

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Email: Jrob1517@aol.com Website: <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/> Telephone: 423.743.0199 Fax: 423.743.2005

The Evisceration of the Christian Faith

Sean Gerety

One of the central doctrines of the Reformation and the Christian faith is the principle of *sola Scriptura* – Scripture alone. It is in this principle that all other Biblical doctrines find their source, legitimacy, and warrant. It is the underlying axiom of the Christian faith. Not surprisingly, and as one would expect, any alteration in this foundational doctrine will affect every other doctrine which may be logically drawn from this one inerrant and infallible source. Throughout history this critical doctrine has been the focus of attack for the simple reason that if the foundation can be broken, it is only a matter of time before the whole structure will fall. Even the redundancy, “inerrant and infallible,” is evidence of an earlier attack on the doctrine of Scripture by Liberals and Neo-orthodox who sought an “infallible” word from God in what they believed to be an erring book. Yet, today, among those calling themselves Reformed, there has been an even more deadly and pervasive attack on the truth of Scripture that has left men impotent to defend the Gospel. This movement has attempted to divorce the statements of Scripture from their logical and necessary implications.

Scripture and Logic

The principle of *sola Scriptura* is often misunderstood as being restricted to the explicit statements of Scripture; any implication that might be drawn from them tends to be regarded with suspicion. Logical deductions from Scripture are often derided as the products of “mere human logic,” the underlying assumption being that man’s logic is one thing, and God’s logic, whatever that might be, is, well, another. Of course, those who defend such a view never actually explain what God’s logic is or how we can tell one logic from the other, yet they couch their misology in pious language. Human logic, they say, while of some limited value, must be “curbed.” That was not the position of

the theologians at the Westminster Assembly who asserted both the sufficiency and rationality of Scripture: “The *whole* counsel of God, concerning *all* things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or *by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture*: unto which *nothing* at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men” [emphasis added].

Notice, the “whole counsel of God” consists not merely of those statements “expressly set down in Scripture” but also includes all those statements which may be validly deduced from Scripture. According to the *Westminster Confession*, Christianity is a rational, deductive, logical system, and valid deductions from Scripture are no less the counsel of God than those statements that are assigned a chapter and verse. All of them together are the “whole counsel” of God, which is all that is necessary for God’s glory and man’s salvation, faith, and life. Therefore, the principle of *sola Scriptura* and the divine authority of Scripture extend to all, and not just to some, additional propositions that may be validly inferred from Scripture. Christians are not to assent to the so-called prophetic babbling of Charismatics or some self-appointed Magisterium, or even succumb to the comfort of human tradition and custom. Scripture alone, the mind of Christ, should be the sole object of our belief, for it is God’s Word alone that sets us free from the tyranny of sin and human invention. God’s Word – the whole counsel of God – includes all necessary inferences which can be logically deduced from Scripture.

It is precisely this relationship between Scripture and those propositions that can be necessarily deduced from Scripture that many theologians, including Cornelius Van Til and his followers, have long denied. Van Til argued that all Scripture is analogical and

apparently contradictory, that God's logic is not man's logic, and that there is a qualitative, in addition to a quantitative, difference between God's thoughts and man's. According to Van Til, it is not just the extent of God's knowledge that can never be exhausted by man, but there is a complete discontinuity between the truths God knows and the "truths" man knows. God's knowledge and the knowledge possible to man, Van Til and the Westminster Seminary faculty wrote in 1944, do not coincide "at any single point." Van Til repeated this statement many times in his subsequent books. As a consequence of this complete disjunction between God's knowledge and man's knowledge, "Our knowledge is analogical and therefore must be paradoxical,"¹ and "all teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory."² Not only is there a complete break between God's thoughts and man's, but, as we will see, God's logic and man's logic are not the same. This explains why one of the hallmarks of Vantilian Newspeak is the distinction (without a discernible difference) between "apparent" and "real" contradictions in Scripture. As Van Til put it, "While we shun as poison the idea of the really contradictory, we embrace with passion the idea of the apparently contradictory."³

Two questions that arise are these: What is the difference between the "really contradictory" and the "apparently contradictory"? and, Is there any method by which we can tell one class of contradictions from the other? If there is no such method, what are the meaning and purpose of asserting that all Scripture is "apparently contradictory"? Does not such an assertion encourage laziness in Bible study, commend ignorance, and elevate clerics and academics, especially those of the Vantilian stripe, into a new priestly class who alone can peer into the Biblical stew of apparent contradictions, antinomies, tensions, analogies, and insoluble paradoxes and demand assent to their contradictory view of truth on the basis of nothing more than their own authority?

