

# My Credo

**By: Cornelius Van Til**

The following essay was taken from the book, *Jerusalem and Athens* which was written as a Festschrift for Dr. Van Til on his birthday. This book is still in print and available from P&R Publishing Company which may be contacted at the address below. [scanned by: Ed Walsh for CRTA]

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## Dedication

The critical essays in this book are dedicated to Cornelius Van Til on the occasion of his 75th birthday and 40th anniversary as professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, in recognition of his tireless efforts in the statement and defense of the Christian faith.

As author of such books as *The New Modernism*, *The Defense of the Faith*, *Christianity and Barthianism*, and *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, his influence has been both strategic and controversial. The extensive impact of this original and penetrating Christian apologist has been aided by the private distribution of numerous "unpublished" class syllabi. His lectures, whether given in Roman Catholic, Jewish, fundamental, liberal, or Calvinistic institutions are equally challenging and demanding. Yet for all this prodigious activity, the influence of Cornelius Van Til has been spread mostly by his students with whom in the course of his forty years at Westminster he shared his convictions and concerns.

Van Til is not only a philosopher and theologian. A born teacher, he is an outstanding and persuasive lecturer and preacher, possessing, in his lecturing, the gift of simplicity. A warm-hearted and humble man, he draws love and loyalty to himself and gives it with equal readiness.

Cornelius Van Til was Born into a large family on May 3, 1895, in The Netherlands. His family migrated to the United States in 1905, when he was ten years old, settling in Indiana. They farmed near the borderline of Indiana and Illinois, close to Chicago, at Highland.

The family faith was Reformed, and church membership Christian Reformed. Van Til's great love and abiding interest in Kuyper and his works are a notable aspect of the man and date back to his youth. Dr. Van Til is a graduate of Calvin College (A.B.), of Princeton Theological Seminary (Th.M.), and Princeton University (Ph.D.). In 1925 while still a student he married a long-time home-town friend, Miss Rena Klooster.

After a year in the pastorate he spent one year (1928-1929) as Instructor of Apologetics at Princeton Theological Seminary. After the reorganization of that institution he was asked to remain by the new Board of Control but chose rather to accept the position of Professor of Apologetics in the newly formed Westminster Theological Seminary.

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## **My Credo, by Cornelius Van Til**

How can I express my appreciation adequately for the honor you have conferred on me by your contributions to this Festschrift? I shall try to do so first by setting forth in this, my "Credo," a general statement of my main beliefs as I hold them today. Then I shall deal separately with the problems and objections some of you have raised in respect to my views in separate response to the essays themselves. I hope that by doing this we may be of help to one another as together we present the name of Jesus as the only name given under heaven by which men must be saved.

### **I. The Self-Attesting Christ of Scripture**

The self-attesting Christ of Scripture has always been my starting point for everything I have said. What this implies for various problems will appear more clearly, I hope, as I go along. Allow me in this section to illustrate what I mean by recalling the incident of Jesus' healing of the man who had the palsy. When Jesus said to this man, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee," certain of the scribes reasoned in their hearts, "Why does this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?" (Mark 2:5, 6). Over and over "the Jews" charged Jesus with blasphemy. For it they nailed him to the cross.

These "Jews," call them "Pharisees," were very "orthodox." They swore by Moses and the prophets. Abraham was their father, and the God of Abraham was their God. "We thank thee, God, that we are not polytheists as other nations are." There is and there can be only one God. "Hear; O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4).

When Jesus, therefore, claimed to be one with the Father they were certain that he blasphemed. What an outrage for Jesus, a mere man, to claim that he was the Son of God. Away with him from the face of the earth!

What zeal this was for the one God, the only true God, the God of Moses! Of course, they did not like to put any man to the torture of crucifixion. But the God of Moses wills it; we must save the people from their sentimental love for this man. Soon it appeared that they had indeed "saved" the people. "Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber" (John 18:40).

The irony of it all—the leaders of the Jews did not love and serve the God of Abraham at all! Like the nations about them, and especially the Greeks, they had become worshipers of the creature rather than the Creator! They made their own apostate moral consciousness the standard of right and wrong. With their notion of a "living Torah" they were able, so they thought, to do justice to the changelessness of the law and, at the same time, to live according to the principles of the "new morality."

It is in the face of this Pharisaic opposition that Jesus' assertion of his identity as Son of God and Son of man stands out in its significance. Every fact in dispute between the Pharisees and Jesus involved the ultimate claim that Jesus was the Son of God, and, as such, the promised Messiah. Jesus told the Pharisees, in effect, that they had twisted beyond recognition the meaning of every word of the Old Testament.

It was natural, therefore, that they should think of Jesus as a blasphemer. Not that the idea of blasphemy could have any meaning on their view of things. If Jesus' claim to be the promised Messiah, the Son of God, were true, then they, the Pharisees, were reactionaries, revolutionaries, apostates. They were intellectually, morally, and spiritually wrong in everything they said and did. Could they admit that Jesus was right when he said that they were of their father the devil? Could Jesus be right when he said that though they were lineal descendants of Abraham yet, spiritually, Abraham was not their father at all? Could Jesus be right when he said: "But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you" (John 15:42)?

