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# The CALVIN Forum

**The Jungles of Westminster's  
Apologetics**

**An Exercise in Ambiguity**

**Apologetics by Inconsistency**

**American Calvinism:  
A Failure in Leadership**

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# EDITORIAL

## The New Apologetic

IN its next three issues the *Forum* will present a number of critical discussions of the new apologetic at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, two of them appearing in the present number. Most of them have been written by men of the (Reformed) faith whose graduate training has been primarily in the field of philosophy. Accordingly, their discussion will concern primarily the theory of knowledge and they will be occupied with questions such as these. Can the unbeliever now truth? May we legitimately speak of "brute facts," or must we begin with "facts-to-a-mind"? Does knowledge add something to facts otherwise meaningless? Do God's thoughts enter into the being of facts, and if they do, how avoid identifying God with His creation? Can we really know any one thing truly without knowing everything else? Can we say that the universe is logical in the same sense in which a deductive system of propositions is logical? Could the believer and the unbeliever carry on anything like a significant conversation without at least a minimum of common meanings and common presuppositions? These and other questions are expertly handled in the forthcoming articles. Which, naturally, is not to say that they are finally settled.

The present critics of the new apologetic have no quarrel with its Christian theistic position, nor do they question the legitimacy of the attempt to demonstrate the reasonableness of the Christian faith by borrowing from secular philosophers. They seriously question, however, the adequacy and, in fact, the technical correctness with which the new apologetic has done its job. Specifically, they complain (1) that its theory of knowledge, borrowed from the idealist school, logically leads to a species of pantheism, not to theism; (2) that it frequently confuses an argument by presupposition with a rational demonstration; (3) that it sometimes grossly misrepresents the position of secular and Catholic thinkers (It is one thing to reject Aristotle; it is quite another to play up the superiority of the Christian position by contrasting it with a distortion of Aristotle); (4) that it ignores and also confuses recognized meanings of the words "truth" and "knowledge"; (5) that it arbitrarily assigns new and unheard of meanings to certain technical terms in philosophy, thereby confusing issues, raising pseudo-problems, and presenting pseudo-demonstrations of foregone conclusions; and (6) that it tends to put into the idea

of the antithesis a content which can only lead to exaggerated, improbable, and even absurd results.

Again, none of the present writers suspects the proponents of the new apologetic of making anything like a subtle attempt to undermine Christian doctrine. But when theories and presuppositions which can lead only to pantheism are uncritically taken over in order to arrive at theism, the resulting discourse easily reduces to the cabalistic. And, after all, a bad argument for the truth frequently does more damage than a good argument against it. The aim of the present editorial is not to give a digest of the articles hereby introduced but, rather, to provide a certain amount of background for the better appreciation of them.

### I

In asserting that the givens with which we must begin are not facts but "God-interpreted facts," the new apologetic seems to have taken over uncritically the idealist theory of knowledge and truth, a theory leading logically to a kind of pantheism. For the assertion appears to mean that "to be" is identical with "to be interpreted by God." In other words, God's interpretative action enters into the being of a fact (say, a tree, a bar of iron, or a human thought) in such a way as to make its existence identical with God's knowledge. Now if God's knowledge constitutes the facts, the facts must constitute God's knowledge. How, then, can we distinguish God's knowledge from God's creatures?

This is the question of the relation between truth and reality, a question which the idealist handles somewhat as follows. Truth and reality, so he argues, must have a fundamental identity, since if truth is not identical with reality there must be something in reality which is not a content of truth and which, therefore, cannot be a possible object of thought—any thought. But if truth is to be truth, it must contain all of reality in ideal form. Yet that is demonstrably impossible since truth can never, for example, include whatever we feel at the moment, nor can it include the sensible past and the sensible future. Truth and reality, therefore, do not seem to be identical after all. Nevertheless, if in knowledge we must begin with "facts pre-interpreted," they must be identical. Now there is but one way out of this dilemma and that is to regard truth as an *aspect* of reality. Accordingly, reality must be conceived as an all-comprehending Absolute, something behind

and beyond the distinction of subject and object, i.e., the knower and the thing known.

Now if, on the one hand, we identify this Absolute with God, we arrive at a full-blown pantheism—God is the one Reality comprehending all other realities which, in turn, are so many parts or aspects of God. In fact, we could say that God is the one Reality comprehending all illusions, since whatever is not itself the Absolute is not ultimately real. And, on the other hand, if we do not identify God with the Absolute, God must be regarded as something less than the Absolute, i.e., a part or aspect of the Absolute and having, therefore, no final reality in Himself. Well, any theory of knowledge the logic of which pushes one into something like *that* can hardly be considered a happy choice if one wishes to make a case for Christian theism.

## II

The new apologetic maintains that the unbeliever, in rejecting supernatural revelation, rejects the "first premise" of all true reasoning and cannot, therefore, hope to come to a true conclusion. He may be as logical in his argumentation as he pleases, but since he is simply out of touch with reality, his reasoning cannot but end in sheer illusion. Therefore, he cannot really be said to "know anything truly."<sup>1</sup> In short, unless I "know God truly," I cannot know anything truly.

The trouble with a statement of this sort is that it involves enough truth and also enough ambiguity to function as the source of endless futile discussion. The statement involves—or, at least, is associated with—the truth that inasmuch as only God can be said to know everything, so that only He can have the true point of view, therefore God knows truth absolutely. In this sense of knowing, obviously, no finite mind, Christian or unbeliever, can be said to know truth. On the other hand, when I say that in order to come to a true conclusion, I must first know God truly, I hardly mean that I must first know everything God knows. Apparently, therefore, we should distinguish between knowing absolutely (as only God knows) and knowing truly (as, supposedly, only the Christian knows). Just how, then, can I show that the Christian knows partially and yet truly whereas the unbeliever knows partially and yet falsely? Unfortunately, the new apologetic fails to give a satisfactory answer to that question.

The position of the new apologetic finds its analogue in idealism, which teaches that true knowledge of any given fact involves knowledge of the whole universe, a teaching logically following from its theory that one cannot properly speak of objects, since they are but abstractions, but that one must always speak of "objects-to-a-mind" or "objects-to-thought." Tennyson's "flower in the crannied wall" is a reflection in literature of this point of view. In order to know this flower in its final reality, one

<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this discussion we can afford to ignore the tautology involved in this expression.

would presumably have to know all the conditions of its existence, which in the end would involve knowledge of everything. Or, again, in order to give a complete explanatory account of how one billiard ball causes another to move precisely as it does, one would have to give an explanatory account of friction, which would involve an account of gravitation, which in turn would involve the theory of relativity, and which, finally, would involve an account of the entire physical universe. Accordingly, the idealist argues that inasmuch as every object-to-mind obtains its meaning by virtue of its relations to other objects-to-mind, we cannot claim real knowledge of any particular object-to-mind until we know how it is related to all objects-to-mind. This means that in the final analysis we can legitimately speak of but one real object-to-mind, namely, the universe as a whole (variously designated as the Absolute, the Real, the Whole, and so on). Implied in all this is the doctrine that the universe as an object-to-mind so determines any and every particular object-to-mind comprehended within it that in and of themselves they reduce to abstractions, appearances, illusions. Thus the carpenter, the scientist, and the common man in considering, say, the uses of a block of wood or a bar of iron, are not really dealing with realities at all but only with abstractions. They do not really *know* these things because they do not relate them to the universe as a whole.

Now this view of "knowing truly" represents one of those theoretical possibilities which no one would think of acting upon; in fact, only the idealists accept it in theory, and nobody believes it in practice. Naturally, if in order to know one thing truly we must know everything, then if we don't know everything, we don't know anything. Fortunately, we can admit the truth of this and forget it. Obviously both in ordinary discourse and in science one does not have to possess full information about this or that in order to know that the information one does have is not completely false. If I represent half the truth for what it is, namely, half the truth, my representation is evidently true; and it becomes false only if I represent it as more than that. I do not, for example, have to know everything Einstein knows about the theory of relativity in order to assert truly that Newton's theory is only an approximation; and my assertion that the sun is shining does not become truer when Einstein agrees with it. Of course, more people may be inclined to believe the assertion when *he* makes it, but that is something else again.

## III

Applying this peculiar theory of knowledge to the field of religion, the new apologetic argues that the unbeliever cannot "know truly" because he rejects the Christian view of God as the "first premise" in his thinking. And again, as in the case of the idealist's definition of true knowledge, we can accept this proposition and also pay no further attention

tion to it, since it presupposes a very special and not very useful definition of true knowledge. That is not to deny that God is the source, the ultimate ground of all that exists; it is simply to assert that one can have true knowledge of phenomena in the sense of accurate description without including God in the description. Thus I can know, and "know truly," that it is impossible and *why* it is impossible under ordinary conditions to start a fire under water by means of an ordinary match without knowing that God has willed it so and without knowing all there is to be known about chemistry. The Christian, in common with the non-Christian, tests the truth of his assertions about particular things by an appeal to laws, secondary causes, particular characters and qualities as God has determined them. And in doing this he makes neither God nor himself the immediate referent; that is to say, he does not assert that he knows truly that the sun is shining because he believes that God knows it is shining; nor does he say that he knows it is shining because he himself thinks it is shining.

Incidentally, this practice of ignoring the actuality of secondary causes involves the danger of what has been called a "suffocating supernaturalism," a habit of mind in which everything is referred to God in such a way as virtually to identify both natural events and human actions with God's action. In the end we arrive at a kind of dead-end theology consisting of the lone proposition that God does everything and that He acts about as He acts. No one denies this, but its assertion is not particularly useful; like the idealist's assertion that the universe is One, it amounts to a truism which cancels out no matter what else we may say about God and the universe. The fact remains that if, for example, I am to be justified by faith, it is I who must exercise faith; God does not do this for me. Of course, I need God's grace in order to believe, but it is I and not God who does the believing—or the doubting, the repenting, and the suffering.

In other words, if a human being, believer or unbeliever, wishes to gain true knowledge of a tree or a bar of iron in terms of secondary causes, he must submit his thinking to the objective existence of these things and their qualities as God has *established them*. Now by the grace of God the believer may see the glory of the Lord in these things—and the unbeliever is doubtless the poorer for not seeing it—but that does not transform the believer into an expert botanist or physicist. Conversion did not make a Euclid out of the Philippian jailor. And any system of apologetics the presuppositions of which involve the denial of such obvious facts, whatever its merit in other respects, will not impress an honest and intelligent unbeliever. One supposes, however, that apologetics is not only for the edification of the saints but also for the refutation of normally reasonable and educated sinners. Nor will it do to answer

that, of course, the truth of God will always seem silly to the unregenerate, for the answer to that one is this: An apologetic which results in conclusions going counter to what everybody knows to be everyday fact may constitute a lofty exhibition of the gift of speaking in unknown tongues, but it is not apologetics. Apologetics presumably has for one of its purposes that of showing the uninitiates that what the initiates believe is not exactly drivel.

This, incidentally, brings to mind the aforesaid complaint regarding the rather arbitrary use of terms found in the new apologetic. The apologist who borrows from the field of philosophy will do well to keep to the meanings which the history of philosophy has assigned to certain terms, since otherwise he will either be misunderstood or accused of equivocating.<sup>2</sup> And it is no answer to say that in philosophy the Christian and the non-Christian cannot even approximate identical meanings whenever they use identical terms. For if that is indeed the case there can be but one conclusion, and that is that apologetics is something wholly futile.<sup>3</sup> Once again, apologetics is supposed to be, at least in part, for the *refutation* of unbelievers, not for their *confusion*. To define "five" as "eight," and "eight" as "ten," and then to argue that five plus eight equals eighteen may to the layman smell of deep thought and the higher mathematics, but it is not very fruitful philosophizing, to say nothing of effective apologetics. Anybody can win a match to his own satisfaction by making his own rules as he goes along, but that has nothing to do with useful controversy.