According to Van Til and his followers, the "apparent contradictions" of Scripture arise primarily as a result of our "creatureliness" or "finitude," and, as creatures before the Sovereign Creator, we are to accept these "apparent contradictions," not try to reconcile them, and to believe that for God there are no real contradictions. This is the explanation offered by John Frame in his essay, "Van Til: the Theologian" (which can also be found in the book *Foundations of Christian Scholarship* [edited by Gary North] under the title "The Problem of Theological Paradox"). Frame asserts:

[W]e are in a strange state of affairs: we have two propositions ("God is good" and "God foreordains evil") which we can show to be logically interdependent in one sense; yet we cannot show them to be logically compatible except by an appeal to faith....⁴ This balance of interdependence and paradox is in the interest of thinking in submission to Scripture. Scripture must be followed both in its assertions of interdependence and in its refusal to reconcile all doctrines to our satisfaction.⁵

Thus, a paradox remains for us, though by faith we are confident that there is no paradox for God. Faith is basic to the salvation of our knowledge as well as the salvation of our souls [17].

Notice the role "faith" plays when confronting an apparent contradiction in Scripture. According to Frame, and by way of example, we cannot show through the use of logic how God's goodness and his foreordination of evil can be harmonized; instead, we appeal to "faith." According to Frame, "*We must not simply push our logic relentlessly to the point where we ignore or deny a genuine biblical teaching*" [33, emphasis is Frame's]. Logic fails, and we are unable to harmonize a particular set of Biblical teachings. That's where "faith" comes in. We are not to wrestle with these "contradictory" teachings and attempt to logically harmonize what might seem to us to be conflicting truths, for, it is assumed at the outset, all such wrestling is futile and is a prideful violation of the Creator/creature distinction.

This procedure, in which "faith" curbs logic, is hostile to systematic theology and the Confessional idea that Christianity (which consists of all the propositions of Scripture plus all those propositions which may be deduced from them) is a rational, deductive faith. If Frame were interested in affirming his own "creatureliness" at this point and were merely confessing his own inability, one could hardly object. We certainly can't expect everyone, particularly a new Christian, to know how all the pieces of the Christian system fit together. Frame, of course, is not a new Christian. He has been a seminary professor for forty

⁴ Frame does not explain how an "appeal to faith" demonstrates anything, let alone shows the logical compatibility of two propositions. His use of the word "faith" here involves a *denial* of logical analysis and demonstration. "Faith" is Frame's magic wand.

⁵ John Frame, *Van Til the Theologian*, 30.
http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/index.html?mainframe=frame_vtt.html. Of course, Scripture does not "refuse" to reconcile doctrines. It is Frame and the Vantilians who refuse, eschew systematic theology, and forbid others to demonstrate the logical consistency of Biblical doctrines.

¹ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 61.

² Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 142.

³ Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 9.

years. Frame is not humbly admitting his own limitations; he is arrogantly asserting that if he cannot reconcile these doctrines, no one can, and anyone who claims he can, or even tries to reconcile them, is impious, lacking "faith." It is this refusal to try to harmonize apparently contradictory doctrines of Scripture that Frame calls "thinking in submission to Scripture." Surrendering the mind to the "apparently contradictory" becomes for the Vantilian a divine duty and a sign of true Christian humility. But where in Scripture are we commanded to submit ourselves to contradictions, real or imagined? Nowhere, of course. One might be tempted to overlook such a sanctimonious leap into the absurd if it were merely the result of a particular theologian's embarrassment over his failure to harmonize one or two particularly troublesome Biblical doctrines. How often have we all heard even the best theologian or pastor appeal to the proverbial (and un-Biblical) "mystery" when confronted with a particularly sticky question for which he has no answer? Yet, that is not the case here, for Van Til and his disciples make this leap into the absurd a principle of Christian theology, asserting that "all" our knowledge and all the teachings of Scripture are paradoxical and apparently contradictory. Frame writes:

One might conclude...that Van Til regards Christianity as a deductive system in which each doctrine, taken by itself, logically implies all the others. Van Til, however, explicitly denies this notion. There is no "master concept" from which the whole of Christian doctrine may be logically deduced [14].