As Christians we are not, of ourselves, better or wiser than were the Pharisees. Christ has, by his word and by his Spirit, identified himself with us and thereby, at the same time, told us who and what we are. As a Christian I believe first of all in the testimony that Jesus gives of himself and his work. He says he was sent into the world to save his people from their sins. Jesus asks me to do what he asked the Pharisees to do, namely, read the Scriptures in light of this testimony about himself. He has sent his Spirit to dwell in my heart so that I might believe and therefore understand all things to be what he says they are. I have by his Spirit learned to understand something of what Jesus meant when he said: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. I have learned something of what it means to make my every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, being converted anew every day to the realization that I understand no fact aright unless I see it in its proper relation to Christ as Creator- Redeemer of me and my world. I seek his kingdom and its righteousness above all things else. I now know by the testimony of his Spirit with my spirit that my labor is not in vain in the Lord. "I know whom I have believed and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day" (II Tim. 1:12, NASB). All of my life, my life in my family, my life in my church, my life in society, and my life in my vocation as a minister of the gospel and a teacher of Christian apologetics is unified under the banner Pro Rege! I am not a hero, but in Christ I am not afraid of what man may do to me. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the ongoing march of victory of the Christ to whom all power in heaven and on earth is given.

## **II. Christ Writes Me a Letter**

I have never met Christ in the flesh. No matter, he has written me a letter. Not he, himself. He chose helpers. By his Spirit, the Spirit of truth, these helpers wrote what he wanted me to know. From heaven my Lord then sent his Holy Spirit on Pentecost to dwell in the hearts of all those whom he came into the world to redeem. I am, by his grace, one of them. Together we form the church, his people. In us and through us he establishes his kingdom. As a soldier of the cross, strengthened by his power in the inward man, I fight daily against Satan, who seeks at every point to establish his own kingdom in the hearts and to the hurt of men.

In his letter Jesus tells me that all men are made of one blood because all are created by God. As such all men are God's children; they all bear his image. But the first pair, from whom all later generations of men came "by ordinary generation," sinned against God. God set before them the ideal of joy which he would give them if they led their lives in the direction he indicated to them. That direction was to be marked by love and obedience to their Maker and benefactor. But our first parents had a person-to-person confrontation with Satan. Satan told them how free he had

become since declaring his independence of God. To be self-determining man must surely be able to decide the "nature of the good"-regardless of what God says about it.

Adam saw Satan's point. "You are right, Satan, I must first decide whether such a God as often speaks to us (1) knows what the 'good' for us is, (2) controls history so that he can determine what will happen if we disobey him, and (3) has the right to demand obedience from us. After I decide these issues, and if the answer is 'yes,' then I shall obey him. Certainly not before."

But by taking to himself the right to decide these issues, Adam had already decided them-in the negative. If God is such a one as knows the "good" for us, controls whatsoever comes to pass, and has the right of unquestioned obedience, then man obeys his word because it is his word. Adam, in disobedience, became a "free" man.

But Satan miscalculated. Refusing to believe that God controls the course of history, Satan began his attempt to take over the whole of mankind to himself. Having succeeded with the first Adam, he tried his trick on the Second Adam. But the Second Adam replied to Satan's scheme, "Get thee behind me, Satan," and, "It is written"! The Second Adam both knew and received the Word of God, for he was God, the Word. He lived his life according to what he, in his program, had written down in advance. Even the words, "I thirst," spoken on the cross, were spoken in accord with what was written.

Now what was written consisted chiefly in his promise to his people that he would, in the face of Satan and his hosts, redeem them from their sin. He would be their Great High Priest by giving himself as their substitute. "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." He would be their Prophet, like unto Moses, proclaiming the final word of deliverance to his people, establishing them in the truth in the face of Satan's effort to make them believe the lie. He would be their King, establishing his elect nation of "holy ones" against the effort of Satan to establish a kingdom based upon the self-righteousness of the Pharisees.

He came, he saw, he conquered: there was a transition from wrath to grace in history. The new age had come, the age of grace and glory. In his letter Jesus tells us of this new age. Much of this letter comes to us through his servant Paul. Much of the early growth of Christ's kingdom came through the work of his servant Paul. How did Paul tell the story of the Christ?

In Romans Paul tells us of the wayward path of mankind. Both Jews and Greeks, being from the beginning of the world confronted with the truth of God, have nevertheless exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. Since they chose not to have God in their knowledge, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against these men who hold back the revelation of God as if it were some awful, destructive flood. Such a flood it will be for men who refuse to turn back to God through his Son.