#### IV

The new apologetic tends to talk about God as though He were the ultimate presupposition or the major premise of a deductive system. The idealist, we may recall, believes that one cannot really know any particular thing truly unless one knows just about everything else, i.e., unless one knows the universe as an object-to-mind. As a result, he tends to talk about the universe as though, like geometry, it were a deductive system of propositions of which the universe itself as an object-to-mind constitutes the one and only presupposition or first premise. Now if the idealist wishes to think reality after the analogy of a deductive system of propositions, that is, after all, his privilege. Much more fantastic analogies have been used in the history of philosophy as guides to an understanding of ultimate reality. But when, as in the case of the new apologetic, one tries to make a case for the Christian religion by reducing the relation between God and the created universe to a purely logical one, one evidently reduces the Deity to a part of a system of which creation is also a part. And that, clearly, is not Christian

<sup>2</sup> Unless he has sound reasons for believing that his writings will be a *must* for undergraduates for the next five centuries or so.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Abraham Kuiper believed that it was.



theism. Again, no one is accusing anybody in Westminster of really believing this, but it is nevertheless the conclusion to which the logic of their language seems inevitably to lead.

Anybody wishing to demonstrate, say, a theorem in geometry can obviously do so without postulating the existence of God; and to the Christian not engaged in special pleading it seems a matter of simple truth that human beings are able to solve problems in geometry because God has made them that way, not because they accept the Bible.<sup>4</sup> The fact that one believes that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" does not in itself make one more expert in the science of physics, and an apologetic whose presuppositions involve the denial of that obvious fact is simply not doing the job. Anyway, it is evidently useless to argue that because a man does not accept the Christian religion he cannot *really* (i.e., ultimately, metaphysically) distinguish an egg from a cucumber. That kind of thing gets one nowhere, and there is no earthly use for it except, possibly, as an undergraduate exercise in making purely nominal and academic distinctions.<sup>5</sup> Incidentally, it is precisely that kind of thing which in religion easily gets a man into a state of mind in which he regards those who disagree with him on details, including his immediate associates, as belonging to the anti-Christian forces arrayed against him. It is well to remember that although it is the part of philosophy to speculate, it is no less its part to know when to stop speculating.

The antithesis between the Christian way of life and non-Christian ways can hardly be exaggerated, but that does not mean that it cannot be made to look a bit silly by Christians with a pet theory to defend. No Christian denies that the unbeliever in rejecting God's self-revelation is out of touch with reality. But there are, after all, degrees of being out of touch, and the unbeliever is not as a rule so out of touch as to cease being a man made in the image of God. And as a bearer of God's image he would seem to have considerably in common with the believer. To him the idea of God as the creator and sustainer of the universe is at least not meaningless, since otherwise he could hardly deny it. In fact, if the Christian and the non-Christian had as little in common as the new apologetic seems to imply, there would be no particular sense in doing apologetics, to say nothing of

<sup>4</sup> In fairness to Professor Van Til of Westminster Seminary it should be stated that he seems recently to have repudiated some of his earlier and more extreme assertions relative to the present issue. And in his syllabi one occasionally finds such statements as that created beings have a nature and an activity of their own, and that unbelievers have knowledge which is "true as far as it goes." Nevertheless, such statements are so obviously out of character with the general tenor of his apologetic that one is justified in saying that they amount to little more than lip service to what Dr. Kuyper and others have called common grace.

<sup>5</sup> Something on a par with the alleged Mediaeval pastime of trying to show by rational demonstration just how many angels could dance on the point of a needle.

preaching the Gospel to the heathen. And in practice the proponents of the new apologetic unconsciously admit this when they borrow from the idealistic logic of unbelievers in order to establish the truth of Christian theism. The Apostle Paul once admonished the Corinthians to "give no offense, neither to the Jews, *nor to the Gentiles*" (1 Cor. 10:32). And concerning the unbeliever's capacity for being in touch with reality he tells us that "that which may be known of God . . . God hath shewed unto them . . . so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1). Now whether one wishes to think of the pagan's knowledge of God as revelation of some kind or as common grace is not particularly important. And it may be that we need a refinement of what Calvin and Kuiper have told us about this, but there is no good evidence that the new apologetics gives us that refinement.

## V

Regarding the general question of what believers and unbelievers know and don't know, and in what respect and to what extent they can "know truly," the only sensible way out would seem to be that of recognizing degrees of knowledge and levels of truth. What the carpenter knows about a tree when he relates it to a house by means of his tools differs in kind and degree from what the physicist knows when he relates it to a bar of iron by means of some atomic theory or other. And what each knows is true, i.e., "true as far as it goes," as our friends of the new apologetic would say in their rarer moments. The Scholastics realized long ago that truth is a transcendental idea, and that its unity is only a unity of analogy; that is to say, truth is different as it is applied to different realms.<sup>6</sup> There are many kinds of truth, and for each kind a different theory is probably necessary. Anyway, the theory that I must check up with God's knowledge before I can utter any kind of truth at all is entirely useless. When the unbeliever—or the believer, for that matter—says that it is a sultry day because the temperature and the humidity are thus and so, he is not substituting himself for God as "the ultimate point of reference in predication," as the new apologetic has it. His point of reference is reality as he finds it and to the extent to which he finds it. Kierkegaard once defined truth in so far as human beings can be aware of it as "the tension of the whole individual in the presence of the object of his passionate thought." Evidently, this tension can always be translated into practice as when, for example, we link truth with courage, fidelity, and charity. As men, as beings created in God's image, we can know that if we do this or that particular deed, we shall be *true* to our

<sup>6</sup> Which is something altogether different from saying that truth is relative.

selves, and we need no general theory of truth to see this. For the Christian truth is always something beyond, something more than he at this particular moment knows. In spite of that he can without

fear of mistake regard truth, truth for him, as fidelity to himself as a bearer of the image of God, and fidelity to God as the Creator and Savior of that image.

C.D.B.

# Professor Van Til's Apologetics

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## Part 1: A Linguistic Bramble Patch

IN a series of three papers I propose to offer a critical study of a few phases in the theological thought of Professor Cornelius Van Til. I consider this a job worth doing and have at present sufficient leisure to get on with it. I wish to stress that my purpose is to analyze and criticize. I certainly do not wish to protest against the fact that he has been working to explain and defend the Reformed faith. Nor do I wish to encourage anyone who inclines to suppose that there is no agreement between Van Til and myself on many basic matters. That would be a pure mistake. Though some readers are likely to make that mistake, I choose not to use their time, by presenting summaries of whole areas of Van Til's thought, to render that mistake less likely. In these papers I set myself to criticize certain fundamental ideas of Van Til which are in my view confusing and dangerously misleading.

A note about the sources I have used. I make a few references to Professor Van Til's lecture, *The Intellectual Challenge of the Gospel*, delivered on July 10, 1950, at Tyndale House in Cambridge, England, and published in London by the Tyndale Press. The great bulk of my references are to three unpublished syllabi, viz., *Apologetics* (1951), *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (1952), and *Christian-Theistic Evidences* (1951). All quotations will be identified by the use of an abbreviation for the appropriate title plus a page notation. Professor Van Til has inspected a copy of all quotations from the syllabi which I intended to use and has rendered the service of considering whether they agreed with his present thinking and of suggesting certain alterations and suppressions. For his kindness in undertaking this onerous task I wish to thank him publicly. Readers who have access to the syllabi can take notice of the alterations. Responsibility for selecting and interpreting Van Til's statements, and for the use made of them in my argument, belongs of course to me.

### I

The first thing to notice about Van Til's writing is his habit of using military images in order to describe the work of an apologist. On the first page of

*Apol.* he makes a comparison between modern warfare and the vindication of Christian theism. "The apologist must use many types of weapon, comparable to bayonets, rifles, machine guns, heavy cannon, and atom bombs. Two pages later he likens apologetics to the messenger boy who carries maps and plans from one general to another. One might profitably wonder why these images arise in Van Til when he is speaking, not of the Christian life, but of the Christian scholar's labor at his desk and in the classroom to defend the Christian faith. From many of Van Til's statements one learns that he considers himself almost alone in presenting an unadulterated version of Reformed apologetics. Again and again he tries to show that the apologetics of such men as Bavinck and Hepp is not quite pure enough. And as for the work of Roman Catholics and non-Reformed Evangelicals, he says such things as the following. "Romanism and Evangelicalism . . . do not seek to explode the last stronghold to which the natural man always flees and where he always makes his final stand" (*Apol.* 59). "The natural man must be forced out of his hideouts, his caves, his last lurking places. Neither Roman Catholic nor Arminian methodologies have the flame-throwers with which to reach him. In the all out war between the Christian and the natural man as he appears in modern garb it is only the atomic energy of a truly Reformed methodology that will explode the last *Festung* to which the Roman Catholic and the Arminian always permit him to retreat and to dwell in safety" (*Apol.* 66). No doubt this is bracing talk, and spiced by a show of familiarity with the world's newest and the most horrible weapons. But there is a real danger that people who talk themselves into the mentality characteristic of war, or slide into it, are likely to grasp at any weapon and to stick at no means for achieving their ends. Surely the end of apologetics is to clarify and defend the truth; it is not destruction. Surely also the man who thinks of apologetics on the analogy of getting at someone with a flame-thrower is in danger both of blinding himself to the standards of discussion and of controversy, and also of violating what Christ said and did with respect to sinful men.

Perhaps I am pressing too hard on Van Til's metaphors. I bring them forward only to raise the question whether this peculiar quality of his writing indicates some quality of his mind. And if the metaphors ought not to be pressed, then they serve as samples of what I consider to be his carelessness in the use of language. I proceed to deal with this at some length.

## II

At one point he gives us the phrase "the judicious Butler" (*Apol.* 60). This enshrines a minor literary slip; it is Hooker, not Butler, who has come to be honored with the term "judicious." At another point he hopelessly muddies the waters in which philosophers have sought to make a precise distinction between the terms "analytic" and "synthetic." This distinction appears quite clearly in Kant, who said that a statement is analytic if its predicate is contained in the meaning of the subject term. E.g. "A puppy is a young dog." Van Til, however, represents Kant as saying that analytic knowledge is introspection, inspection of one's own internal states. This is simply off the mark. Perhaps Van Til is confusing two uses of the term "subject," once as the logical subject of a sentence, and once as referring to the person who performs the act of self-inspection. I have no objection to Van Til's saying that God's self-knowledge is "analytic" in the sense that "God does not need to look beyond himself for additions to his knowledge" (*Apol.* 6). But it would be silly to pretend that the term "analytic" as so used bears any resemblance to the strict use of Kant or of a contemporary logician; and if one did understand this term, whenever Van Til uses it, as a logician understands it, he might be wise to hesitate before applying it to God's self-knowledge.

Van Til proceeds to say about God's knowledge of "the things that exist beside himself" (Is "beside" equivalent to "next to" or "in addition to?" Van Til does not pause to say.) that it "precedes these facts." This "precedes," he adds, is to be taken logically, not temporally. Here he gives himself occasion to go through a beautiful exercise in the use of language, in using words so carefully that they do not temporalize God's knowledge of natural events or eternalize the events known by God. But he disappoints; instead of pursuing precision, he lapses into popular obscurity and declines the gambit. From man's point of view, he says, it is correct to say that God knows the facts before they occur. "God knows or interprets the facts before they are facts" (*Apol.* 6). Elsewhere he states, ". . . there once was no a *posteriori* aspect to knowledge at all (i.e. no natural events). When God existed alone, there was no time universe, and there were no new facts arising." "In fact, we believe that the world once upon a time did not exist" (*I. S. Theol.* 10). I submit that this is nothing but loose talk. A theologian can do better than this. There is no insuperable difficulty in conforming language to the doctrine that time was

created with the natural world and that God's existence is supertemporal. One does not have to use such expressions as "when God existed alone" or "before God created the world" or "God knows the facts before they are facts" or "once upon a time the world did not exist." It is true to say that God knows what will occur tomorrow; it is not true to say that God knows today what will occur tomorrow. It is improper to *date* God's knowledge.