Yet this is precisely what the *Westminster Confession* and the Scriptures affirm when they assert all the parts of Scriptures "consent," that is, agree with one another. Jesus put it this way: "The Scriptures cannot be broken." It is the consent of the whole (for the meaning of God's word is not manifold, but one) which provides evidence, through the power and work of the Holy Spirit, to convict men that God's Word is true. If one rejects the notion that Christianity is a logically deductive system, then there can be no "consent of the parts." While no one denies that sinful men are fallible and often err in both exegesis and when drawing inferences from Scripture, the error of the Vantilians and the Neo-orthodox is to impute error to logic itself. As John Robbins observes:

Logic – God's and man's – is unaffected by sin, just as arithmetic is. Man's thinking is affected by sin, so we make mistakes in both logic and arithmetic. But our sin consists precisely in violating the rules of logic and arithmetic, which are the rules of God's own thinking.

Further, if Van Til is correct and all Scripture ends in paradoxes, which, by his definition, defy harmonization, what becomes of any application of Acts 15:15: "And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written..."? If there is "no 'master concept' from which the whole of Christian doctrine may be logically deduced"⁶ (if Christianity is not a logical system), then what difference does it make if a doctrine agrees – or disagrees – with "the words of the Prophets"? As has already been shown, according to Van Til and his chief apologist John Frame, the "words of the Prophets" also end in apparent contradiction, and there can be no hope of logical harmonization. Christianity, for the Vantilian, is a hodgepodge of conflicting "truths," and the belief that there is "no contradiction for God" is nothing more than a blind leap of un-Christian "faith." Whatever truths the Christian faith may consist of, they are impervious to systematization and are, quite literally, beyond logic and beyond belief. The theologian, not to mention the average person in the pews, is prohibited, all in the name of "faith," "mystery," and "thinking in submission to Scripture," from trying to understand how the teachings of Scripture cohere. If "embracing with passion" the apparent contradictions of Scripture is the height of Christian humility, it follows that attempting to harmonize these apparent contradictions, that is, doing systematic theology, must be the apex of sinful arrogance and pride.

The Clark-Van Til Controversy

A powerful example of Van Til's vilification of anyone who would dare even to try to harmonize the supposed "apparent contradictions" of Scripture occurred during the controversy that developed in the 1940's between Van Til and Gordon Clark. One of the central issues in that controversy was Dr. Clark's contention that he had harmonized one of the so-called insoluble paradoxes of Scripture, specifically the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. What is particularly revealing is the reaction of Van Til and his associates to Dr. Clark's proposed solution to this problem. (For Dr. Clark's argument see his article "Determinism and Responsibility," or the last chapter of *Religion, Reason and Revelation*.) As Herman Hoeksema observed in *The Clark-Van Til Controversy* (which is a very readable account written at the time of the controversy), instead of engaging Dr. Clark's argument or even attempting to refute it, Van Til and his followers viciously attacked Clark as a "rationalist." To

⁶ The "master concept" is actually a master proposition, the axiom of Christianity itself: The Bible alone is the Word of God.

quote the *Complaint* Van Til and others filed against Dr. Clark's ordination:

Here then is a situation which is inadequately described as amazing. There is a problem which has baffled the greatest theologians in history. Not even Holy Scripture offers a solution. But Dr. Clark asserts unblushingly that for his thinking the problem has ceased to be a problem. Here is something phenomenal. What accounts for it? The most charitable, and no doubt the correct, explanation is that Dr. Clark has come under the spell of rationalism. It is difficult indeed to escape the conclusion that by his refusal to permit the Scriptural teaching of divine sovereignty and the Scriptural teaching of human responsibility to stand alongside each other, and by his claim that he has fully reconciled them with each other before the bar of human reason, Dr. Clark has fallen into the error of rationalism [*The Clark-Van Til Controversy*, 23].