As children of Adam they have always made and continue to make the effort required to cover-up the truth about themselves and God. They see every fact as other than it really is. By means of their literature-drama, poetry, and philosophy-they try to prove to themselves that the world is not the estate of God and that they are not made in his image. Both Jew and Gentile have blinded themselves to the true state of affairs about themselves and their world-about their past, their

present and their future. Not being creatures of God, they could not have sinned against such a one. They do not need, therefore, the atoning death of Christ for the remission of their sins. As Stephen said of the Jews, so also it must be said of the Gentiles, that they have always resisted the Holy Spirit-to their own damnation.

In his address on the Areopagus Paul proclaims the name of the resurrected Christ to the Gentile covenant-breakers, would- be fugitives from divine judgment. Paul does not place himself on their level in order with them to investigate the nature of being and knowledge in general, to discover whether the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob might possibly exist. He tells them straight out that what they claim not to know, he knows. He tells them that their so-called ignorance is culpable, for God is as near to them as their own selves. He tells them, therefore, to repent of their worship of idols, to turn to the living God, lest they stand without the robes of righteousness before the resurrected Lord Christ on the day of judgment.

Paul's preaching to the Greeks was similar to Noah's preaching to the men of his time. When at first Noah claimed that God had given him a word of warning which men reject only to their own peril, they were nevertheless sure that they could dispose of such claims in terms of their own wisdom. There were, they said, no "facts" or "valid reasons" to support Noah's claim, unless one accept the "fact" that God spoke to Noah. But there was only Noah's word for this and who was Noah? But when the last men were drowning they saw themselves and their wisdom for what they really were, namely, foolishness. It was then too late. Even so at the end of time, in the face of the wrath of the Lamb, men will again see themselves and their wisdom for what it is and will call upon the hills to cover them lest they fall into the hands of an angry God.

Paul knew that the Greeks could not identify themselves truly in terms of their philosophy. "Chaos" and "Old Night" were their only substitutes for what Paul told them of the origin and destiny of the world. They tried various combinations of ultimate rationality (unity) and ultimate chance (diversity) in terms such as "form" and "matter" to take the place of creation and providence, but to no satisfaction. Even so, Paul could not prove to the Greeks in their sense of the word "prove," that what they believed was foolishness and what he believed was "good sense." Paul could not adopt the principles of the "free" first Adam to "prove" the principles of the Second Adam. Paul recognized, as did his Greek audience, that his ideas were, all of them, foolishness to the non-Christian mind. The Greeks would not believe any single one of them, much less all of them in their proper relation to each other, unless by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit they were given eyes with which to see the whole truth of God in Christ. Paul knew that the natural man, like Xantippe who is said to have kept on clipping her fingers even though these fingers were all that was left of her above the water, will keep on saying that Christ is wrong and that Satan is right so long as he has breath except the Spirit in mercy give him light and life.

This, then, is the message of the letter written to me and to the whole Church by Christ himself. Ever since I can remember it was of this letter of Christ which my father read to me and to the family. It was also this letter which I heard in church, spoken by the minister of Christ. Every minister in those days had a V.D.M. degree: Verbum Dei Minister. When, therefore, I became a teacher of apologetics it was natural for me to think, not only of my Th.M. and my Ph.D., but

above all of my V.D.M. The former degrees were but means whereby I might be true to the latter degree.

How else, I thought, can anyone be a follower of the Reformation? Calvin and Luther: they expounded the Scriptures for the edification of the church of Christ. They rescued the Bible as the Word of God for the people of God from the apostate church of Rome. When they insisted on the necessity, authority, sufficiency, and the perspicuity of the Scriptures, they rejected in principle the entire Roman theological structure as it was largely based upon the very Greek thought against which Paul so vigorously preached.

Wanting to follow the Reformers, it was natural that I read and appreciated the works of those who before me likewise attempted to do so. I first used the works of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. How basic and how broad was their view! The idea of Scripture, they said, must never be separated from its message.

The Roman Catholics, for example, in separating the two, distort the biblical views of sin and salvation. According to the position of Rome, the transition from sinner to saint is a metaphysical process of elevation on the "scale of being." This Greek-Christian metaphysics of salvation brings with it a false view of the nature of Scripture. Scripture, on this view, cannot be "sufficient." The Roman church adds itself as the continuing organ of revelation to written revelation, therewith achieving the sufficiency which Scripture, of itself, lacks. As Bavinck truly said, the nature of the message of salvation and the nature of Scripture are always involved in one another.