In a context in which he has just referred to man's having been created in God's image Van Til adds that man "was organically related to the universe about him" (*Apol.* 15). The term "organic" is sufficiently vague to leave the statement quite useless: by itself it does not indicate whether the connection from man to nature is from higher to lower, or *vice versa*; or again, it would be far from safe to picture an enormous organ in which man shares the role of an organ or cell with the other items in nature. What Van Til means is not clear until one reads the following sentence: "Man was to be prophet, priest and king under God in this created universe." The term "organic" is by no means suited to signify all this, and the sentence quoted which contains it is both superfluous and misleading. And what does Van Til mean by saying that all non-Christian theories relate man incidentally or accidentally to the rest of creation? Does he include Judaism and Islam in the list of non-Christian theories? Even the Greek conception of man as unique because he is able to exercise *logos* and as representing a higher actualization of functions shared by man with the brutes is far from asserting an accidental relation of man to the sub-human order. Of course, the terms "accidental" and "incidental" are not defined; one suspects that Van Til uses them to disparage, not to characterize. Judging from one of his images, I am led to conclude that Van Til has little inclination to think highly of *logos*. Speaking of reason as the instrument of a person, he likens it to a saw. "Whether it will move at all and whether it will cut in the right direction depends on the man operating it" (*Apol.* 49). I suggest that the material also has something to do with whether the saw will move and with the direction in which it cuts. Suppose that I choose to take Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat into the laboratory for study; could my reason make a start? Or suppose that someone has chosen to study the properties of triangles; what is the point of saying that the student can determine the direction to be taken in proving that the interior angles of a triangle amount to 180 degrees? That I should turn my thought to triangles I can decide; but if I am to prove the theorem I must submit to the triangle. And this determination by the object applies to both the regenerate and the unregenerate person: the two do not differ on the definition and properties of a triangle; they do not have to differ on the philosophical questions raised by the development of non-Euclidean geometries. If reason were quite like a



saw, Van Til's metaphor might be more useful than it is in supporting his general thesis that reason "will invariably act wrongly" (Apol. 50) unless its possessor is regenerate. This metaphor is a bit too slippery to do much good, and that is at present my sole point.

More serious inaccuracy and looseness of speech are found in Van Til's numerous statements that the face of God is visible everywhere. The covenant idea, says Van Til, means that we can "see God's face everywhere" (Apol. 26), and this idea is significant for philosophy and science as well as for theology. "... the face of God appears in all the facts and principles with which philosophy and science deal" (Apol. 27). The objects of science bear the "imprint of God's face." Creation is like a great estate: the owner's name is "plainly and indelibly written at unavoidable places." Or it is like a sheet of inlaid linoleum, bearing on its surface a pattern which penetrates to the bottom (Apol. 61). All these statements are metaphorical, and not one of them is explained. They all liken recognition of God to visual sensation. But of course I do not see God in the same way as I see the color or visual shape of a tree. What is it that I see when I see God, and with what sort of eye? I consider that Van Til neglects his duty as a theologian when he entirely fails to answer this question. This is one of the most fundamental questions in theology; and certainly the apologist has a special responsibility to discuss it. And if science is engaged in discovering and formulating relations of sequence between natural events which are observable by the senses or by instruments which improve upon the senses, and if Van Til never spells out exactly what the face of God looks like when the scientist studies his proper object, he has nothing to justify the reprimand he administers to the physicist who does not refer to God as one factor in an analysis of light. I do not dispute that every item of the created world is an instance of God's creative and sustaining efficacy. Of course it is! I wish only to point out that Van Til offers only a misleading metaphor where what is needed is a penetrating piece of philosophical theology, an analysis of what it is in an object that justifies my saying that it is a creature. Whatever this may be, it is not something like a color or shape or scent, and my apprehension of it is rather different from vision or smell.

Another metaphor of Van Til's is perhaps still more tricky. Comparing the search for truth to traveling on a highway built (presumably) by God, Van Til speaks of the Christian following road signs which are perfectly plain to sight. Non-Christians, he says, travel in the opposite direction on the same road, and follow other road signs (Apol. 73). Not only does Van Til leave one quite in the dark about what the Christian's road signs are and by what "sense" one "sees" them (so far the metaphor is on a level with the others); now he adds that the non-

Christian also has road signs which point the way toward a precipice. This addition is a startling fantasy. If creation consists of items all of which reveal God, there should be no items to point the wrong way.

Perhaps Van Til intends to say that the natural man has himself installed the road signs to which he can point. It is clear at any rate that Van Til wants to deny (at least on most occasions) that Christians and non-Christians share a common area of knowledge. He says that "the knower himself needs interpretation (i.e. by God—some are regenerate, others not) as well as the things he knows. The human mind, it is now commonly recognized, makes its contribution to the knowledge it obtains" (Apol. 39). Let me point up the argument. It is now commonly recognized, says Van Til, that the human mind makes its contribution to knowledge. God has taught us that there is a radical difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate person. They will therefore make different contributions to their respective knowledge. Consequently the Christian and the non-Christian do not share a common area of knowledge. Of these four sentences, the first is Kantian in origin: Van Til relies on or borrows from Kant in order to give evidence for one of his central theses. This is a startling procedure unless he can be confident that Kant formula is derivable from Christian principles. He says nothing to show that it is. (Does the Bible teach that the radical difference between regenerate and unregenerate people is such that they do not share the same algebra or numismatics or meteorology?) Further, the term "contribution" is left quite unspecified, with the result that one cannot tell where to look for evidence of the truth or falsity of Van Til's statement. What contribution does the regenerate man make to his apprehension, e.g., that the grass is wet or that a triangle is a plane figure formed by three straight lines intersecting by twos at three points? How can I divine whether Van Til's sentence is such that to assert it or to deny it says anything? Yet it is such undisciplined, virtually insignificant talk as this that Van Til puts forward to justify his thesis that except by presupposing the deepest principles of Christian thought one cannot know the character of any facts.

Another passage in which Van Til defends the thesis just noted contains such linguistic barbarisms as "factness of the fact" and "factness as facts." "... there is one system of reality of which all that exists forms a part. And any individual fact of this system is what it is primarily because of its relation to this system. It is therefore a contradiction in terms to speak of presenting certain facts to men unless one presents them as parts of this system. The very factness of any individual fact of history (Van Til has just referred to Christ's resurrection) is precisely what it is because God is what he is. ... God makes the facts to be what they are" (Apol. 99).

Since I have no means of discovering what characteristic of a fact is designated by the term "factness," I may be excused for not knowing what Van Til is trying to say. Suppose I wanted to deny what Van Til says: just what would I be doing, how would I go about doing it? Furthermore, what is meant by speaking as if God's perfect existence, His creative act, His eternal counsel and providential rule, are parts of a system in which apples and amoebae are also parts, and in which all parts are what they are because of their relation to all other parts? Does God derive His nature from apples? If God "makes" the facts, I should think that they are *not* parts of a system in which God is also a part, and that the tie between God and facts is precisely *not* a logical one. Van Til's use of this vague idealistic language, borrowed perhaps from the idealistic logicians whose works he studied years ago, ought to be disconcerting to a Reformed mind, in fact to any Christian. On the topic of Van Til's use of idealistic language I shall speak more fully later.

One last instance of linguistic vagueness. I quote from *Apol.* 19. "The question of knowledge is an ethical question. It is indeed possible to have theoretically correct knowledge about God without loving God. The devil illustrates this point. Yet what is meant by knowing God in Scripture is *knowing and loving* God: this is true knowledge of God; all other knowledge of God is basically false." In the manner of the doctor who says to his colleague, "My patient Smith has a beautiful case of pneumonia," I say that this passage is a beautiful case of capitalizing on ambiguity. Not only is it the barest impropriety to conjoin the two terms "false" and "knowledge" (knowledge is by definition true, and to say it is, is to utter only a tautology); Van Til even drops into the pit of equating "false knowledge" with "theoretically correct knowledge." Furthermore, he concedes the point of my remarks by using two words, "knowing" and "loving," in order to state the meaning of "knowing" as it is used in Scripture. Then there is a distinction between knowing and loving. And if the devil wouldn't quite get his due unless the term "knowing" were applied to him, I wonder what is due to Aristotle. Now, if this distinction has to be acknowledged, I call attention to the fact that this passage obscures the whole point of Van Til's oft-stated and basic thesis that the unregenerate man can know no facts at all. Granted that he does not both know and love God, does it follow that he knows no fact at all, even that he does not know God, in the sense in which "know" is distinct, on Van Til's own showing, from "know and love"? In a later paper I hope to discuss this issue at length.

### III

Van Til sets what he considers a Reformed mode of thought in opposition to all other Christian modes; in fact, he strives to outdo all other Reformed writers

in achieving a radical purism or exclusiveness. It is therefore surprising to notice how he slips into the use of phrases and arguments collected from non-Christian sources. I call attention to Aristotelian formulae and to phrases and arguments which are at home only among speculative idealists.

The use of Aristotelian phrases is striking because of the numerous statements Van Til makes to the effect that the God of non-Christians is not God at all. "Any God that is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not God but an idol" (*Apol.* 36). Again, "Any other sort of God is no God at all and to 'prove' that some other sort of God exists is to 'prove' that no God exists" (*Apol.* 14). I shall not take time to discuss the question of what Van Til would say about the God of Judaism; my interest is restricted to Aristotle, and on this topic Van Til says: "No greater contrast is thinkable than that between the unmoved *noesis noeeseos* of Aristotle and the Christian God" (*I. S. Theol.* 216; also see *Challenge* 8). Whether one can think of a greater contrast is for each to judge: one has to be rather ignorant of the history of religions to find this dictum useful. The fact is that Van Til characterizes the Christian God in the exact terms of Aristotle. It is Aristotle who elaborated the distinction between potentiality and actuality and made possible the familiar formula in which God is spoken of as pure act, *actus purus*. This is what Van Til says: "In the being of God . . . possibility is identical with reality and potentiality is identical with actuality" (*Apol.* 6). It is Aristotle who coined the phrase *noesis noeeseos*; Van Til says: "God is self-conscious activity" (*I. S. Theol.* 178). "For it is God knowing himself that is God. And God is God knowing himself. God is God's self-affirmation. God is God's *eternal* self-affirmation. God is pure act" (*I. S. Theol.* 171). It would be easy to exult over this sample of confused discussion. It is more important to adopt a critical attitude toward Van Til's violent attacks on non-Christian thinkers: why should Aristotle's formulae have less truth when Aristotle proposes them than when Van Til repeats them? If Aristotle's God is no God at all, what must be said of the Christian God Whom Van Til defines in the exact words of Aristotle?

I should have expected Van Til to point out that Aristotle's definition of God is defective because it defines God as the actuality of consciousness rather than as the actuality of being. After all, Augustine and Aquinas put forward this correction. Perhaps Van Til has imbibed so freely of the potion of modern idealism that this basic Christian objection to Aristotle's theology does not seem significant to him. Evidences for my conjecture are scattered throughout Van Til's writings, in the many passages in which his dominant interest seems to be directed toward the cognitive function of God. In common with the majority of post-Renaissance philosophers Van Til is exercised by the problem of knowledge.

I do not wish to discuss such a general topic as the symptoms in Van Til of kinship with modern epistemologists. Instead, I want to point out specifically how he uses terms and arguments borrowed from speculative idealism, and thereby to underline my view that he is skating on thin ice; his purism is turning into a boomerang. For modern idealism is no friend of Christianity. Hegel and his followers were busy building huge systems of thought to revise or displace Christian belief, and assumed the role of preachers of new principles of culture.