The reason the Complainants slandered Dr. Clark as a "rationalist" was that he claimed to harmonize two doctrines of Scripture which they, the Vantilians, claimed could not be harmonized. What else could the Vantilians do except slander? If this so-called "apparent contradiction" could be harmonized at the "bar of human reason" – if Dr. Clark could harmonize doctrines that Van Til and the Westminster Seminary faculty insisted could not be harmonized – then Van Til's entire philosophy, resting on his analogical and paradoxical view of Scripture, would be exposed as a fraud. Yet, as Hoeksema pointed out, the only "proof" Van Til could provide that Dr. Clark was "under the spell of rationalism" was that he mentioned pagan philosophers. Of course, Dr. Clark's opponents failed to note that he mentioned Calvin's *Institutes* as well, which, as it turns out, is central to Dr. Clark's argument and key to solving this puzzle "which has baffled the greatest theologians in history." Of course, if the mere reference to pagan philosophers warrants the epithet "rationalist," one doesn't have to read too far in the *Institutes* to conclude that Calvin must have been a "rationalist." Paul himself, who quotes a pagan poet in *Acts* 17, must have been a "rationalist," too.

For the Vantilians, at least those true to Van Til's teachings, apparent contradictions do not function as "red flags" warning them to go back and check their premises, carefully define their terms, and examine their inferences. Instead, when they encounter an apparent contradiction, they must bow their heads in feigned Christian piety and resignation. Such false humility is sheer arrogance, for they do not even entertain the possibility that they may have erred. The apparent contradictions are due to their "creatureliness," not to

their stupidity or foolishness. Frame's answer to the logical paradoxes of Scripture is "just believe," but believe what? How does Frame or any Vantilian know "there is no paradox for God"? By an appeal to Scripture? Impossible, since "all teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory." Without any reason the Vantilians command us to believe that for God there is no contradiction. Magic "faith," divorced from logic and Scripture, becomes the means by which they assert "there is no paradox for God." But why wouldn't it make more sense, even as a matter of simple intellectual honesty, to conclude that if Van Til is right and these so-called paradoxes of Scripture are logically irreconcilable, then perhaps God himself is contradictory? There is and can be no warrant in Scripture – since Scripture itself is contradictory – for asserting that God is non-contradictory.

When Frame insists we "cannot show" that various teachings of Scripture are logically compatible, we must ask how he (or any Vantilian) can possibly know this? Does it follow that because he or his mentor could not harmonize various teachings of Scripture, that no one can? What sort of arrogance is this? If we accept Van Til's doctrine of Scripture, how can we tell a "real" from an "apparent" contradiction, since neither, we are told, can be harmonized at the bar of human reason? If we, at the outset, must embrace apparent contradictions "with passion," what possible incentive can there be to search the Scriptures and examine other places that, in the words of the *Confession*, "speak more clearly"? Must we bow in submission to error as well? It would seem so, for we cannot distinguish between "apparent" and "real" contradictions. That is, given Van Til's doctrine, we cannot distinguish between truth and error. Frame's proposed "solution" to the problem of the theological paradox is a deadly blow to the Biblical doctrine of Scripture. Simply put, without some clear method by which an "apparent contradiction" can be distinguished from a "real contradiction," it is impossible to tell one from the other. Since both classes of contradiction appear identical to the human mind, and human logic cannot distinguish or reconcile either one, Van Til's and Frame's view of Scripture results in complete skepticism.

Van Til: The Father of Norman Shepherd

While Frame gives many examples of so-called "apparent contradictions" in Scripture, which, we are told, are impervious to logical harmonization (divine foreordination and human responsibility, the unity and diversity of the Godhead, God's foreordination of sin while not being sin's author, to name a few), it must be remembered that this paradoxical and contradictory view of Scripture extends to all teaching of Scripture

and to all our knowledge, including our knowledge of the central doctrine of the Christian faith, justification. Frame writes, "Thus, the doctrine of justification by faith incorporates the paradox of divine sovereignty. The doctrine of justification by faith – when fully explained in its relations to the rest of Scriptural truth – is just as paradoxical as divine sovereignty."⁷ Note carefully, the doctrine of justification is just as paradoxical and contradictory as any other Biblical doctrine in the Vantilian anti-system. Also, note how it is that we come to a paradoxical view of justification. Paradoxes arise precisely when we attempt to explain a doctrine in relation "to rest of Scriptural truth." For the Vantilian, the doctrine of justification is as resistant to logical harmonization as are all other Biblical doctrines. This is the connection between Van Til's doctrine of revelation and the current heresies over justification and other doctrines that have emerged in Presbyterian churches.