Just so, from the Reformed point of view, all so-called "evangelical" non-Reformed theologies (all those which, although non-Reformed, hold to what J. I. Packer calls the "evangelical equation" of Scripture with the Word of God, such as orthodox Lutheranism, traditional Arminian-Wesleyanism, and synergistic fundamentalism), which have an inadequate view of sovereign grace, have also an inadequate view of Scripture. A God who cannot control history because of countless men with wills not fully dependent on his own can only make salvation a bare "possibility." Christ might have died in vain. Being "free," all men might refuse to exercise their supposedly "God-given- freedom" to "draw their check for 'eternal life' put in the Bank of Heaven for all men." God's plan, to call out a people for himself, might never have been realized. Needless to say, every major teaching of Scripture excludes such a "scheme." God is God. Christ finished the work of salvation for his own. Only those "in Christ" from the foundation of the world died with Christ on the cross. Christ saved his sheep; he did not just make their salvation "possible." The emphasis, therefore, on human autonomy in non-Reformed evangelical theology not only plays havoc with the scriptural message of salvation by grace alone, but distorts the doctrine of Scripture itself by finding the ultimate exegetical tool in the subjective experience of human freedom and by denying to Scripture and the Holy Spirit the power, authority, and necessity of invading the souls of men. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God do not change men, men first agree to be changed! For this reason no non-Reformed theology can properly be called a "theology of the Holy Spirit." A theology which loses the right to be called a "theology of the Holy Spirit" loses also the right to be called "a theology of the Word of God." It is no wonder, therefore, that G. C. Berkouwer speaks of the "isolation of the Reformed view of Scripture."<sup>1</sup>

This point receives even stronger confirmation in the case of existential theology.

If non-Reformed evangelical theologies tend toward subjectivism, modern non-evangelical theology stands on it flat-footed! Take the theology of Karl Barth, for example. The free grace of God, Barth maintained, could not be communicated through a stabilized, objectivized revelation. Orthodox theology, he argues, has reduced the living, active revelation of God to that of a lifeless form. When Barth spoke agreeably, therefore, of verbal inspiration he "actualized" it and therewith fitted it "into his system."<sup>2</sup> In bringing down the Bible to the dimension of "causal relations," orthodoxy brings down the entire religious relation between God and man to the level of impersonal concepts and ideas. Orthodoxy is the theology of the "blessed possessors," the theology of those who control the freedom of God. The God of orthodoxy, indeed the God of Calvinism, is not sovereign! The God of Calvin is not the God of sovereign, universal grace.

We may say, therefore, that the Barthian soteriology of "sovereign, free grace" which comes to us only in our subjectivity entails a radically new view of Scripture itself. The Bible may now be called the Word of God only in so far as it brings this message of subjectivity to us. To say "the Bible is the Word of God," for Barth, does not imply a directly discernible revelation of God in history as we know it.

From these examples of Roman Catholic, Arminian-Wesleyan-Lutheran, and finally modern theology, it is clear (1) that the idea of Scripture can never be separated from the message of Scripture, and (2) that none of these non-Reformed evangelical and modern theologies have a view of Scripture such that the Lord Christ speaks to man with an absolute authority. The self-attesting Christ of Scripture is not absolutely central to these theologies. Just so, he will not be central in any apologetic form to defend them.

### **III. Toward a Christ-Centered Apologetic**

Deciding, therefore, to follow the Reformers in theology, it was natural that I attempt also to do so in apologetics. I turned to such Reformed apologists as Warfield, Greene, and others. What did I find? I found the theologians of the "self-attesting Christ," defending their faith with a method which denied precisely that point! That this was the case may be shown by a brief survey of what I call the "traditional" method of Christian apologetics.

The traditional method, offered first in detail by Thomas Aquinas in its Catholic form and by Joseph Butler in its Protestant form (but being in principle that offered by the very earliest of apologists), is based upon the assumption that man has some measure of autonomy, that the space-time world is in some measure "contingent" and that man must create for himself his own epistemology in an ultimate sense.

The traditional method was concessive on these basic points on which it should have demanded surrender! As such, it was always self-frustrating. The traditional method had explicitly built into it the right and ability of the natural man, apart from the work of the Spirit of God, to be the judge of the claim of the authoritative Word of God. It is man who, by means of his self-established intellectual tools, puts his "stamp of approval" on the Word of God and then, only after that grand act, does he listen to it. God's Word must first pass man's tests of good and evil,

truth and falsity. But once you tell a non-Christian this, why should he be worried by anything else that you say. You have already told him he is quite all right just the way he is! Then the Scripture is not correct when it talks of "darkened minds," "wilful ignorance," "dead men," and "blind people"! With this method the correctness of the natural man's problematics is endorsed. That is all he needs to reject the Christian faith.

Seeing, therefore, the failure of even Reformed theologians and apologists in their efforts to defend consistently the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, it became clear to me that new ground work needed to be done. I did not, however, undertake this task *de novo*. I learned much from other men, just as I did in theology from Kuyper and Bavinck. Since I conceived of Christian apologetics as focusing on the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, it was natural that I should learn most of the development and defense of the doctrine of the person of Christ in the historical, theological development of the church. There are three eras in history in which Christian apologetics was helped forward in the right direction.

The Council of Nicea.-Here, in A.D. 325, the church concluded that the only adequate expression of the teaching of Christ concerning himself and of the apostles concerning God, was in a formulation such that all three persons of the Trinity were equally ultimate. The church rejected the subordination of the Son to the Father in any "ontological" sense. Herman Bavinck points out that herewith was rejected any attempt to unite God with man in terms of some change wherein God ceased to be himself as God.