I begin with a detached use of a term which may have no importance beyond that of a minor symptom. Van Til says: "... we offer the God and the Christ of the Bible as the concrete universal in relation to which all facts have meaning" (*C. T. Evid.* 67). If I understand what the term "concrete universal" meant to its inventors, no Christian can in a clear conscience apply it to God. God cannot be both a concrete universal and the perfect Being from Whom the finite order derives by an act of free creation. Let me quote from the article on "concrete universal" in *The Dictionary of Philosophy* (Philosophical Library, New York, 2nd ed., 1942, p. 61). This term is explained by recourse to Hegel: it means "a synthesis of two opposite abstractions. . . . The lowest of such dynamic or concrete universals is Becoming, which is a dialectical synthesis of Being and Not-Being. The only absolutely concrete universal, however, is Reality itself, the World Whole, conceived as an all-inclusive, organic system of self-thinking Thought." It is notorious that Hegel promoted pantheism, and in his analysis the God of traditional theistic theology, as abstract Being, is so empty as to lapse into Non-Being, its opposite; the synthesis is this concrete developing world or Whole in which God and nature are complementary aspects. It is dangerous to use the term "concrete universal" when speaking of the God of Christian faith. Hegelianism characterizes the Ultimate Whole as a system of thought. Van Til says, "For Christianity, God's thought is constitutive." The term "constitutive" is Kantian; is Van Til careful to avoid the sense of Kantian terms or the sense made of them by idealists? The next sentence is vague and misleading: "By God's thoughts, as expressed through his will, do the facts of the universe come into existence" (*C. T. Evid.* 57). What kind of causality is ascribed to God's thoughts in the expression "by God's thoughts"? I should be happier than I am with this expression if Van Til were obviously familiar with an Aristotelian or medieval analysis of kinds of causes. In order to remove the idealist undertones of this sentence it would be sufficient to attach the word "by" to the expression "his will." Surely the Christian doctrine of creation is anti-idealistic. Van Til says elsewhere: "The creation doctrine is implied in the God-concept of Christianity; deny the creation doctrine and you have virtually denied the Christian concept of God" (*Apol.*

12). The first clause is confusing and on one interpretation is certainly false. If "implied in" means "implied by," if it has the force of saying that God's nature logically entails His creation of a world (and this is the first and natural interpretation), then Van Til is saying that the world has come from God by a logical necessity of His nature, which is to deny the doctrine of free creation. Now, of course, Van Til repeatedly states the classic doctrine of God's self-sufficiency and of His freedom in creating the world. I mean only to say that his language is idealistic, and that by choosing to use such language he chooses to make idealistic, non-Christian statements.

When he discusses logic or method Van Til again relies on the idealists. One frequently finds such a phrase as "the internal coherence of God's nature" (*I. S. Theol.* 11), but one never learns what this may mean. More important is a passage which begins with a vacuous idealist slogan. "All knowledge is inter-related. . . . If one knows "nature" truly, one also knows nature's God truly. Then, too, the mind of man is a unit. It cannot know one thing truly without knowing all things truly" (*I. S. Theol.* 27). What does one learn by being told that man's mind is a unit and that all knowledge is inter-related? A bundle of twigs is also a unit, and two true statements may not be otherwise related than by both being true. There is no logical connection between the first and the second of Van Til's sentences just quoted, nor between the third and the fourth. Certainly the first and third offer no evidence for the second and fourth. If Van Til has evidence to give, perhaps it consists in the idealist coherence theory of truth, which, by the way, has never succeeded, except by resorting to ambiguity and *ad hoc* theoretical patchwork, in showing that there is a relation of implication between such sentences as "I have a headache" and "Yesterday President Eisenhower held a press conference."

Van Til does actually repeat characteristic idealist statements in logic. "We may speak of the method of Christian theism as being the method of *implication*" (*I. S. Theol.* 8). Bosanquet repudiated what he called "linear inference" in order to replace it by a logic of "implication," a logic proceeding on the hypothesis that men approach reality only through judgments and that judgments have their place as elements in a total system all the parts of which mutually support one another by logical or quasi-logical relations. It is perfectly obvious (see *I. S. Theol.* 14, Note 2) that Van Til refuses to follow Bosanquet's logical method toward its climax in absolute idealism (in fact, it is idealist metaphysics that "justifies" idealist logic). Then why does he repeat with approval the idealist formulae? My guess is that he considers idealist logic to be handy weapon for the defense of his twisted and purist version of Reformed apologetics. Actually it is a boomerang.

It is Van Til who says: "... all reasoning is, in the nature of the case, *circular reasoning*" (*Apol.* 63). He goes so far as to write, "without the presupposition of the truth of Christian theism no fact can be distinguished from any other fact. To say this is to apply the method of idealist logicians in a way that these idealist logicians, because of their own anti-Christian theistic assumptions, cannot apply it. The point made by these logicians is that even the mere counting of particular things presupposes a system of truth of which these particulars form a part. Without such a system of truth there would be no distinguishable difference between one particular and another. They would be as impossible to distinguish from one another as the millions of drops of water in the ocean would be indistinguishable from one another by the naked eye" (*Apol.* 74-75).

To start off simply, one cannot distinguish the drops of water in the ocean because these drops are not distinct, i.e. separated. It is easy, however, to bring about distinctness by using a dropper. Further, what is the system of truth which one must presuppose in order to count two pencils? Is God a "part" of this system? And does the Mohammedan find it difficult to distinguish a hawk from a handsaw? Until one learns the answer to such questions, what use can he make of Van Til's dicta? Finally, is it not entirely improper for Van Til, the Reformed purist who really wants to avoid sharing common insights with non-Christians, to *defend* his interpretation of what Christianity implies by an appeal to idealist logic? The statement by which one justifies or defends another statement must be better known than the latter statement; so Van Til is more certain of idealist logic than he is of Christian theism. His position is a fine subject for irony. In talking as if God is "part" of a "system of truth" Van Til is talking himself out of classic Christian modes of thought. He is entirely too naive to be trusted in his dealings with idealists. Here is a passage which uncritically

restates and accepts, and uses for the defense of *Christian theism*, a particularly bad point of the British neo-Hegelian, F. H. Bradley. "... even that which the intellect does assert about the objects of knowledge (i.e. changing, temporal objects) is, on the non-Christian view, of necessity involved in contradiction. F. H. Bradley's great book *Appearance and Reality* has brought out this point with the greatest possible detail. ... The point is ... that in the nature of the case all logical assertion with respect to the world of temporal existence must needs be self-contradictory in character" (*Apol.* 83). In the first part of the book Bradley applied at great length the dialectic of Parmenides and Zeno. An adequate answer to all three, Bradley, Parmenides, and Zeno, can be found in Aristotle's pointed remark that Parmenides found change contradictory only because he embraced the mistaken assumption that nothing can exist unless it exists in the manner of perfect Being or actuality. Aristotle did not embrace this erroneous assumption, non-Christian though he was. Hence Van Til is entirely wrong when he says: "On the assumptions of the natural man logic is a timeless impersonal principle. ... It is by means of universal timeless principles of logic that the natural man must, on his assumptions, seek to make intelligible assertions about the world of reality or chance. But this cannot be done without falling into self-contradiction" (*Apol.* 83-84). Well, I take it that Aristotle was a "natural man." He simply did not practice logic or metaphysics in the manner in which Van Til says that the natural man must do. What Van Til calls "timeless principles of logic" are really postulates about the character of being; they are metaphysical dogmas, not principles of logic at all. They are idealistic principles, and Van Til is far from free of them. Therefore I give warning that he is in danger of substituting idealism for Christianity.

NOTE: This is the first of a series of three articles by Professor Jesse De Boer on the new Westminster apologetics. The others will appear in the October and November issues of the FORUM.—Editors.



# On Brute Facts

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EPISTEMOLOGICAL problems are notoriously complex and technical. Yet for Christian philosophy, as for philosophy in general, their answers are not only intrinsically important, but have far-reaching consequences in metaphysics, ethics, and the other branches of philosophical inquiry. That a critique of knowledge logically precedes, or is identical with, metaphysics may be seriously doubted, but the important role of epistemology in a comprehensive world-view is indisputable.

Calvinists have never challenged the validity of the philosophical task, and therefore they should also realize the value of a sound theory of knowledge. They have a right to expect from epistemology considerable light on the problem of common grace, the philosophy of Christian education, method in apology for the Faith, and the antithesis between believer and unbeliever. Nor are these questions of merely academic interest, as their recurrence in contemporary discussion shows. Underlying them all is the problem of Truth: what is its origin and nature, and how shall we best attain it? Granted the antithesis between lovers and haters of God, shall we deny the possession of partial truth to the latter? If so, what is the significance of common grace?

Much of our awareness of these and other issues, and their relation to epistemology, can be credited to Professor Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Theological Seminary. Although much of his work has not been published, American Calvinists have become acquainted through other media with the fact that Professor Van Til has elaborated a point of view which is in a real sense novel. He has, further, insisted that epistemology is the key to his system.

In this article I shall attempt an analysis and criticism of one facet of Professor Van Til's epistemology, namely his treatment of factuality. Although they will necessarily be incomplete, my comments are still, I believe, fundamental in importance, since the subject of factuality is crucial in Professor Van Til's system. My purpose is simply to contribute to the contemporary discussion of a much-debated problem from a philosophical point of view. No finality is claimed for the following remarks.

## I

Much of Professor Van Til's argument in epistemology can, I believe, be compressed into a single premise and a conclusion as follows: (A) There are

no brute facts, and (B) Therefore there is no common knowledge possessed impartially by Christian and non-Christian. Each of these propositions should be elaborated.

(A) A brute fact, according to Professor Van Til, is an *uninterpreted* fact. Such a fact is unintelligible because it is unstructured, "raw," and unrelated to anything else.<sup>1</sup> But as Christians we know that no facts are brute facts, since every fact derives meaning from its place in the plan of God. Thus every fact is pre-interpreted by God, and the task of human thought is to reinterpret the facts within the limits of finitude, in the same way as does God.<sup>2</sup>

(B) Every non-Christian errs in his initial supposition that God does not exist, and therefore that there are brute facts. He absolutizes his own mind, attempts to impose complete rationality on the facts, but always fails because he has not begun with God. Consequently every proposition which he utters is false in so far as this proposition is part of a godless system. This last point is made by Professor Van Til as follows:

Now it may seem as though it is straining at a gnat to insist on the point that the 'natural man' does not even know the flowers truly, as long as it is maintained that he does not know God truly. The point is, however, that unless we maintain that the 'natural man' does not know the flowers truly, we cannot logically maintain that he does not know God truly. All knowledge is inter-related. The created world is expressive of the nature of God. If one knows 'nature' truly, one also knows nature's God truly. Then, too, the mind of man is a unit. It cannot know one thing truly without knowing all things truly.<sup>3</sup>

If the Christian should attempt to reason with the unbeliever on the basis of "neutral" facts, he would tacitly be conceding the existence of *brute* facts, and thereby vitiating his own position. The only effective apology for Christianity is based on the two-fold method of presupposition, destructive and constructive:

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" 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.<sup>4</sup>

It can be seen even from this cursory survey that Professor Van Til draws momentous conclusions

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Common Grace*, page 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Apologetics* (unpublished), page 35.

<sup>3</sup> *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (unpublished), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> *Apologetics*, page 63. Does this method presuppose a common criterion of intelligibility? It would appear so.



from his premise concerning brute fact. His denial of any common ground is, as he recognizes, in conflict with some of the opinions held by Kuyper, Bavinck, Hepp, and the "Old Princeton" school and he has not hesitated to criticize them. Each of them, says Professor Van Til, has in places failed to accept the full implications of the absolute ethical antithesis as it affects knowledge, and in so doing they have all made inconsistent concessions to non-Christian methodology.<sup>5</sup> In view of these considerations, then, it would seem profitable to re-examine the matter of factuality.