Another example of this rejection of the Biblical doctrine of Scripture comes from Doug Jones (erstwhile assistant to Greg Bahnsen, now a teaching elder at Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho; editor of Canon Press; Professor of Philosophy at New Saint Andrews College; and regular contributor to Douglas Wilson's *Credenda / Agenda* magazine), who cites Frame in his review of John Robbins' booklet, *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth*:

Van Til holds that we use logic under the guide of Rom. 3:4: "[L]et God be true, though every man be found a liar." We adopt what can be deduced from Scripture by good and necessary consequence unless our inferences force us to deny other Biblical teachings. (See John Frame's "Van Til: the Theologian" [28-37] for the full explication of this point.)⁸

Notice the twist placed on *Romans* 3:4 where the truth of God's Word, which corrects the errors and presumptions of men, is used to support Van Til's contradictory view of Scripture. Of course, nowhere in *Romans* 3:4, or anywhere else in Scripture for that matter, are we told that God's Word is "apparently contradictory" and impervious to systematization. *Contra* Jones, Frame, and Van Til, the *Westminster Confession* affirms, echoing Scripture itself, that truth is characterized by the logical and harmonious relationship of propositions, not by "apparent contradictions," antinomies, or insoluble and inscrutable paradoxes. Were the *Confession* writers wrong when they claimed a "consent of the parts" as one of the

⁷ John Frame, *Van Til the Theologian*, 35.

⁸ Jones' review appeared in *Journey* magazine in 1987 (edited by OPC minister Richard Knodel).

evidences for the truth of Scripture? If we are to believe Van Til and his followers, it would seem so. They assert that necessary inferences from Scripture are permissible, except when one deduction contradicts another. But if they understood what truth is, they would know that it is non-contradictory, and one valid inference from true premises cannot contradict any other true proposition. If an inferred conclusion contradicts Biblical teaching, the inference must be invalid. Biblical teaching is non-contradictory. But the Vantilian method assures us in advance that valid inferences from Scripture will eventually "force us to deny other Biblical teaching." Could their rejection of the Confessional affirmations that all the parts of Scripture "consent" together, that is, logically cohere, and all valid inferences from Scripture are Scripture, be any clearer?

The Insufficiency of Scripture

Some Vantilians have recently taken the tack of trying to attribute the "insoluble paradoxes" of Scripture to the inherent insufficiency of Scripture itself. This illustrates how far Vantilians have gone and will go in twisting Scripture in order to defend the theology of Van Til.

For the Vantilian, the doctrine of justification is as resistant to logical harmonization as are all other Biblical doctrines. This is the connection between Van Til's doctrine of revelation and the current heresies over justification and other doctrines that have emerged in Presbyterian churches.

One prominent Vantilian who has been very active on Internet discussion boards in defense of Van Til over the years, David Byron, has championed this particular argument by stating, "God doesn't reveal enough to us for us to see *how* some of the teachings of Scripture cohere (though God assures us that they do, in the proverbial grand scheme of things) [emphasis is Byron's]."⁹ Therefore, the contradictions of Scripture, which, we're assured, are not "real," don't arise merely because of inherent human limitations due to our "creatureliness," but also because of the insufficiency of God's special revelation itself. Scripture is inherently incoherent, that is, Scriptural doctrines do not cohere. Scripture's alleged insufficiency prevents us from

⁹ <http://www.ccir.ed.ac.uk/~jad/vantil-list/archive-Aug-1999/msg00056.html>

seeing how the teachings of Scripture logically fit together.

It is important to see just how Byron proceeds in trying to defend Van Til. Byron begins his argument by moving his shells around quickly so the reader is advised to pay close attention [all emphases in the following quotes are Byron's]:

Some sets of propositions constitute *apparent contradictions*. Among the sets of apparent contradictions, some are actual contradictions and some merely seem that way. Call the actual contradictions "Class-A Apparent Contradictions" and call the ones that merely *seem* contradictory "Class-B Apparent Contradictions." Class-A and Class-B combined constitute the set of all apparent contradictions.

Notice that Byron begins by calling actual contradictions "apparent." This confuses the situation, rather than clarifies it. Byron continues:

Here is an example of a Class-A apparent contradiction [that is, an actual contradiction]:

[a] On 16 August 1999, George W is the front-runner.

[b] On 16 August 1999, it is not the case that George W is the front-runner.

If, and only if, all the key terms in statement [a] have the same definition in statement [b], then we would want to insist that [a] and [b] are directly contradictory, and that the reason they *appear* contradictory is precisely that they *are* so.

