks and whatever he does, God is there sustaining and maintaining.

The transcendental method, argument by presupposition, the method of implication, ad hominem argument are all different ways of saying the same thing, that every "thing" must be interpreted in the light of the Triune God. This was and has been Van Til's passion. May those of us who desire to carry on in his line be granted the biblical methodological consistency that was his throughout his career!

Grace Presbyterian Church/Pursuit Ministries
P.O. Box 9063
Amarillo, Texas 79105

74 Geehan, Jerusalem and Athens, 98.