A fact is "a state of affairs," "that which is the case," or "an aspect of reality." We commonly distinguish facts, which are what they are, from propositions or judgments which *refer* to facts. Propositions have mental existence, but their function is not to exist *as such*, but to be *of* or *about* something. Therefore only propositions can be true or false, in so far as they do or do not conform to that which is real. The notions of truth and falsity would have no meaning, were it not for this distinction between Thought and Being, or between noetic being and being as an object of knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

Considered abstractly, then, a "fact" is neither interpreted nor uninterpreted, neither intelligible nor "brute," i.e., unintelligible. This is clearly seen from the fact that the questions "are all facts already pre-interpreted?" and "are there brute facts?" are genuine, meaningful questions. However, it is essential to Christian Theism to answer the first of these questions affirmatively and the second negatively. God, who is Being and Truth, has created, by a free act of his sovereign Will, a cosmos which really is, but whose being is dependent upon his own Being. Because this is so, the cosmos is completely and intrinsically intelligible, and is known exhaustively and comprehensively by Him. Because He makes all facts to be what they are, He knows them as they are. All facts are, indeed, pre-interpreted by Him in a divine System of knowledge. There are no brute facts, no surprises for God.

Because man as knower is also a creation of God, he is able to understand that which is real. But human knowledge is bound by human finitude, and therefore can never be exhaustive or comprehensive. Man is commanded to understand, to interpret facts. But these facts are pre-interpreted by God, and therefore man's knowledge, in so far as it is true, will be analogical to God's knowledge. No human system of knowledge, however excellent, can be identical with the divine System; nor, on the other hand, will it be *completely* different from the divine System. This is the meaning of analogy: the term

<sup>5</sup> An extensive criticism of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Hepp appears under the rubric "The Danger of Abstract Thinking" in *Common Grace*, pages 34-64. Dr. William Masselink has defended these men in his mimeographed *Common Grace and Christian Education* (1951).

<sup>6</sup> The use of "fact" to denote a true proposition is a derivative sense of "fact."

"knowledge" as applied to God and man respectively, is neither univocal nor equivocal.

## II

If this be granted, Professor Van Til's disjunction between "brute facts" and "interpreted facts" would seem to be faulty. To say that all facts are intrinsically intelligible and that all facts are divinely understood and pre-interpreted is to state two distinct (and true) propositions. But the intelligibility of fact is not the same as the being-interpreted of fact, unless one is prepared to affirm as well that the *being* of a fact is identical with the *being-known* of a fact.

While Professor Van Til has never, to my knowledge, defended explicitly the latter thesis—and, indeed, sometimes presupposes its falsity—there is evidence that he has been influenced by it. Consider, e.g., the following passage:

There are others, however, who use Kant in order to refute Hume, and then seek to refute Kant with Kant. These men think, and we believe think correctly, that every appeal made to bare fact is unintelligible. Every fact must stand in relation to other facts or it means nothing to anyone. We may argue at length whether there is a noise in the woods when a tree falls even if no one is there to hear it, but there can be no reasonable argument about the fact that even if there be a noise, it means nothing to anyone. There is, therefore, a necessary connection between the facts and the observer or interpreter of facts.<sup>7</sup>

Several things in this passage bear comment. (1) Professor Van Til approves of using Kant to refute Hume. So far forth, of course, this is entirely legitimate. Much depends, though, on what particular doctrine of Kant is in question. (2) The nature of the "necessary connection" between the fact and its knower is not entirely clear. If it is meant that no fact can have meaning to some mind unless it be known by that mind, the statement is tautologous and requires no proof. On the other hand, if it is meant that no fact can be without being observed or interpreted by some mind, then the argument is a *non sequitur*. From the fact that no one heard the tree fall it does not follow that there was no sound, unless "sound" be defined as someone's auditory perception. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for any fact: given that no one understands or is aware of some fact, it does not follow that the fact does not exist, nor does it follow that the fact is not *capable* of being known (i.e., intelligible). To deny this is to affirm that there is no meaningful distinction between *being* and *being-known*, and to accept the standard epistemological argument for idealism. (3) This brings to mind what may be significant in the appeal to Kant. His refutation of Hume was logically dependent upon the doctrine that mind is *constructive* in the act of knowing—a doctrine which, with the elimination of the thing-in-itself, is idealism.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Christian-Theistic Evidences* (unpublished), page 37.

<sup>8</sup> Compare also: "Everyone who reasons about facts comes to those facts with a schematism into which he fits the facts." *Ibid.*, page 38.

"The human mind, it is now commonly recognized, as the knowing subject, makes its contribution to the knowledge it obtains." *Apol.*, page 39.

It may be objected, at this point, that Professor Van Til distinguishes emphatically between the pre-interpretation of all facts by God, which renders them meaningful, and the re-interpretation of these facts by the human mind. Indeed, it is precisely the sin of the "natural man" that he "wants to be creatively constructive instead of receptively reconstructive."<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless the point remains evident that Professor Van Til's theory of knowledge involves construction by the mind of some kind, and that this construction adds something essential to otherwise meaningless facts.

This raises an interesting but difficult question which I cannot treat in any detail. The question is this: what relation obtains between the *knowledge* of God and the *being* of created facts? Orthodox Christianity has maintained that the cosmos came into existence by virtue of a divine creative act, and that this existence is continuously maintained by divine power. It has also held that God has a comprehensive plan for history, and that every event occurs according to His will in conformity with that plan. Further, God necessarily knows, comprehensively and exhaustively, every fact, whether past, present, or future. In harmony with these truths Professor Van Til says:

Scripture teaches that every fact in the universe exists and operates by virtue of the plan of God. There are no *brute facts* for God. As to His own being, fact and interpretation are co-extensive. . . . And as to the universe, God's interpretation logically precedes the denotation and connotation of all facts of which it consists.<sup>10</sup>

Somewhat more radical, however is a later assertion that "For Christianity, God's thought is *constitutive*. By God's thoughts do the facts of the universe come into existence."<sup>11</sup> There lurks here a curious ambiguity. It is one thing to say that God's thought logically precedes facts, and another thing to say that God's thoughts enter into the *being* of facts. Are we to understand that the knowledge of God cannot be distinguished from the objects of that knowledge? If it is possible to say that God's thought is constitutive of facts, is it not also necessary to say that facts are constitutive of God's knowledge, and therefore of God? In order to maintain a sharp distinction between God and His creation it would seem necessary to make a sharp distinction between the *being* of created reality, and God's knowledge of it. Here is the dilemma: either there are created objects existentially other than God which are the objects of His knowledge, or there are not. If there are, then it seems inaccurate to say that God's thoughts are *constitutive* of these objects in the same sense in which he *knows* them, unless the being of these objects is identical with their being objects of His knowledge. If there are not such beings, the creator-creature distinction is lost.

<sup>9</sup> *I. S. T.*, page 26.

<sup>10</sup> *Evidences*, page 53. Italics in original.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, page 57. Italics mine.

### III

There is a further aspect of Professor Van Til's theory of fact which is essential to his contention that there is no epistemological common ground between believer and unbeliever. This is his insistence upon the interrelatedness of facts. We have seen already that Professor Van Til does not admit the truth of *any* proposition uttered by the "natural man" for the reason that "all knowledge is inter-related" in such a way that "the mind of man . . . cannot know one thing truly without knowing all things truly."

Similarly, in *Common Grace* Professor Van Til objects vigorously to Kuyper's statement that there is a "common territory (i.e. measuring, weighing, counting) where the difference in starting-point and standpoint does not count." His main criticism is as follows:

Weighing and measuring and formal reasoning are but aspects of one unified act of interpretation. It is either the would-be autonomous man, who weighs and measures what he thinks of as brute or bare facts by the help of what he thinks of as abstract impersonal principles, or it is the believer, knowing himself to be a creature of God, who weighs and measures what he thinks of as God-created facts and by what he thinks of as God-created laws. Looking at the matter thus allows for a larger "common" territory than Kuyper allows for, but this larger territory is common with a qualification . . . (it) allows us to do full justice to "antithesis," which Kuyper has taught us to stress. It keeps us from falling into a sort of natural theology, patterned after Thomas Aquinas, that Kuyper has taught us to reject.<sup>12</sup>

I have quoted this passage at length to show the importance which Professor Van Til attaches to the question of "common ground." Because Kuyper believed in such a thing, he is charged with tendencies toward Thomistic natural theology. It is necessary, then, to examine this contention.

Let us consider Professor Van Til's own illustration. Suppose an unbeliever and a Christian are together in a field and they notice a flower which we shall name "A." The unbeliever says that flower A is exactly two inches from flower B. His friend, who happens to carry a pocket-ruler, measures the distance and verifies the judgment. He is likely to say to the unbeliever, "That was a good guess; your judgment is true." Obviously the latter does not know God truly; yet it is paradoxical to deny that he did not correctly judge concerning one relation sustained by that flower.

There are times when Professor Van Til seems to admit this point. He says, for example, "We are well aware of the fact that non-Christians have a great deal of knowledge about this world which is true as far as it goes. That is, there is a sense in which we can and must allow for the value of knowledge of non-Christians. This has always been a

<sup>12</sup> *Common Grace*, page 44.

difficult point.”<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, we are told that “No *sinner* can interpret reality aright”<sup>14</sup> and that “the natural man cannot know the flowers truly.” Finally, there is Professor Van Til’s outright rejection of Kuyper’s thesis regarding common ground.

It seems to me that there are certain considerations which tend to clear up this ambiguity. The flower in the field stands in relation to an indefinite number of beings other than flower B. The precise nature of these relations is willed and known by God, and this complex fact is revelatory of God. If a human being is to “know” this flower with essential accuracy, he must know it as a creation of God, revelatory of his wisdom, power, and glory. “From this ultimate point of view the ‘natural man’ knows nothing truly,”<sup>15</sup> and from this same ultimate point of view the Christian knows *everything* truly. But it does not follow from the foregoing that every bit of knowledge held by the unbeliever is for that reason false, except from the “ultimate point of view.” That is to say, concerning the spatial relation of flower A to B alone, the unbeliever can have true knowledge *as far as it goes*, and the believer can be wrong about that same relation as far as that relation is concerned. Such would be the case if the Christian should, perchance, misjudge the distance between A and B.

On this point Professor Van Til offers an interesting analogy. He cites the fact that Solomon, in building the temple, employed pagan Phoenicians as laborers to cut the timbers, realizing that in this task they were far more skillful than the covenant people. Solomon did not, however, allow the Phoenicians to supply the blueprint, for this was from God. The application of this analogy is:

Something similar to this should be our attitude toward science. We gladly recognize the detail work of many scientists as being highly valuable. We gladly recognize the fact that “science” has brought to light many details. But we cannot use modern scientists and their method as the architects of our structure of Christian interpretation. . . . We offer the God and Christ of the Bible as the concrete universal in relation to which all facts have meaning.<sup>16</sup>

This would seem to confirm my thesis. It is hard to see how the “details” furnished by non-Christians would be themselves altered in a Christian system of interpretation, unless one denies the “value” of these details. In terms of the analogy, the Israelites did not have to re-cut the timbers fashioned by the Phoenicians in order to fit them into the temple.

Why, then, is Professor Van Til so concerned with denying Kuyper’s belief in common knowledge? The answer is, I think, contained in his statements that “the mind of man is a unit,” and that “in the interpretative endeavor the ‘objective situation’ can

never be abstracted from the ‘subjective situation.’”<sup>17</sup> That is to say, as part of a system of thought (which is, as a whole, either for or against God) no proposition can be neutral. So far forth, no Calvinist would deny this. As the property of some mind, every proposition which claims to represent some fact acquires part of its meaning from the religious presuppositions of that mind.

#### IV

To understand fully and accurately what one is saying, he must know the context of that statement. He must know how that person defines his terms and this cannot be done unless he comprehends something of that person’s basic philosophy. In this sense all beliefs are part of a person’s system of thought, and they are essentially related to other parts of that system in a greater or lesser degree.

This truth has been exploited by those who affirm the doctrine of “internal relations.” They state, in the words of Professor Brand Blanshard of Yale (who argues in its favor): “1) That every term, i.e. every possible object of thought, is what it is in virtue of relations to what is other than itself; 2) That its nature is affected thus not by some of its relations only, but in differing degrees to all of them, no matter how external they may seem; 3) That in consequence of (2) and of the further obvious fact that everything is related in *some* way to everything else, no knowledge will reveal completely the nature of any term until it has exhausted that term’s relations to everything else.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, every “fact” derives some of its *essential meaning* from every other fact. The logical conclusion of this doctrine, as Blanshard point out, is that “. . . the ultimate object of thought . . . is an all-inclusive system in which everything is related internally to everything else.”<sup>19</sup> There is finally only one Fact, and this is necessarily the whole universe.