The Chalcedon Creed.-This formulation of the church deals particularly with the difficult question of the relation of the divine to the human "natures" of Christ. Adopted in A.D. 451, it says that the divine and human "nature" of Christ are related unconfusedly changeably, indivisibly, and inseparably. The first two adjective were undirected against the Eutychians, the second two against the Nestorians.

This effort of the church to understand the Christ was theological and therefore apologetically crucial. The work of Christ remains cloudy until the biblical teaching with respect to his person is clearly understood. Yet the true significance of his person becomes clear only as we understand what he has accomplished for his people. For this latter insight we must turn to the Reformed confessions. They give more exact expression to the work of the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, as part of the continuing historical work of Christ as he is now with us.

The Reformed Confessions.-We take the Belgic Confession as illustrative: "We receive these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith, believing, without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Spirit witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling" (Art. V).

It appears, then, that not until the time of the Reformers do we find the church, as the church, confessing before the world anything like an adequate view of the Holy Spirit as the one who ministers to us, as he did to the disciples and apostles, the very Word of Christ. Only in the



Reformed creeds do we find the Spirit of Christ to be an essential part of the work of Christ in saving his sheep.

In these three areas we see the church's increasing understanding of the person and work of Christ. Individual theologians, too, helped the cause forward. One such was Tertullian. Another was Augustine. Both men had very "high" views of Christ and his work. Both saw the centrality of the Holy Spirit to the redemptive work of Christ. They attempted to be consistent with these views in their arguments with non-believers. Tertullian was, in this respect, more successful in this attempt than Augustine.

In the case of Tertullian, we have, says Warfield, a remarkable instance of the right man for the right place and time: "the real father of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity."<sup>3</sup> With a very high view of Christ, Tertullian could say, "After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the gospel no need of research. When we come to believe, we have no desire to believe anything else; for we begin by believing there is nothing else which we have to believe."<sup>4</sup> This statement is not for Tertullian a mere formal submission to Scripture. For Tertullian it is Christ who, in the Scriptures, gives us the "system" of truth which men must believe. "What you must seek is what Christ taught ...." For Tertullian all search for truth is meaningless unless it is in the light of the basic truth which is before men in the Scriptures, the word through which Christ speaks to us from heaven. But Tertullian was no obscurantist or literalist. "Provided the essence of Truth is not disturbed, you may seek and discuss as much as you like."<sup>5</sup> Having set forth this "system" of truth which confronts men in the Christ of Scripture, Tertullian concludes: "From this point onwards I shall contest the ground of my opponents' appeal."<sup>6</sup> Men are not to determine in advance of meeting Christ what his nature must be. for "our Lord himself declared, while he lived on earth, what he was, what he had been, how he was fulfilling the Father's will, what he was laying down as man's duty."<sup>7</sup>

It is clear that I learned from Tertullian. But Tertullian was nevertheless, like us all, a son of his times. He never succeeded of ridding himself of the stranglehold which the Logos- speculation of his predecessors had on him. "The Logos was in principle God conceived in relation to things of time and space: God, therefore, not as absolute, but as relative. In its very essence, therefore, the Logos conception likewise involved the strongest subordinationism. The Logos was therefore necessarily conceived as reduced divinity- divinity, so to speak, at the periphery rather than at the center of its conception."<sup>8</sup> So observes Warfield.

Here, then, we see a truly great Christian theologian who, while developing the idea of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, falls into the ditch of Greek speculation calculated to deny this Christ in toto. In his argument with the Gnostics he adopts not a mere "form" but the very content of their own emanation theories, hoping to convince them that he but wishes to add "Christ" to their already adequate ideas of the origin of man and the world. He does not even attempt to "contest the ground of his opponents" as he set out himself to do. He failed, therefore, to be consistent with a method which he himself proposed. It fell to Calvin to follow the method of Tertullian, cleansing it of its Logos theology.

I have said that the development of the church's doctrine of Christ took place in three basic steps and that these three steps were necessary prerequisites for a truly biblical apologetics. Further I

observed that Tertullian was a man ahead of his time, both in Christology and in apologetic method. The third step, the Reformed creeds, was basically an expression of the theology of John Calvin. We shall understand the third step more fully, therefore, if we look in detail at the Christology of Calvin. In doing so we shall also see a development and application of the method of Tertullian and therewith the beginnings of a Christ-centered apologetics.

For Calvin speculation about God, independently of Scripture, is excluded. Natural theology, therefore, is also excluded. Natural theology starts with man as autonomous and with the world as "given." Natural theologians assume that "reason" and "logic" and "fact" are "religiously neutral." They are but "tools" by which man may and must determine what is and what is not possible.

