Foreword

As one who has labored for decades to understand, articulate, and *re*-articulate Cornelius Van Til's Reformed approach to the discipline of apologetics, I have normally been aware of other scholars in the field whose concerns have been coincident with mine. One day, I received an email from Brant Bosserman, with his doctoral dissertation attached, from which this work is taken. I had never heard of Dr. Bosserman, so my instinct was to do (unfortunately) what I do with virtually all emails of this nature—consign it to the digital trash bin. I rarely have time to read what is required of me, much less what comes to me "out of the blue." But, since this work was focused on Van Til's thought, I decided that I should at least skim it.

My attempt to skim Dr. Bosserman's dissertation turned to serious and concentrated reading. I read every page, some more than once. By the time I had finished this work, I recognized that Dr. Bosserman had successfully focused his energies on a topic that is not only central to the Christian faith, but that is central to all of Van Til's thought. I set this work aside and thought, "Why hasn't this been done before?"

There are a number of responses to that question. One response would be that, though Van Til's apologetic method has its genesis in an affirmation of the ontological Trinity, many of the criticisms of Van Til's thought have, historically, focused on other things. For example, there has been, and continues to be, serious misunderstandings about what, exactly, Van Til means by the notion of "presupposition." There have been those who have seen Van Til's rejection of the standard formulations of the "theistic proofs" as a concession to fideism. There have been, in other words, pressing matters of clarity that needed, and still need, to be addressed. Whatever the reasons, however, the topic that is given its due herein is not by any means tangential to Van Til's thinking; it is the warp and woof of everything that he believed, taught and wrote.

Without question, the most radical, revolutionary, requisite and Reformed aspect of the apologetic set forth by Van Til was his insistence that one's defense of Christianity must begin with the ontological Trinity. No apologist prior to him had argued such a thing, in part because it meant that the discipline of apologetics must self-consciously begin with Scripture. So, says Van Til:

> [A] consistently Christian method of apologetic argument, in agreement with its own basic conception of the starting point, must be by presupposition. To argue by presupposition is to indicate what are the epistemological and metaphysical principles that underlie and control one's method. The Reformed apologist will frankly admit that his own methodology presupposes the truth of Christian theism. Basic to all the doctrines of Christian theism is that of the self-contained God, or, if we wish, that of the ontological trinity. It is this notion of the ontological trinity that ultimately controls a truly Christian methodology. Based upon this notion of the ontological trinity and consistent with it, is the concept of the counsel of God according to which all things in the created world are regulated.[1]

Everything that Van Til wrote and taught has its center in the distinctly Christian, biblical truth of God's Triunity. The fact that God is One in Three must take its rightful place in the theology of any Christian, and especially any Reformed Christian. Not only so, but as goes one's theology, so ought to go one's apologetic; a Trinitarian theology demands a Trinitarian apologetic as well.

But, in spite of Van Til's consistent emphasis throughout his career and his writings, the fact of God's Triunity has not yet ascended to its rightful place, especially in the area of a Christian defense of the faith, and the theology that must undergird that defense. Generally speaking, when mention is made of Van Til's emphasis on the Trinity, the discussion usually turns to the philosophical problem of the "one and the many." Aside from that, little is said, and even less is elaborated.

One can peruse the books and writings of authors who follow in Van Til's line (including mine!) and there will not be a primary and focused articulation of the Trinity, and the implications of that doctrine, in virtually any of them. There is "honorable mention" made in most works, and some have wanted to move *from* that doctrine *to* possible implications, but none of us has, in my opinion, drawn out the deep and rich entailments that a rich, robust, Reformed doctrine of the Trinity requires for the way that we

1. DF4, 121–22.

think about the world, about our theology, and about apologetics. This is not as it should be.

We owe Dr. Bosserman a debt of deep gratitude for mounting the difficulties of Van Til's Trinitarian thought, grabbing the reins, spurring it in the side, and moving it forward, as he guides us through the trail of the rich and radical contours that have otherwise been lying pent up and dormant, virtually hidden from view.

With the pathway now clearer because of Dr. Bosserman's work, those of us who seek to follow in Van Til's line can better recognize its direction, as well as its boundaries. There will be more brush to clear along the way; a work of this depth and breadth is bound to have a few briars and brambles still remaining in the path. But the Trinitarian trail, mapped out by Van Til, has now been extensively trod. Its end has not been reached, and we may want to sidestep it in places in order to mark off a better side-path, but wisdom points to the trail Dr. Bosserman has blazed as the best place to begin.

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