From the doctrine of internal relations, states Blanshard, follows monistic idealism. Since this, obviously, is not the desired goal of any Christian philosopher, it is important to discover the fallacy which has vitiated the argument. Nor is this difficult. It may be granted that within a system of beliefs there does exist a kind of relation between individual propositions which may be called “internal,” such that “all knowledge is inter-related.” What the idealist does is to transfer the properties of a system of thought to reality itself. The mind of man is a unit; therefore the universe is one. Propositions or beliefs are “ideas”; therefore the universe is Ideal. Propositions are internally related; therefore facts are internally related.

<sup>13</sup> *I. S. T.*, page 26.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, page 95.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, page 26.

<sup>16</sup> *Evidence*, page 67.

*J. Hegel*

<sup>17</sup> *Common Grace*, page 43.

<sup>18</sup> *The Nature of Thought*, (Allen and Unwin, 1939), Vol II, page 452.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, page 453.

Two further conclusions should be spelled out clearly. The first is that *coherence* becomes the only available criterion of truth, since there is no existential or factual order of Being which will serve to check the truth of any individual proposition. The second is metaphysical: idealism must necessarily deny the traditional distinction between substance and accident with respect to individual things. There is only one substance, the universe as a whole. Anything less, such as a tree or a man, is an accident of the universe.

Such are the consequences of affirming the internal relatedness of propositions in a system of beliefs, and failing to make a clear distinction between these beliefs and the facts which they purport to reveal. But if, on the contrary, there is a real order of intelligible facts-in-relation which is what it is in spite of our knowing or not knowing it, then it makes sense to talk about abstracting propositions from the intellectual systems of which they are parts. Thus the judgment of an unbeliever concerning the distance between our two hypothetical flowers can be considered by itself, and evaluated by inspecting the fact involved. It is possible because its truth and meaning is not derived from an intellectual system but from reality.

The Christian, then, would have no hesitation about affirming "common ground." Reality itself is that common ground. The Christian knows that even the unbeliever, whenever he makes a pronouncement, is talking about that reality. If this were not so, the unbeliever could not say anything at all, not even something false. When the unbeliever says something which is not completely false, the Christian would not discount it completely, but glorify God for His grace in revealing a partial truth to that unbeliever. He would consider it sinfully arrogant to affirm, e.g., that Socrates' statement to the effect that it is better to suffer injustice than to commit injustice is totally false, just because it is found in Plato's dialogues.

If this second epistemological view is Professor Van Til's basis for legitimate, "as if" cooperation with non-Christian thinkers, then there is no argument. I would insist, however, that we do not withhold the attribution of truth to some of their utterances. Nor should we fail to appreciate the fact that Christians can learn much from non-Christian writers, and that such learning need not prejudice our Christian view of the world. Wherever truth is found, that is Christian truth; we ~~cannot~~ ignore it with impunity.

## V

I shall conclude with some comments on apologetics:

1) The view which I have sketched, an avowed defense of Kuyper's conception of common ground,

in no way implies the possibility of a natural theology. Unless there be revelation, man can know nothing about God. But there is revelation. General revelation, as Calvin says, is objectively perspicuous and sufficient to convince any right-minded man that God, the Creator and Ruler of the universe, exists. The beauty of the flowers in the field, for example, would be impossible if God did not exist.

For the Christian this is obviously true. Suppose, now, that he attempts to convince his unbelieving friend that it is true. He must presuppose that the latter knows that the flowers are there, and that they are beautiful. This is common ground. He may then seek to prove that there must be some principle of Absolute Beauty which is necessary in order to explain this example of Beauty. To this his friend may or may not assent (Plato, e.g., would). Suppose he does, however. Then this second principle becomes common ground. Thus the discussion may proceed to a divine Being, then to the God of Christianity. R

Two things may be observed about this discussion. A) The Christian, at every point, appeals to revealed facts as his evidence. B) Unless the saving Grace of God intervenes in the mind of the unbeliever, he will not be genuinely convinced of the final conclusion.

Professor Van Til has a slightly different approach. He says that "... the only conclusive argument for Christianity is precisely the fact that only upon the presupposition of the truth of its teaching does logic or predication in general touch reality at all."<sup>20</sup> It is true that this is a good argument, but it is not evident that it is the only, or even the best, argument. If it is appropriate to claim the truth of Christianity by pointing to the *fact* of meaningful predication, is it not even more appropriate to claim that it is true by arguing the necessity of a Creator to explain the *fact* of contingent being?

2) Professor Van Til makes much of the point that the Christian must not appeal to "brute facts" in apology for his faith. This is entirely true. It does not, however, imply that we cannot appeal to facts or to reality in apology for the faith. Indeed, to what else can one appeal?

Perhaps the difficulty here stems from a failure to distinguish between the unbeliever's knowledge of facts and the theories which he advances to explain that knowledge. The latter, no doubt, can be shown to be inadequate in their bowing to "brute" facts. Fortunately, however, what men do is often better than what they say they do. We must capitalize on this inconsistency.

<sup>20</sup> I. S. T., page 40.

# Our Dearth in Leadership

Annette Bouma Morris  
Allendale, New Jersey

"As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err and destroy the way of thy paths."

WHEN we celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of Calvin College and Seminary, it was mentioned that the training for leadership was a specific objective in the establishment of this institution. After three quarters of a century, may we not validly look for a history of a quantity of leaders in various fields of Reformed thinking and action?

## I

A leader is one who sees the mountain peak and challenges us to follow him to the summit. He is the man who fights his way to the fore and guides the mob to his goal. Acutely conscious of some evil, he asks, "How has it been attacked traditionally? And how can I develop some better weapon?" Such men were needed; the impelling philosophy was there; also the raw material. But the search is vain. We have had men who could hold the helm; we have not produced captains to set the course.

There are those who can apply Abraham Kuyper to the social scene, but who are not Abraham Kuyper's. We become lyrical about T. S. Eliot, but we have borne no T. S. Eliot. John Dewey influences our pedagogy; but no John Dewey has pioneered our philosophy of education. American Calvinism has begotten no Einstein, no Gandhi, no Michaelangelo. We graft our Reformed opinion to the pagan tree. We grow no new tree.

In a physical land where individual initiative is the prime virtue; and in a spiritual country where man exists to glorify God, why have we produced no leaders of this quality? Why must we accept mediocrity and a faltering voice when we seek seminary and college professors, school teachers and trustees, consistory members and society officers? Why has the man in the pew, on the assembly line, with his children, over the fence to a neighbor, at the ballot-box—why has he no conception of the implications of Calvinism and social action, and art, and law, and labor, and science, and family conduct, and education?

Yet leaders are essential to survival, that is, survival of us as a peculiar people with a unique philosophy of living. Even animals dependent upon social life for individual welfare choose some head, and the pack prospers according to his cunning.

Unless we beget men who will seize the power of a vital Christianity and use it to drive the machines of human thinking and action, we are doomed to spiritual extermination.

Nor have we a right to be satisfied with mere survival; a philosophy perishes unless it be transformed into vigorous and intelligent action. Why has the Christian ethic as modernized by John Calvin, and applied by many European Calvinists not erupted into a stout American tree. Why have we no representatives in Congress, or among the nation's judiciaries, or in the United Nations' Assembly? Why are we not announcing great scientific discoveries, introducing improved educational practices, fighting for social justice, writing outstanding books and dramas, producing our own modern music, paintings, architecture and being great parents and consistory members, and teachers and ministers, and carpenters, and milk-dealers, and machinists.

No one of us can dismiss himself as being beyond the problem of leadership. A man must guide his own offspring, concerning whom he has promised "to instruct in the doctrine of the church." There must be a neighbor curious about religion. All of us, in our vocations, can be either the leader or the led. In public life, in church conduct, in our daily work, at home so many leaders are needed that one cannot excuse himself as non-essential. At the same time, we are not only in authority; we commonly choose our authorities. In church affairs, the community, clubs, government, at work, our opinion is given in the choice of a head. How capable are we the mob, the laymen, the common folk to decide who will guide us? What are our standards?

## II

Before we can arrive at a remedy for our deplorable anemia, we must examine the causes. Perhaps the most damaging is our indifference to our default and negligence. The first requirement for salvation, according to our creed, is an awareness of our sin and misery. This may be applied to all of our problems. And to this one. We are not aware of the need for good leadership nor of our remissness to provide it. Our actions and attitudes indicate that we believe the time for great deeds, heroic pioneering, progressive thinking to have passed God, and His human agents, were giants when the world was young. Today there is no need for greatness.



What absurdity is this! For in the same breath we deplore the absence of a religious philosophy to govern the use of the atom bomb, control international disputes, scientific achievements, education, functioning of government, art production, recreation. God has not changed in His omnipotence; the world's degeneracy continues. Hence, our only conclusion as to our participation is that we have grown numb to the terrible need and lazy toward our obligation. We shrink from the courage and sacrifice required to produce giants again.

Then, too, our standards for judging and obtaining our leadership are warped and mistaken. An honest evaluation of the reasons for selecting certain men for the elder's office, the board of trustees, society president, the township committee would disclose that most men are admired because of their material prosperity. Because sound financing is requisite to the administration of a school, a church, a recreation field, and because monetary bankruptcy is more readily apparent than is spiritual poverty, we vote the popular or wealthier men among us into office. The successful lawyer becomes Sunday school superintendent, the D. Sc. is chosen as chairman of the building committee, and the pastor is popular as religious instructor of the women's society—all this indicative of the fallacious reasoning that training in one field equips a man for authority in other fields. We hold that a teacher who has a knowledge of his subject matter comes automatically by the knowledge of psychology necessary for effective teaching, textbook writing, and lecturing. A minister tested as to his theology is presumed to be equipped miraculously with a mastery of pedagogy; and can therefore teach catechism, society meetings, Bible Institute, college. Who is a great minister, an able writer, a worthy teacher, an admirable councilman, an outstanding scientist? The clergyman who turns out "a deep sermon"? The author who produces a "best-seller"? The pedagogue with steely discipline? A civic manager who gets taxes reduced and opens meeting with prayer? Or the scientist who "sees God in everything"? What are our standards?

We are also lacking in a well-devised policy for preparing and training leaders. We suppress our children. In our fear of self-expression we have passed to extreme repression. Self-government and self-discipline are not encouraged among our youth. Young people of confessing and marriageable age are told what hour to come in at night and to hand over dumbly all or part of their income. Assess the curricula of our schools, investigate home-instruction. Where can a young person acquire the principles and practice in home-making, or religious, vocational, and civic authority? Who is there to stimulate him to the discipline of independent, vigorous, Godly thinking so indispensable to the

people who will make Calvinism vitalize the arts, science, business, housekeeping, the manual trades?

They are not pioneers. They cannot face moral conflict, make moral decisions. They do not wish to starve in a garret, sacrifice material comforts, endure scoffings, sweat tears and blood. Idealism is rejected—replaced by a safe something called "sanctified common sense." Parents do not wilfully and deliberately encourage their offspring into that lonely, painful toil of cutting a path through self-love and self-indulgence to reach the greater glorification of God by greater service to fellow-man. They are trained in materialism, not Calvinism. Our college students know the facts of science, theology, pedagogy, law, some arts; graduates are respected among secular universities. But one fails to evoke answers to "How can I glorify God in the laboratory? At my kitchen stove? In the union hall? While painting a picture?" Yet we are engaged in such activities; we have been training our students for leadership for seventy-five years.