Now if there is anything which is basic to the ideas of the Reformation it is that which Calvin expresses at the very outset of his *Institutes*: man is what God in Christ through Scripture says he is. This God is triune. "The tripersonality of God is conceived by Calvin, . . . not as something added to the complete idea of God, or as something into which God develops in the process of his existing, but as something which enters into the very idea of God, with out which he cannot be conceived in the truth of his being."<sup>9</sup> For Calvin the doctrine of the Trinity was involved in his experience of salvation "in the Christian's certainty that the Redeeming Christ and Sanctifying Spirit are each Divine Persons."<sup>10</sup> "The main thing was, he insisted, that men should heartily believe that there is but one God, whom only they should serve; but also that Jesus Christ our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit the Sanctifier is each no less this one God than God the Father to whom we owe our being; while yet these three are distinct personal objects of our love and adoration."<sup>11</sup> It was because of his deep religious interest in making the triune God of Scripture the starting point of all his theology that Calvin found it necessary to exclude every last vestige of subordinationism which might even be said to be sanctioned by the language of Nicea. He therefore used the word *αὐτόθεος* with respect to the Son of God.

The significance of this for Christian apologetics should be clear at once. "All those who were for any reason or in any degree unable or unwilling to allow Christ a deity in every respect equal to that of the Father were necessarily offended by the vindication to him of the ultimate divine quality of self-existence."<sup>12</sup> Calvin explicated the person of Christ solely in scriptural terms, i.e., his method is exegetical rather than speculative. As such his method is simple: who Christ is depends on Christ's self-identification. If Christ is who he says he is, then all speculation is excluded, for God can swear only by himself. To find out what man is and who God is, one can only go to Scripture. Faith in the self-attesting Christ of the Scriptures is the beginning, not the conclusion, of wisdom! It was, therefore, not until the fully developed Trinitarian theology of Calvin, which says that Christ is authoritative because *αὐτόθεος*, that there was therewith developed a truly Christian methodology of theology and of apologetics. The method by which a Christian develops the content of his faith must not be denied by the method he uses to defend that content. Calvin, seeing this, denied all speculation and natural theology as "avenues" to faith. Rather, faith and understanding are pure gifts of free grace.

The apologetic method thus far outlined will be made clearer if we consider an objection, indeed the "stock" objection, to such an approach as Calvin's. It comes from Stuart Cornelius Hackett in his *The Resurrection of Theism*. We must, says Hackett, have "a rational justification for the

metaphysical ultimate" which we believe in. Calvinism denies this. The Calvinists say that God has "created rational men as mere puppets of his sovereignty. But if it seems to be the case that man is under obligation to believe the gospel and that he must accept Christ as Savior before the Spirit of God regenerates the heart-if, I say, man is a moral and rational agent confronted with a revelation for the acceptance of which he is morally and rationally responsible-then let the presuppositionalist framework be consigned to the irrationalism that is written so plainly through its structure .... With her opponents thus languishing in defeat, reason pushes on to consider experience itself to determine whether God is real."<sup>13</sup>

With these words Hackett sums up the issue between himself as an Arminian and myself as a Calvinist very well. It goes without saying that we two have radically different beliefs as to what the Bible says about man and his sinfulness and about the Holy Spirit and his sovereignty. Indeed, the issues between us are total. There are no "fundamentals" in common between us: we will necessarily understand creation-providence, the fall of man, the atonement of Christ, his sinlessness and his resurrection, his second coming and his ultimate triumph, the doctrine of Scripture, the nature of saving faith-we will necessarily understand, I say, these doctrines in different ways. Hacker's Christian faith and my Christian faith, which we both desire non-Christians to accept, are radically different. They are different not only in their content but also in the very method of their construction.

I make two broad points in reference to this. First, any non-Christian epistemology, i.e., any theory of knowledge based upon principles acceptable per se to the "mind of the flesh," (and therefore those of Hackett's own method) is doomed to utter failure; not only failure as an avenue to Christian faith, but as an avenue to any form of knowledge whatsoever. This I think can be, and has been repeatedly, shown by myself and many others. Second, Hackett's basic charge that Calvinism is determinist and irrational is simply not true. First, as to the charge that it is determinist and that men are but "puppets," one need only read Calvin himself to be persuaded that such an understanding of Calvinism is false. The Calvinist notion of divine sovereignty has nothing to do with the philosopher's notion of physical, causal determinism. I have developed at length in other places the covenantal, exhaustively personalist view of providence which is clearly part of Calvin's thought.

As to the charge that the Calvinist position is "irrational," I assume that Hackett cannot mean that it is inconsistent. After all, one of the so-called "sins" of Calvin was that he was too deductive, too logical, in drawing implications from this and that in Scripture, that in "logicizing" theology he destroyed its heart. I assume that what Hackett means is that on the Calvinist position man is called upon to repent of his sins and accept Christ without having, reasons for doing so. The Calvinist cannot give reasons because he has no point of contact with the non-Christian. There are, for the Calvinist, no reasons to which he might appeal in an effort to get his friend to accept Christ.