Here is an example of a Class-B apparent contradiction [that is, an apparent contradiction]:

[a'] Someone who stabs a child in the face with a sharp object is someone who thereby performs an immoral act.

[b'] Bob is someone who stabs a child in the face with a sharp object.

[c'] It is not the case that Bob is someone who thereby performs an immoral act.

On the face of things (so to speak), it *appears* that the conjunction of [a'] and [b'] stands in direct contradiction over against [c']. It *appears* that, given the truth of [a'] and of [b'], Bob *must* be someone who performs an immoral act when he stabs. And if we had good reason to think that [a'] through [c'] were the whole story, then we might also have good reason to find a Class-A contradiction here. However, [a'], [b'], and [c'] are *not* the whole story. What God hasn't revealed (to suggest the relevant analogy) are the true statements [d'] and [e']:

[d'] Someone who is a dentist and who, in the course of his legitimate practice, stabs a child in the face with a sharp object that is an appropriate dental

instrument is NOT someone who thereby performs an immoral act.

[e'] Bob is a dentist.

There are several things to say about this somewhat contrived and strained analogy. First, Byron has not shown, or even attempted to show, that it models anything in Scripture. Second, it rests on an obvious equivocation in at least two terms: "stab" and "face," thus violating Byron's own rule that "all the key terms [must] have the same definition." Because of this equivocation, the statements a', b', and c', do not result in any conclusion. Byron even admits the equivocation:

The revelation of more information, in the form of [d'] and [e'], makes evident that there is *more than one way* to "stab a child in the face," and that some senses of that phrase denote immoral acts while some other senses denote acts of dentistry.

This admission of equivocation is fatal to Byron's argument. Finally, Bob the dentist is as clumsy as Byron the philosopher.

Consider Byron's argument carefully as it relates to Scripture, particularly 2 *Timothy* 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...." If all Scripture ends in apparent contradictions, then in what sense can all Scripture be profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, etc.? We could not even judge, much less correct, the actions of a "face stabber," given Byron's scenario. So what happens when we try to make judgments or to draw inferences from Scripture? If Scripture is inherently insufficient, as Byron argues, if one doctrine will invariably appear to be the contradictory of another, as Van Til asserts, which side of any given Biblical contradiction will serve the various functions Paul outlines above? It seems, despite their explicit denials, that both Christ and Paul did speak "Yes and No."

According to Byron's example, when we come to the insufficient Scriptures we must expect to be confronted by contradictions. Further, the information we need to distinguish real from apparent contradictions has not been revealed to us. All we are left with are contradictions, because Scripture is insufficient.

According to Byron, every judgment that we might want, or, better, need to make in light of Scripture, and in the face of any controversy which might arise, must always be tentative, since we could never be sure if any of our inferences, sound though they may be, are resting on complete information. The Trinity may in fact turn out to be The Pentanity: Scripture simply doesn't tell us about the Mother and the Daughter. Or maybe it

is the Octinity, with the Dutch Uncle, Aunt, and Cousin thrown in. Absurd, you say? Absolutely. These are the absurd consequences of asserting the insufficiency of Scripture in order to defend Van Til's irrationalism. Blasphemous, you say? The blasphemy lies in asserting the insufficiency and irrationality of Scripture. Byron's Vantilianism is no less fatal to Christianity than Liberalism and Neo-orthodoxy.

For Vantilians like Byron, "apparent contradictions" appear to the mind and function as actual contradictions, and they are the result of the inherent insufficiency of God's propositional revelation. Scripture is not "the whole story," and we cannot expect to understand God's revelation. For the Vantilian, Scripture is not the perfect and complete revelation of God.

According to the Vantilians, not only is Scripture insufficient, but God, far from being omnipotent, cannot reveal himself to his creatures in intelligible, non-contradictory propositions. This explains why so many men schooled in Van Til's philosophy and apologetic method have been willing to accept the contradictory and heretical teachings of men like Norman Shepherd.

