

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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The Heresy Matrix

John W. Robbins

Editor's Note: This essay is taken from our newest book, *A Companion to The Current Justification Controversy*. This excerpt is part of a discussion of the roots of the current controversy over the Gospel.

To this point in the book, Dr. Robbins has discussed the influence of Neo-orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, the New Perspective on Paul, Reconstructionism, and the Biblical Theology movement; and after this excerpt he discusses some of the fruit of the justification controversy in the Kinnaird case in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the theology of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church in the Presbyterian Church in America. In this essay he discusses the heresy matrix: the theological irrationalism that has given rise to the false gospels being taught in churches today.

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

As Palmer Robertson noted in *The Current Justification Controversy*, the Faculty of Westminster Seminary reacted angrily to the May 4, 1981 open letter signed by 45 theologians.¹ One member of the Faculty, Professor Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., wrote a seven-page response addressed to "those concerned for the ministry of Westminster Seminary."

In his May 19, 1981 letter, Mr. Gaffin first raised the usual procedural objection: "Is this communication [the May 4 letter] the constructive or even proper way to prosecute concerns about doctrinal error? Does it really serve the well-being of the church to widely publicize loosely supported allegations of serious doctrinal error?... One thing is certain: the effect of this communication has been to undermine, without due process, what is most precious to Mr. Shepherd as a seminary professor, the confidence in him of the churches he is seeking to serve."

Now of course, confidence in Norman Shepherd had been undermined six years earlier, when his students,

examined by presbyteries for ordination, had confessed that justification is by faith and works. Confidence in Professor Shepherd was not first undermined by a letter sent in 1981, but by Professor Shepherd's faithful students in 1974 and 1975. That loss of confidence in 1974 and 1975 marks the beginning of the controversy.

Furthermore, charges had been filed against Shepherd in the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1977, four years before Gaffin alleges that there was a lack of due process in this case. Moreover, as Robertson's history shows, the Seminary Faculty, Board, and administration had been engaged in discussions and conferences with Shepherd for six years prior to Gaffin's sending his May 19 letter. Gaffin knew all this, yet he wrote, "without due process."

Dr. Robertson's history also shows that the allegations against Shepherd were not "loosely supported." There was ample documentation of his views in audiotapes of his classroom lectures, various papers he had written for the Faculty and Board of the Seminary, and essays that he had published. What apparently made the May 4, 1981 letter so disturbing to the Westminster Faculty was the fact that it informed the larger church – not just the Seminary community, which had largely succeeded in keeping the controversy contained within its walls for years – of serious doctrinal problems in the teaching at Westminster Seminary.

The bulk of Mr. Gaffin's letter, after he raises the procedural objections, is a labored attempt to ferret out theological precedent for Shepherd's erroneous views on justification in Herman Bavinck (Gaffin includes a page of newly translated material from his *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* with his letter), in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and even in John Calvin.

With regard to Calvin, Mr. Gaffin spends more than a page discussing a single paragraph from Calvin's commentary on *Ezekiel*. This is a pattern that Peter Lillback, who received his Th.D. from Westminster Seminary in 1985 for his dissertation, *The Binding of God*, also used in his attempt to transform Calvin into a

¹ The full text of this letter is reprinted in *A Companion to The Current Justification Controversy*.

teacher of justification by faith and works.² And Samuel T. Logan, Jr., a member of the Faculty since 1979, and a defender of Shepherd who became president of the Seminary in 1991, published an essay in *The Westminster Theological Journal* in 1984 maintaining that Jonathan Edwards held a similar view of justification.³ Dr. Logan concluded:

Edwards believes that full justice must be done to Biblical passages such as this [Matthew 25:31-46] and he correctly does that justice in identifying feeding the hungry and visiting the sick and clothing the naked as *conditions* of justification. With obedience such as this, justification shall be and without it justification shall not be [45, emphasis in the original].

From the 1980s on, these revisionist efforts by Shepherd sympathizers received a boost from the growing influence of the so-called New Perspective on Paul. According to this new school of thought, dating from 1977, we modern Protestants have misunderstood Paul (due to the influence of Luther, who had misunderstood Paul by reading him autobiographically) by first misunderstanding "Second Temple" (really first century A.D.) Judaism as a works-righteousness religion. Once we rid ourselves of that error about Judaism, we can understand justification as Paul and James intended – the key to how Gentiles are now included in the covenant. They enter by faith and baptism, and they maintain their position in the covenant by their faithful obedience. For the past 20 years the pages of *The Westminster Theological Journal* have been peppered with articles by men who espouse some variation of this viewpoint, either in its Shepherd variation or its New Perspective variation: Don Garlington, Joseph Braswell, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Peter Leithart, Samuel T. Logan, Jr., John M. Frame, and R. J. Gore, to name several.