In response to this I observe that this also is not the case. Hackett assumes that unless one finds a point of contact with the natural man by way of agreeing with him on his false views of man and the world then one has no point of contact with him at all. Against this position, I maintain, with Calvin following Paul, that my point of contact lies in the actual state of affairs between men as the Bible tells us of it. It is Hackett who has no real point of contact, for his lies in what men

imagine (and, to be sure, "agree") to be the case. The Calvinist's point of contact is rooted in the actual state of affairs. All things are what they are because of their relation to the work of the triune God as reported in Scripture. Hackett's "point of contact" as an evangelical Arminian is an essentially Kantian epistemology, an epistemology in terms of which men stand utterly unrelated to one another and are, at the same time, reduced to relations of one another.

To look for a point of contact with the unbeliever in the unbeliever's notions of himself and his world is to encourage him in his wicked rebellion and to establish him in his self-frustration. We have already seen that the natural man is under the self-imposed delusion that he is "free," i.e., independent of the control and counsel of God, and that the "facts" about him are also "free" in this way. He may pretend to be "open-minded" and ready to consider whether God exists. But in being so "neutral" he commits the same sin as Adam and Eve.

Why seek truth where only a lie is to be found? Can the non-Christian tell us and therefore the Christ himself what the facts are and how they are related to each other, in what way they cohere, while yet excluding creation and providence? If he can, and if he can tell us truly, then the Christian story simply is not true! Because the natural man cannot do this, because the Christian message is true, I have sought and still seek to reap the benefit of a theology in which the triune God of Scripture has the initiative in salvation.

The Calvinist's idea of an actual as opposed to an imagined point of contact is not just some useless notion. It is the only intelligible point of contact possible. The non-Christian holds that pure chance and absolute fate are equally ultimate and mutually correlative limiting concepts or heuristic principles which man uses to explain the fact that we have learned much about the world, that there is order in the world, a uniformity, while there is also continual change and development. But the non-Christian's "explanation" is no explanation at all. To say "it just happens" as an explanation of an event is really to say, "There is no explanation that I know of."

The Calvinist, therefore, using his point of contact, observes to the non-Christian that if the world were not what Scripture says it is, if the natural man's knowledge were not actually rooted in the creation and providence of God, then there could be no knowledge whatsoever. The Christian claims that non-Christians have made and now make many discoveries about the true state of affairs of the universe simply because the universe is what Christ says it is. The unbelieving scientist borrows or steals the Christian principles of creation and providence every time he says that an "explanation" is possible, for he knows he cannot account for "explanation" on his own. As the image-bearer of God, operating in a universe controlled by God, the unbeliever contributes indirectly and adventitiously to the development of human knowledge and culture.

When Hackett maintains that the Calvinist position is irrational because it cannot give "reasons" for believing, he must mean that on a position such as mine the Christian does not accept the non-Christian scheme wherein the non-Christian determines what are "good reasons" and "valid proofs." This is perfectly true, but this is not irrational. Rather the Christian offers the self-attesting Christ to the world as the only foundation upon which a man must stand in order to give any "reasons" for anything at all. The whole notion of "giving reasons" is completely destroyed

by any ontology other than the Christian one. The Christian claims that only after accepting the biblical scheme of things will any man be able to understand and account for his own rationality.

But I have said enough so that readers should have a clear picture of the drift of my thought. Nevertheless, I think it might be helpful if in a final section I put, in only outline form, the total picture. This will make it easier for the contributors and the general reader, as they go on to the rest of this Festschrift, to refer back and see at a glance what my position is.

#### **IV. The Total Picture**

##### **A. My problems with the "traditional method."**

1. This method compromises God himself by maintaining that his existence is only "possible" albeit "highly probable," rather than ontologically and "rationally" necessary.
2. It compromises the counsel of God by not understanding it as the only all-inclusive, ultimate "cause" of whatsoever comes to pass.
3. It compromises the revelation of God by:
  - a. Compromising its necessity. It does so by not recognizing that even in Paradise man had to interpret the general (natural) revelation of God in terms of the covenantal obligations placed upon him by God through special revelation. Natural revelation, on the traditional view, can be understood "on its own."
  - b. Compromising its clarity. Both the general and special revelation of God are said to be unclear to the point that man may say only that God's existence is "probable."
  - c. Compromising its sufficiency. It does this by allowing for an ultimate realm of "chance" out of which might come "facts" such as are wholly new for God and for man. Such "facts" would be uninterpreted and unexplainable in terms of the general or special revelation of God.
  - d. Compromising its authority. On the traditional position the Word of God's self-attesting characteristic, and there with its authority, is secondary to the authority of reason and experience. The Scriptures do not identify them selves, man identifies them and recognizes their "authority" only in terms of his own authority.
4. It compromises man's creation as the image of God by thinking of man's creation and knowledge as independent of the Being and knowledge of God. On the traditional approach man need not "think God's thoughts after him."
5. It compromises man's covenantal relationship with God by not understanding Adam's representative action as absolutely determinative of the future.
6. It compromises the sinfulness of mankind resulting from the sin of Adam by not understanding man's ethical depravity as extending to the whole of his life, even to his thoughts

and attitudes.

7. It compromises the grace of God by not understanding it as the necessary prerequisite for "renewal unto knowledge." On the traditional view man can anti must renew himself unto knowledge by the "right use of reason."