Nor are we encouraged to train ourselves for positions of authority. We consider ourselves as qualified as the next man to be deacon, trustee, father, teacher. We believe that being a fairly decent Christian satisfies the demands of any office. Or, that regeneration has automatically equipped us with unerring judgment and reliable opinion. Or that years of experience in a position inevitably results in greater competence. There are few cases on record where a man refused the elder's office, the editor's chair, the presidency, because of a genuine feeling of inadequacy. Once into the saddle, we gallop along on observance of other riders, instinct, and a hit-or-miss philosophy which maintains our position only because others are even more inept or ignorant. After twenty years in a particular assignment we are not only no more capable than we were at first; we have calcified to the extent that we can no longer improve. In addition to neglecting the training of our youth and of ourselves, we abuse those who do lead. We assume authority, and freely criticize those elected to leadership, offering counter-opinions from our own wealth of ignorance and unregenerate tastes. Ask a fellow-Christian: "What of Synodical decisions on amusements? Communism? Modern art? Methods of education? Good literature?" He knows. Unlearned, we teach. Unguided, we lead. And when a man has been chosen for a certain position, he is selected for several other posts in the kingdom. As he accepts the superintendency of the Sunday school, he is serving at the same time in the consistory, the school board, several committees, the town council. He is Personnel Director at his office, father of several children, husband of one wife. Although it is apparent that he cannot possibly discharge adequately the duties of these offices and that other men are suffering from want of stimulation to spiritual action and expres-

sion for their devotion, we continue to load one man with all the work, and hold the rest unqualified and unqualifiable.

Leaders are rarely appreciated in their time. It may be said with complete safety that their value can be measured inversely to their popularity. Christ's Jews, Socrates' Greeks, Galileo's Italians, Boniface's Frisians are among us today to crucify, and lynch, and stone, or, more reprehensibly, to sneer, to slander, to ignore. Will a man be Christ: to forsake heaven for the kind of hell we award our saviors? We repeat glibly the necessity of knowing our sin and misery. But Woe! to the man who would draw us from our slough.

### III

To institute a proper and vigorous remedial program will be vital but laborious. Old standards must be X-rayed, broken, and reset in honesty. Educational methods will need alteration. Our personal philosophies want a probing reappraisal. Training for authority begins in the cradle, applies to the two sexes, to poor and to rich, to the brilliant and to the dolt. All those who deal with youth must teach in this awareness of the inescapability of leadership—both general (parent, evangelist, community leader) and particular (his professional field). At home, in the church, at school children must be challenged with discussions, guided toward right conclusions. The requirement will not be satisfied by "saying a piece" for Sunday school, nor by including a subject called "Leadership" in the curriculum. It is to be gained, rather, by a sympathetic ear for his small opinions, an effort to enlarge his experience, an exchange of dictatorship for supervised self-decision.

"Must I take Latin?" would be replaced by, "Why am I going to college? What course can best educate me?" "No, you may not go to the movies!" arouses antagonism and rebellion. Why not discuss with him the purpose of recreation, the various forms, and come to a conclusion on what a Christian attitude would be. The atmosphere should be charged continually with wholesome criticism, of self, of others, of things—recognizing virtues as well as faults, never breaking down without considering reconstruction, always respecting the superior position of the authority in the field, forever seeking knowledge upon which to base new theories of Christian living.

Our habit of encouraging the audacious into further audacity, to the persistent repression of the modest and the timid, has aborted countless embryonic leaders. John Smith, president of the class, member of the debating team, editor of the college yearbook, star of the play, representative at the intercollegiate oratorical contest—indicates the kind of specialization we have accomplished in our educational process, this monopoly inevitably resulting in the snuffing out of the self-expression of the more feeble members. What has a Christian institution

to do with competitive sports or scholasticism? Are we merely to best the next man, our brother; or is it God's will that each one develop fully those talents with which he is endowed.

In the business and military worlds, each man's qualifications are studied. He is sent to a specialized school; he receives on-the-job training. In high school, and certainly, in college, sound guidance bureaus should be set up whereby a youth is advised not only for what profession he is best suited, but also, where is his Excalibur—what field of leadership lies fallow in God's kingdom for his plow.

A school lesson, a sermon, a lecture, by any agent, for children or adults, should be an unceasing discussion of the character of some evil (such as the lack of Christian influence in the labor union, poor architecture in our church buildings, shortage of teachers and missionaries), the remedies applicable, and incentive to action.

### IV

Two results will follow. Our graduates will enter formal adulthood looking not for the methods of making the most money in the easiest way but rather straining for spiritual worlds to conquer. And the effect upon parents and teachers will be, "Lord, keep me still unsatisfied." We never reach the elevation at which we can sit smugly down to rest, having attained one goal. Have you been elected to the school board? How can you select and dismiss teachers, appropriate moneys, approve and disapprove methods of teaching, supervision, discipline unless you are trained in these matters? There are books on pedagogy for the laymen at the library. There are courses of study at night schools in almost any subject. Don't fear that your elementary school background will be despised at the university nearest you. There are experienced and sympathetic consultants to advise you. Have you been chosen to serve as elder? What do you know of our creed and doctrines, of the Acts of Synod, of our church history. And what are you going to do about being a real ruler of the church, knowing about the spiritual state of your congregation, and how it is ministered to by your pastor?

A lifetime is scarcely enough to achieve proficiency in one work. How dare we sit back in sloth when we have just begun the labor of equipping ourselves and of finding our proper task? Then, having accomplished this anticipation of a specific duty for each Christian, and intensive training for it, let us reward our leaders and increase their efficiency by continued prayers for them as leaders and for us all. Their word will be received with respect, because theirs are the voices of the learned, the voice of the dedicated ones, the servants of God serving all men—in the church, in the home, in business. Another seventy-five years, and we will, by God's grace, have heard the world utter its thanks for His great boon—Calvinism.

# From Our Correspondents

## FROM THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Editor  
*The Calvin Forum*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

The University,  
Potchefstroom, South Africa  
May 8, 1953

Dear Dr. De Boer:

In this letter for publication in the *Calvin Forum* I should like to tell you something about the election just held in South Africa for our Parliament. As you may know, our government is in the hands of a Governor-General (a vice-regal office), the Parliament, and the Senate. Our Parliament is normally reelected every five years. In 1948 we had a general election when the present government (in the hands of the National Party) came into power. In South Africa we have really only two political parties that count: the National Party under Dr. D. F. Malan and the United Party under Mr. J. G. H. Strauss (successor to the well-known Gen. J. C. Smuts). The third party is the so-called Labour Party.

The present election was fought between the National Party on the one side and the United Front on the other. The United Front was a pact between the United Party, the Labour Party, the Torch Commando, and two or more small sections. On the dissolution of Parliament the number of members was as follows: National Party, 86; United Party, 64; Labour Party, 6; Native representatives, 3. The National Party had a clear majority of 13 over all other sections. The result of the new election was this: National Party, 94; United Party, 57; Labour Party, 5. The Native representation remained 3. The National Party has therefore increased its clear majority to 20. This leaves no doubt. The electorate has given Dr. Malan a decided majority, and he can proceed to put his policy into action.

One of the most significant facts arising in this election is that the National Party has made a clean sweep in the rural districts. Beside this, it has gained urban seats. The power of the United Front lies in the cities among the non-Afrikaans-speaking sections of our population. That of the National Party is in the country districts and several cities among the Afrikaans-speaking population. The fight was decided between the English-speaking and the Afrikaans-speaking sections. The National Party had the support mainly of the Afrikaans-speaking, and the United Front of the English-speaking sections. Very few English-speaking people voted for the National Party, while some 177,000 Afrikaans-speaking people voted for the United Front. In round figures the National Party obtained a total vote of 640,000 and the United Front 763,000. Prac-

tically all of the Coloured population voted in the United Front. Thus the opposition has the majority of the voters on its side, but the National Party has a majority of 29 members in the Parliament. There is nothing strange about this. The Conservative government of Sir Winston Churchill in England has a majority of 17 seats while the Labour Party assembled 231,000 more votes. And the total number of votes cast against Churchill amounted to over 1,100,000.

On the question why the National Party won, the answer would depend on the standpoint of the writer. A supporter says, *inter alia*: the National Party has a policy that is clear and the embodiment of the deepest convictions of 60% of the South African population. It has a strong leader; it is a pure party, having no sections. On the other hand, the United Front has no clearcut policy; it has the support of the most divergent groups (English, Jews, Coloureds, Conservatives, Liberals, Labourites, Dominionists, Empire lovers, etc.); and it has a weak leader since the passing of Gen. Smuts. There is no doubt that the National Party has the support of the South African youth. I do not desire to pose as a prophet, but I cannot see how the opposition will be able to overthrow the present government in the near future. My argument for this statement is twofold: The National Party has a policy supported by the vast majority of the Afrikaans-speaking voters and supported by the overwhelming majority of the *new* voters. (Youth is on the side of the National Party). In other words, the National Party has a clear set of principles and the support of an ever-increasing number of voters.

A very brief comparison of the underlying policies of the National party and of the United Front might make this clear. The National Party stands for the maintenance of the absolute sovereignty and independence of the South African state, while the United Front believes that full membership of the British Commonwealth of Nations confers unique advantages on South Africa. The National Party believes in national unity between the European language groups in South Africa, but maintains that this unity can be achieved only by absolute equality between these two groups, by mutual respect and by individual loyalty to South Africa as the only fatherland. The United Party stands for the broad national unity of all South Africans irrespective of any racial differences, particularly colour differences. The National Party stands for the maintenance of European government in South Africa; it wants to achieve this by applying a policy of apartness in the

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social, territorial, economic, and political spheres; and it rejects all attempts at equalization in these spheres between white and non-white. The United Party does not believe that total separation now or in the future is desirable or practical, and yet, it believes in and practice partial separation, particularly social and economic. The National Party believes in active rejection and suppression of Communism while the United Party stands for a rather indecisive action against people who believe in Communism. The National Party stands for the full sovereignty of the Union Parliament. It claims that the highest legislative body in South Africa should be the elected Parliament and that the courts should interpret and apply the laws made by Parliament and should have no right to declare a law of Parliament

as *ultra vires*. Where necessary the National Party believes in the lawful changing of the Constitution of the Union. The United Party, however, believes that the Constitution was a compact entered into at the time of the Union and that nothing has happened since to weaken its sanctity and pledges itself to defend the Constitution.

In conclusion I may state that the new government will proceed legally to put into effect its policy of apartness, its policy of the sovereignty of Parliament, its policy of putting Coloured voters on a separate roll. Meanwhile no European need fear any abolition of his rights as a citizen.

With kind regards,  
J. CHR. COETZEE

## Book Reviews

### ADVENTURING FOR GOD

APOSTLE TO ISLAM: A BIOGRAPHY OF SAMUEL M. ZWEMER.  
By J. Christy Wilson. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. 261 pages. \$4.00.

MODERNITY with its emphasis on gadgets and machines has begotten a drab culture. The lives of most people are characterized by deadening apathy to what is going on in the world. Those who constitute exceptions to the run-of-the-mill mass spend their years on the thin edge of a nervous frenzy which is artificially induced and leads precisely nowhere. It can't be denied that this dull routine has rotted the fabric of Christian conviction and experience within the churches of our land. The high adventure of doing great things for God on the grounds of expecting great things from God has too frequently been choked by our craving for creaturely comforts. Much of our American Christianity is pseudo-sophisticate, a paltry imitation of the garish world and therefore devoid of apostolic fervor and power.

This fascinating story of the pioneer of American missions to the Moslem world is a refreshing reminder of the heroism of living for Christ. It has been rightly called "a definitive biography of the giant among missionaries in this century." As such this review of the life and labors of Dr. Zwemer serves to recall us to our prime duty of witnessing for Christ in a hostile world and reminds us that a comfortable Christianity often signifies spiritual suicide for the church.