The Fruit of Vantilianism

It should be obvious by now that the principal effect of both Frame's and Byron's arguments is to subvert the Christian faith and preclude any systematic study of the Scriptures. This explains why Vantilians eschew systematic theology and embrace with passion Biblical Theology, where eisegesis can proceed unencumbered by the systematic teaching of Scripture. It must be recognized that the Vantilian, if he is faithful to the teachings of Van Til on paradox, does not believe that the Scriptures evidence a "consent of the parts," as the *Westminster Confession* asserts. Quite the contrary, for the Vantilian the Scriptures are resistant and impervious to systematization, and the so-called truths of Scripture consist of various and conflicting doctrines that can never be harmonized, no matter how hard or how long we try. Further, any attempt to harmonize doctrines that the Vantilian declares to be apparent contradictions (which, as we have seen, extend to all Biblical doctrines including justification), is to fall under "the spell of

rationalism." They say that our only hope is that these apparent contradictions will be resolved in Heaven, but of course we have no reason to hope for that either. Since we will still be creatures in Heaven, God will never be able to explain the apparent contradictions to us. According to the Vantilians, not only is Scripture insufficient, but God, far from being omnipotent, cannot reveal himself to his creatures in intelligible, non-contradictory propositions. This explains why so many men schooled in Van Til's philosophy and apologetic method have been willing to accept the contradictory and heretical teachings of men like Norman Shepherd. Besides, what else could these men do when one of their own, a man openly defended by John Frame and even by Van Til himself,¹⁰ proclaims that a sinner is justified by faith, even by faith alone, and yet at the same time is saved by his "faithful obedience" to the demands and conditions of the covenant? That is why it is no surprise that the faculty and administration at Westminster Seminary, as well as the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, men schooled and trained in Vantilian apologetics and epistemology, discussed Shepherd's contradictory, heretical faith/works doctrine of justification for seven years, and in the end failed to discipline Shepherd or denounce his teaching as heresy.¹¹ Instead, Shepherd was able to leave the Seminary and the OPC in good standing. Many of Shepherd's defenders in the administration and faculty at Westminster Seminary were allowed to continue to champion, develop, and promote his contradictory and destructive doctrines. The result is that his disciples now control the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia). Thanks to Van Til's deficient view of Scripture, and his rejection of the doctrine that Scripture is a logical, non-contradictory system, Shepherd's views have spread throughout Reformed and Presbyterian denominations.

The alarm was sounded long ago by Dr. Gordon Clark as he exposed the skepticism, irrationalism, and hostility to the Biblical doctrine of Scripture implicit in Van Til's theology. Few, it seems, took any notice. Yet, in contrast to what we have seen concerning Van Til's doctrine of Scripture, Dr. Clark championed the truth that the Scriptures cannot be broken. Dr. Clark saw the central importance of defending the Christian faith as a logical system of doctrines, because it is the logical relationship of Biblical propositions to each other which

¹⁰ See John W. Robbins, *A Companion to The Current Justification Controversy*, The Trinity Foundation, 2003, 41-46.

¹¹ See O. Palmer Robertson's history of the Shepherd affair, *The Current Justification Controversy*, The Trinity Foundation, 2003.

provides evidence that God's Word is true. Dr. Clark wrote:

Archaeology, of course, can contribute little or nothing toward proving that the doctrines, as distinct from the historical events, of the Bible are true.... The literary style of some parts of the Bible is majestic, but Paul's epistles are not models of style. The consent or logical consistency of the whole is important; for if the Bible contradicted itself, we would know that some of it would be false.¹²

If, nonetheless, it can be shown that the Bible – in spite of having been written by more than thirty-five authors over a period of fifteen hundred years – is logically consistent, then the unbeliever would have to regard it as a most remarkable accident.... Logical consistency, therefore, is evidence of inspiration....¹³

Since, as we have seen, neither Van Til nor his followers have been able to provide any method by which we might distinguish an apparent contradiction from a real one, the "apparent contradictions" they passionately embrace turn out to be inescapable contradictions after all.

The misology and false view of Christian humility and piety in the Vantilian system preclude the harmonization and systematization of the doctrines of Scripture, and Vantilians anathematize those who assert that all the parts of Scripture logically consent. Consequently, and unless things change dramatically, the Neolegalist march through Presbyterian and Reformed denominations will continue. Thankfully, some Vantilians are beginning to see the rotten fruit of Van Til's doctrine of Scripture, particularly as it relates to the current justification controversy, yet all too many remain blind. Unless Van Til's view of Scripture is completely excised from Christian thought, the strength and vigor of the Reformed faith, which finds its source and sustenance in that central and foundational doctrine of Scripture alone, will disappear, and the Reformed faith will be replaced by a clever counterfeit in the churches.

¹² *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* 17-18.

¹³ *God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics*, 16.

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