Herman Bavinck

Professor Gaffin's appeal to Herman Bavinck is more plausible than the theological revisionism of Calvin that he and Shepherd pioneered in their attempt to find precedent for their views. Appeal to Bavinck is plausible, because Bavinck reveals the profound theological irrationalism that gave rise to Shepherdism in the first place. One should not be surprised if Bavinck's views on justification were confused as well.

² See David Engelsma, "The Binding of God," *The Trinity Review*, January/February 2002. Oddly, this new view of Calvin is not basically new, but a revival of Perry Miller's fundamental misunderstanding of covenant theology, in which, according to Miller, the doctrine of the covenant was developed in order to warm and soften the cold, hard doctrines of God's eternal predestination and decrees of election and reprobation.

³ See "The Doctrine of Justification in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," *The Westminster Theological Journal*, Spring 1984, 26-52.

His *Doctrine of God* (also translated from the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*) begins with a chapter on "God's Incomprehensibility" in which the first paragraph asserts that "the idea that the believer⁴ would be able to understand and comprehend intellectually the revealed mysteries is equally unscriptural.⁵ On the contrary, the truth which God has revealed concerning himself in nature and in Scripture far surpasses human conception and comprehension. In that sense Dogmatics is concerned with nothing but mystery."⁶

Apart from the fact that Bavinck here uses the word "mystery" in a sense not found in Scripture – for in Scripture, mysteries are divine secrets revealed to men for their understanding and knowledge⁷ – Bavinck tells us that we cannot know what we are talking about in theology, for the subject matter of theology "far surpasses human conception."

Bavinck does not shrink from the implications of his theological skepticism, which is a direct attack on divine propositional revelation. He writes for several pages, quoting various medieval theologians with approval:

Accordingly, adequate knowledge of God does not exist. There is no name that makes known unto us his being. No concept fully embraces him. No description does justice to him. That which is hidden behind the curtain of revelation is entirely unknowable.... Justin Martyr calls God inexpressible, immovable, nameless. The words Father, God, Lord, are not real names "but appellations derived from his good deeds and functions...." "God is known better when not known...."

The fact that God exists is evident, but "what he is in his essence and nature is entirely incomprehensible and unknowable...." When we say that God is unborn, immutable, without beginning, etc., we are only saying what he is *not*. To say what he *is*, is impossible. He is nothing of all that which exists....⁸ There is no concept, expression, or word by which God's being can be indicated. Accordingly, when we wish to designate God, we use metaphorical language....⁹ We

⁴ Notice that Bavinck is speaking of the believer.

⁵ How does Bavinck know it is "unscriptural" if, as he says, the believer cannot understand Scripture?

⁶ Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*. The Banner of Truth Trust [1918,1951] 1977, 13. Bavinck's phrase "understand and comprehend intellectually" is redundant. By what means, other than the intellect, can one understand and comprehend?

⁷ See, for example, *Matthew* 13:11; *Mark* 4:11; *Luke* 8:10; *Romans* 11:25; *Romans* 16:25; *1 Corinthians* 2:7ff.; *1 Corinthians* 4:1; *1 Corinthians* 13:2; *1 Corinthians* 15:51; *Ephesians* 1:9, and so on.

⁸ This, of course, is atheism.

⁹ This is a denial of literal truth about God.

cannot form a conception of that unitary, unknown being, transcendent above all being, above goodness, above every name and word and thought....

Negative theology is better than positive.... Nevertheless, even negative theology fails to give us any knowledge¹⁰ of God's being, for in reality God is exalted above both "negation and affirmation...."¹¹ "For it is more correct to say that God is not that which is predicated concerning him than to say that he is. He is known better by him who does not know him, whose true ignorance is wisdom...."¹² Indeed, so highly is he exalted above all creatures that the name "nothing" may justly be ascribed to him....¹³

The statements: "God cannot be defined; he has no name; the finite cannot grasp the infinite," are found in the works of all the theologians. They unanimously affirm that our God is highly exalted above our comprehension, our imagination, and our language.... "Whatever is said concerning God is not God, for God is ineffable...."

There is no knowledge of God as he is in himself.... No name fully expresses his being; no definition describes him. He is exalted infinitely high above our conception, thought, and language.

Now, any informed Christian, actually any sane person, reading these pages in Bavinck, would stop and lay his book aside. The reader has just been told, repeatedly and emphatically, that no thought or language adequately and accurately describes God, that we have and can have no knowledge of God. If that is so, there is obviously no point in reading further, unless it is to attain a clinical understanding of how a mind can become so disordered as to write a book on a subject about which he can know and say nothing.