The author tells his story well. He is thoroughly equipped for his task, since he also labored for several years among the Moslems, knew the subject of his biography intimately, and succeeded him as teacher of Christian missions at Princeton. The reading of the titles of the four sections of the book already whets our appetite: As the Twig is Bent, To the Heart of the Moslem World, In Journeyings Often, and The Harvest of the Years. It is the gripping tale of the trials and triumphs of laboring for the Lord in the most difficult and dangerous sector of the non-Christian world. Many quotations from diaries, letters, and books serve admirably to introduce us to the mind and heart of the mis-

sionary whose story this is. Particularly impressive is the wide range and thorough grasp of Dr. Zwemer's knowledge of the Moslems who so often have been alternately ignored and feared by the Christian churches. His compelling conviction that only Jesus Christ is the answer to the need of the Moslem world was succinctly stated by himself more than forty years ago. At one of the many conferences which featured him as the leading speaker he told his audience:

As our eyes sweep the horizon of all these land dominated or imperilled by this great rival faith, each seems to stand out as typical of one of the factors in the great problem. Morocco is typical of the degradation of Islam; Persia of its disintegration; Arabia of its stagnation; Egypt of its attempted reformation; China shows the neglect of Islam; Java the conversion of Islam; India the opportunity to reach Islam; Equatorial Africa its peril. Each of these typical conditions is in itself an appeal. The supreme need of the Moslem world is Jesus Christ. He alone can give light to Morocco, unity to Persia, life to Arabia, re-birth to Egypt, reach the neglected in China, win Malaysia, meet the opportunity in India, and stop the aggressive peril in Africa. (p. 174).

Such passionate love, keen insight, and intense zeal for preaching the gospel yielded a rich harvest on the field in meeting the non-Christians and at home in stirring the churches to a sense of their heavenly commission.

The book deserves careful attention. The life and labor of its subject are carefully recorded. It is provided with a good index and lists the books which flowed with amazing and increasing rapidity from his facile pen. An apology is made for not mentioning the articles written by Zwemer on the grounds that the list would be quite interminable. The reader is amazed that one man, even with the long years of vigor allotted to him, could accomplish so much for the cause of Christ.

We believe that the value of the book would have been measurably increased, if more attention had been paid to Zwemer's missionary strategy. Although the author occasionally refers to the message which burned upon his heart and the methods which he prosecuted with a large



measure of success, too much of this is mentioned in a rather incidental way. A careful analysis of this from his life and works ought to be soon forthcoming, in order that the secret of his strength may be more appreciated.

This book ought to find its way into the libraries of many Christian homes and schools and churches throughout the English-speaking world. It is a necessary antidote to the lackadaisical spirit which today suffocates the spiritual life of many who name the name of Christ. For whether we witness for the Saviour of mankind at home or abroad, the world needs men and women of unfaltering conviction and unflagging zeal. Only when this is present will the churches be able to respond to the high calling wherewith they have been called by God.

PETER Y. DE JONG  
South India

### THE PASTOR AND PSYCHIATRY

ZIELSZORG EN PSYCHIATRIE. By Dr. B. Christian Hamer. Kampen, The Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1952. 226 pages. 8.50 guilders.

THIS is a book every pastor should read. Our Christian teachers, too, can profit greatly from Hamer's discussion.

How shall we translate the title, especially the first word? What is the English equivalent for the Dutch word *zielszorg*? The word is composed of two parts, *ziel* and *zorg*. The former means soul. The latter is best translated to take care of, provide for, or look after. But these do not convey the full meaning of *zorg*. *Zorg* has more personal communication in it. Spirit to spirit communication stands at the center of it. A colleague of mine in the English department informs me that originally the English word *care* meant about the same as the Dutch word *zorg*.

This book addresses itself to the problem of recognizing deviations in the normal mental life of the person who comes under the pastoral care of a minister of the gospel. Hence, the advice to every pastor who can read the Dutch to study this book with some care.

The author is a psychiatrist and a Christian of the Reformed faith. He knows psychiatry, but he also knows the gospel. What is more, he knows the relative significance of each in the life of people. He is competent to advise pastors on the important subject of understanding people.

And how important it is to understand people. In our time many people are seeking help from the psychiatrist. The medical profession is beginning to realize how basic inner security of the soul-life is to the physical well-being of the person. College classes in abnormal psychology and related courses fill up rapidly on registration day. People want to know more about themselves. This is not an unhealthy or illegitimate desire in itself. But back of it as a motivating factor may be some undesirable situations in the person's life which he himself is not conscious of or cannot admit to himself.

There are people in the churches who avoid pastors and consistories in their problems because they, for some reason, have the wrong attitude toward spiritual ministry in the church. The soul-care idea is not present to them. They find their way into guidance bureaus, to marriage counselors, and the like. But these are rarely capable of giving their counseling the emphasis of soul-care. How necessary then that our pastors come to understand more of the deviations to which their parishioners are subject particularly today.

Diagnose? No, he cannot do this and should refrain from any such attempt. Recognize first symptoms, as in the case of measles, etc? Yes, this is important. Dr. Hamer points to serious consequences which ill-advised spiritual admonition may have for a person afflicted with a distortion in his personality. The well-meaning pastor can do great harm because he fails to understand.

What is this valuable book like? It sets forth recognizable symptoms and describes in general the course of the most common form of deviations from normal mental life. It also suggests in what direction therapy generally is undertaken and gives a brief appraisal of different kinds of psycho-therapy. Then the author indicates what place spiritual counsel has in the various cases as they are identified.

When I was in the Netherlands three years ago, I heard one of the leading Reformed theologians deliver an address at the opening of a seminary. He pointed out, among other things, that a minister of the gospel must first and foremost be a theologian. He must be a student of the living Word of God in order to be able to lead God's people in the green pastures of that Word. Very true this is, and no other activity may intrude upon this major task. But he, as a minister, must *lead* people in the feeding upon that Word for every area of life. This means that he must understand people. The Word must be made relevant to the particular situation in which a Christian finds himself. Dr. Hamer very aptly points out how the Word can speak to the human heart even in moments of imbalance and distortion in his personality.

I know of no book quite so pertinent for spiritual counselors. The controversial issues in psychology and psychiatry are not ignored, but honestly taken into account. A comparatively new area of general revelation is made relevant to the work of the pastor in his delicate work with apparent personality deviations. We need more study in this field. We need Christian psychiatrists, men of God, dominated by the Spirit of Christ, who will open the field of understanding people to us. We thank God for the few men that are now entering upon this important work.

CORNELIUS JAARMA  
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### A COMMENTARY FOR EDIFICATION

EXPOSITION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN. By Arthur W. Pink. Reprinted by Zondervan Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1953.

ANYONE looking for a conservative evangelical commentary on the gospel of John, written from the generally dispensational, pre-millenarian, Baptist point of view, will find it in this work by the well-known author of "The Sovereignty of God," "Exposition of Genesis" and a large number of polemical and doctrinal pamphlets and books—who served a number of pastorates in America and resided in Scotland until his death in 1945.

This commentary was written in 1923 and the present three-volume work is a complete reprint of the original four-volume set, with new clearer print and with the addition of Scripture references at the top of each page.

It is not necessarily a criticism to say that the book bears few of the marks of the usual "scholarly" type of commentary. The author evidently wrote, as he says, "to edify those who are members of the Household of faith." He omits points that he considers of purely academic importance because "they provide no food for the soul." His expressed



aim was "to obtain from God the meaning of the text, and . . . to apply its lessons . . . effectively to his hearers and readers."

There are many things to admire about the author and the work before us. The book is not dry and pedantic, but is easy to read, deeply devotional, filled with personal testimony to the author's faith and earnestness. On the fundamentals of the Christian faith, Pink is soundly conservative. He is sometimes sharply polemic, not hesitating to describe a false position as "a Satanic falsehood." He accepts much of the Calvinistic emphasis (cf. p. 30 vol. 1) and opposes ultra-dispensationalism, modern faith-healing cults, and the like. Sometimes his doctrinal exposition is outstanding. His treatment of regeneration in connection with John 3 is exceptionally illuminating.

There is especially one feature about the commentary to which the present reviewer must take exception. The Rev. Mr. Pink is given to allegorical or, as he calls it, symbolic interpretation. Especially does this come out in his treatment of Christ's miracles. Undoubtedly the miracles of Jesus have spiritual significance. They are called "signs" which leaves room for something more than merely that they proved His Deity. But when the miracle of the wedding in Cana of Galilee is made to mean that the stone water-pots are the natural heart of man, their being set apart is a symbol of the Old Testament of law, the water is the Word, and the wine is the Divine joy of regeneration, we have a case not of exegesis but of "eisegesis." Those ideas are not in the text, ready to be drawn out. They are outside the text and are put in. The author treats similarly of the miracle at the pool of Bethesda. On page 130, vol. I, amazing and remote deductions are drawn from several apparently incidental and utterly remote references to brass in the Scripture. On page 168 of the same volume ten references to wells are collected from passages in the Bible from Genesis to Proverbs to prove that wells are type of Christ.

These examples are sufficient to indicate the type of treatment to which we refer. There is a temptation to fall into this sort of thing. Frequently the listeners in the pew like it because it seems to them to be profound analysis of Scripture. However, if it is not there, it is not proper, we feel, to import it, although extravagant typology and allegorizing is not unknown even to otherwise very careful exegetes.

ARNOLD BRINK  
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### SCHOLARLY EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW

AN EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW. By Alfred Plummer. *Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1953, 451 pages, \$5.00.*

**B**ORROWING an expression of Dr. Albertus Pieters one may well call this commentary an "outstanding example of that happy combination of profound scholarship and evangelical Christian faith so often found in the great scholars of the Church of England" (*The Lamb, the Woman and the Dragon*, p. 361). It is designed, according to the author's preface, as a supplement to the commentary

in the I.C.C. series on Matthew by Rev. W. C. Allen. The Rev. Allen restricted himself to literary questions; this volume gives a more exegetical, historical, and theological approach.

As a reprint of the second edition the value of this work is limited by the fact that it takes no account of recent developments. But Dr. Plummer's command of the literature of his day (i.e., about 1910) on this subject was complete, and here we have the product of great learning.

Anyone expecting to find ready-made material for sermons here will be disappointed. The commentary is exegetical, but very seldom expository or "practical." There are occasional remarks of that character that are very fine, as for example the warning against publicity of church giving on page 90. In general the purpose is to provide concise statement as to the probable meaning of the text. Much attention is given to parallels with Mark and Luke, and in lesser degree, John. There are many references to apocryphal and patristic literature. In finer print problems of textual criticism and language are mentioned from time to time.

The introductory essay on The Christology of the First Gospel takes a strong stand on the full deity of Christ, a theme which is defended throughout the book. Plummer also does not hesitate to defend all the miracles, the existence of angels and evil spirits, the Trinity, and other evangelical doctrines. His view of the atonement is very universalistic e.g., comments on 20:28 on page 280. Whenever opportunity is presented, he argues against the idea of everlasting punishment, hinting rather at its disciplinary character. His teaching on the relationship of the believer to the Savior is rather vague. Interesting is the fact that he doubts the authenticity of the "except for fornication" clause about divorce, and maintains the absolute indissolubility of marriage.

The apologetical value of the book against attacks on the deity of Christ and the historicity of his works and words can be appreciated. However, it is vitiated a large extent by a very compromising view of the origin of Scripture and leniency toward higher critical positions. The final author of the gospel was not the apostle Matthew. Almost a disproportionately large amount of space is devoted to conjectures as to sources of specific passages and comparisons with the other two Synoptics. Although Plummer's own conclusions regarding the writings of the New Testament are conservative he seems to share rather extreme views of the Old Testament, questioning the historicity of Jonah (p. 183), of Noah, and of Lot's wife (p. 340). I could not find a word ascribing the Scriptures to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He asserts that, whatever the reason, we must not regard Christ as authoritative for matters of criticism, e.g., the authorship of Psalm 110. From a Reformed viewpoint these are serious concessions to a rationalistic method. In spite of many excellent features one feels that the camel's nose is in the tent, and an apologetic based on this position cannot successfully maintain itself against enemies of the truth. Therefore the book is not to be recommended for use by any but theologically trained students.

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