### **B. My understanding of the relationship between Christian and non-Christian, philosophically speaking.**

1. Both have presuppositions about the nature of reality:

a. The Christian presupposes the triune God and his redemptive plan for the universe as set forth once for all in Scripture.

b. The non-Christian presupposes a dialectic between "chance" and "regularity," the former accounting for the origin of matter and life, the latter accounting for the current success of the scientific enterprise.

2. Neither can, as finite beings, by means of logic as such, say what reality must be or cannot be.

a. The Christian, therefore, attempts to understand his world through the observation and logical ordering of facts in self-conscious subjection to the plan of the self attesting Christ of Scripture.

b. The non-Christian, while attempting an enterprise similar to the Christian's, attempts nevertheless to use "logic" to destroy the Christian position. On the one hand, appealing to the non-rationality of "matter," he says that the chance-character of "facts" is conclusive evidence against the Christian position. Then, on the other hand, he maintains like Parmenides that the Christian story cannot possibly be true. Man must be autonomous, "logic" must be legislative as to the field of "possibility" and possibility must be above God.

3. Both claim that their position is "in accordance with the facts."

a. The Christian claims this because he interprets the facts and his experience in the light of the revelation of the self-attesting Christ in Scripture. Both the uniformity and the diversity of facts have at their foundation the all-embracing plan of God.

b. The non-Christian claims this because he interprets the facts and his experience in the light of the autonomy of human personality, the ultimate "givenness" of the world and the amenability of matter to mind. There can be no fact that denies man's autonomy or attests to the world's and man's divine origin.

4. Both claim that their position is "rational."

a. The Christian does so by claiming not only that his position is self-consistent but that he can explain both the seemingly "inexplicable" amenability of fact to logic and the necessity and usefulness of rationality itself in terms of Scripture.

b. The non-Christian may or may not make this same claim. If he does, the Christian maintains that he cannot make it good. If the non-Christian attempts to account for the amenability of fact to logic in terms of the ultimate rationality of the cosmos, then he will be crippled when it comes to explaining the "evolution" of men and things. If he attempts to do so in terms of pure "chance" and ultimate "irrationality" as being the well out of which both rational man and a rationally amenable world sprang, then we shall point out that such an explanation is in fact no explanation at all and that it destroys predication.

**C. My proposal, therefore, for a consistently Christian methodology of apologetics is this:**

1. That we use the same principle in apologetics that we use in theology: the self-attesting, self-explanatory Christ of Scripture.

2. That we no longer make an appeal to "common notions" which Christian and non-Christian agree on, but to the "common ground" which they actually have because man and his world are what Scripture says they are.

3. That we appeal to man as man, God's image. We do so only if we set the non-Christian principle of the rational autonomy of man against the Christian principle of the dependence of man's knowledge on God's knowledge as revealed in the person and by the Spirit of Christ.

4. That we claim, therefore, that Christianity alone is reason able for men to hold. It is wholly irrational to hold any other position than that of Christianity. Christianity alone does not slay reason on the altar of "chance."

5. That we argue, therefore, by "presupposition." The Christian, as did Tertullian, must contest the very principles of his opponent's position. The only "proof" of the Christian position is that unless its truth is presupposed there is no possibility of "proving" anything at all. The actual state of affairs as preached by Christianity is the necessary foundation of "proof" itself.

6. That we preach with the understanding that the acceptance of the Christ of Scripture by sinners who, being alienated from God, seek to flee his face, comes about when the Holy Spirit, in the presence of inescapably clear evidence, opens their eyes so that they see things as they truly are.

7. That we present the message and evidence for the Christian position as clearly as possible, knowing that because man is what the Christian says he is, the non-Christian will be able to understand in an intellectual sense the issues involved. In so doing, we shall, to a large extent, be telling him what he "already knows" but seeks to suppress. This "reminding" process provides a fertile ground for the Holy Spirit, who in sovereign grace may grant the non-Christian repentance so that he may know him who is life eternal.

I hope that by this, "My Credo," I have been able in a small way sincerely to thank all those who took the time to write for this birthday-book.

- C.V.T.

### Endnotes

1 A chapter by this title is found in G. C. Berkhouwer's *Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1938).

2 G. C. Berkouwer, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

3 B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (New York: Oxford, 1930), p. 107.

4 *Early Latin Theology*, trans. and ed. by S. L. Greenslade, "The Library of Christian Classics," Vol. V, gen. eds., J. Baillie, J. T. McNeill, H. P. Van Dusen (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 36. Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics*, VII.

5 *ibid.*, p. 40.

6 *ibid.*, p. 41.

7 *ibid.*, p. 43.

8 B. B. Warfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

9 B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1956), pp. 190-191.

10 *ibid.*, p. 195. 11. *ibid.*, p. 198. 12. *Ibid.*, p. 251.

11 *ibid.*, p. 198.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 251.

13 Stuart Cornelius Hackett, *The Resurrection of Theism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), pp. 174-175.

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