This is the Antichristian irrationalism that passes for Christian theology in both Protestant and Catholic, "conservative" and "liberal" seminaries. It explains a great deal about the "dialectical," that is, contradictory, pronouncements that issue forth from every modern school of theology. In such a turbid atmosphere, anything goes, including the simultaneous affirmations that justification is by faith alone and also by faith and works. No Christian doctrine, none whatsoever, can be maintained in such a mystical, skeptical, and irrational framework. It is a black hole that swallows and extinguishes all light and all rational thought. It is the

medieval mother of all heresies, for the rejection of propositional revelation is the root of all error. Bavinck was a conduit carrying this rubbish into Reformed theology in the twentieth century.

Vantilianism

This writer has some sympathy for those followers of Cornelius Van Til who ignored the warnings about Van Til's philosophy and theology from Gordon Clark and The Trinity Foundation and have now been embarrassed by their mentor's defense of Norman Shepherd, and, in particular, his heretical doctrine of justification. Their embarrassment might have been avoided.

Beginning in the 1940s, Dr. Clark warned the church about the pernicious nature and effects of the dialectical theology and philosophy of Professor Van Til. The Trinity Foundation has published several essays and books on the subject, including *God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics*; *The Clark-Van Til Controversy*; and *Cornelius Van Til: The Man and the Myth*. A few Vantilians listened, but most did not. Now the dialectical Dutch chickens have come home to roost, and their homecoming has become an embarrassment to those Vantilians who unequivocally believe and defend the Gospel of justification by faith alone.

Randy Booth, a Vantilian pastor and author who recently spoke at Shepherdfest 2003, a conference on the covenant sponsored by followers of Vantilian Greg Bahnsen at the Southern California Center for Christian Studies (SCCCS), recently published an essay titled "Caution and Respect in Controversy." In this essay, Booth asserts that "Unsubstantiated charges of heresy have been leveled at both Professor Shepherd and those associated with the AAPC" (3). Now if one reads Palmer Robertson's *Current Justification Controversy*, or recent issues of *The New Southern Presbyterian Review*, or the several essays in *The Trinity Review* on the topic, and more at The Trinity Foundation website, he will find all the substantiation needed to justify the charges against both Shepherd and the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church. Booth has apparently failed to do this, and so he asserts, falsely, that these charges are unsubstantiated.

What Booth has read is what he presents as "a transcription of a speech by Cornelius Van Til at the Justification Controversy meeting of the Committee of the Whole of the OPC Philadelphia Presbytery" (7). Although he does not date the speech, it was obviously delivered sometime during the Shepherd controversy in the OPC more than 20 years ago. Booth quotes Van Til's speech to support his statements that

Van Til was, from the beginning and all the way through the Shepherd controversy, an unashamed supporter of Norman Shepherd, as was the majority of the Westminster faculty, including Richard Gaffin and John Frame.... As Van Til vigorously and publicly supported Shepherd, he refuted the errors of those who opposed him, arguing that those opposing Shepherd were attempting to separate faith and works [7].

¹⁰ Notice the denial of "any knowledge."

¹¹ If this were so, then God would be indistinguishable from Satan.

¹² One wonders whether George Orwell had read this statement, since he incorporates it into *1984*. More likely he had read medieval theologians.

¹³ This is what atheists say of God: God is nothing.

Booth also quotes John Frame as saying: "Van Til and others, including myself, believed that Shepherd's formulations were orthodox."

Here are Van Til's words, as provided by Booth:

I think that when we begin with the idea of faith, we have to think first of all that the devils also believe and tremble. Now we have faith by which we need *not* to tremble because Christ on the cross said, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" so that His people might not be forsaken. It is finished! It was finished, once for all. Now that is, I think, beautifully expressed in this word of our Lord [discussion of *John* 6:22ff].

When the multitudes wanted to make Him king because He had given them bread, and they thought it would be easy to have a handout, Jesus said, when they found the other side, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, ye seek me not because ye see signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled."

Now then comes the crucial point. "Do not work for food which perishes but for food which endures to eternal life which the Son of Man shall give to you, for of him the Father even God has been sealed." They therefore said, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said unto them, "This is the work of God, that ye may believe on Him Whom He hath sent."

Here faith and works are *identical*. Not similar but *identical*. The work *is* faith; faith *is* work. We believe in Jesus Christ and in His salvation, that's why we do not tremble. He *died* for us, in *our* place, and the Scotsmen would say "in our room and stead," for that substitutionary atonement, on the basis of which we are forensically righteous with God and are now righteous in His sight and shall inherit the kingdom of heaven in which *only* the righteous shall dwell. And I'm going to ask John Frame if he will quote the Greek of this particular passage.

[Frame works through it reading both the Greek and English.]

I thank you. Well now, you see faith alone is not alone. Faith *is not* alone. Faith always has an object. The faith, your *act* of believing, is pointed *definitely* to God in Jesus Christ, and by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, and conversion. It's all one. It's not a "janus-face" [Janus-faced—JR] proposition, but it is not possible to give exhaustive statements in human words, human concepts. And that's why we have to be satisfied merely to do what the Scriptures and confessions of faith say that they [*i.e.*, we] ought to do, and that then we are on the way, and I think that Norman Shepherd is certainly in the line of *direct descent* of [*i.e.*, on the topic of] faith. Thank you. [Emphases noted are Van Til's.]

More important than Van Til's confused, rambling defense of Norman Shepherd is the influence of his thought at Westminster Seminary and in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church from the 1940s to the present. One can see, running through the Shepherd controversy, the influence of Van Til in, for example (1) Shepherd's repeated affirmation of contradictory and conflicting statements, such as that Adam's obedience (had Adam in fact obeyed God's command) would have been meritorious; and Adam's obedience would not have been meritorious;¹⁴ (2) Shepherd's repeated affirmation of the teaching of the Westminster Standards on justification, while at the same time teaching contrary to the Westminster Standards on justification; (3) Shepherd's abuse of the doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God in order to deny to men knowledge revealed in Scripture, in an attempt to justify his contention that "covenantal election" can be lost; (4) Shepherd's assertion of the "free offer of the gospel" – meaning the fictitious doctrine of the sincere desire of God to save all men, elect and reprobate¹⁵ – in order to justify his contention that evangelists should tell every man, "Christ died for you." These are four specific examples; but the influence of the paradoxical, dialectical theology of Van Til pervades Shepherd's thought, as well as the thought of his defenders, who with their "Biblical theology" and "multiperspectivalism,"¹⁶ have turned Reformed theology into a Babel of confusion.

Worse, Van Til's influence is seen not only as the context and form of Shepherd's thought, but also as the context and form of his critics' thought – at least those critics affiliated with Westminster Seminary and the Presbytery of Philadelphia.

It is clear from Dr. Robertson's history of the Shepherd controversy that neither the Seminary nor the Presbytery, over a seven-year period, could deal definitively and decisively with the theology of Norman Shepherd. Why not? The Philadelphia Presbytery of the OPC, the Seminary Board, and the Seminary Faculty were paralyzed by the influence of Van Til's dialectical theology, which subverts logical, noncontradictory thought. So when the Executive Committee of the Seminary Board, writing its *Reason and Specifications* explaining why Norman Shepherd was finally dismissed after seven years of discussion, points out that "The Faculty report [of February 1977] called attention to the responsibility of teachers to avoid confusing statements," the reminder was not only several decades too late, but

¹⁴ See "Reason and Specifications" in *A Companion to The Current Justification Controversy*.

¹⁵ This false doctrine was stated and defended by John Murray and Ned Stonehouse in their 1948 essay "The Free Offer of the Gospel." For a refutation, see Garrett Johnson, "The Myth of Common Grace," *The Trinity Review*, March/April 1987. Murray and Stonehouse wrote their essay as part of the Clark-Van Til controversy in the 1940s.

¹⁶ See the works of John Frame and Vern Poythress.

contrary to the practice of Westminster's most famous professor, Cornelius Van Til.

For decades, Professor Van Til's stock-in-trade, both in the classroom and in his books, had been confusing statements. Worse, this confusion was not inadvertent; it was deliberate. Van Til had written:

It is precisely because they [the colleagues and followers of Van Til] are concerned to defend the Christian doctrine of revelation as basic to all intelligible human predication that they refuse to make any attempt at "stating clearly" any Christian doctrine, or the relation of any one Christian doctrine to any other Christian doctrine. They will not attempt to "solve" the "paradoxes" involved in the relationship of the self-contained God to his dependent creatures.¹⁷

Notice the four appearances of "any" in that first sentence: They – the Westminster Faculty – refuse to make *any* attempt to state clearly *any* Christian doctrine, or the relation of *any* one Christian doctrine to *any* other Christian doctrine.

Furthermore, this is stated as a "refusal": They *refuse* to state clearly any Christian doctrine. It is a deliberate act, not an error of omission or oversight.

Furthermore, this refusal is made into a fundamental principle of theology: They refuse to state any doctrine clearly, because such a refusal is fundamental to the whole enterprise of Christian apologetics: "It is precisely because they are concerned to defend the Christian doctrine of revelation." Defending the doctrine of revelation demands that Christian apologists deliberately and principally refuse to state any doctrine clearly, and principally requires them to be vague, ambiguous, and confusing.

Professor Van Til practiced what he taught. His unintelligibility was legendary, so much so that it was the object of foolish admiration and jesting. One admiring jest at a Westminster Seminary banquet is recounted by William White, Jr., in his book *Van Til: Defender of the Faith, An Authorized Biography*:

"There is a controversy today as to who is the greatest intellect of this segment of the twentieth century," the m.c. said. "Probably most thinking people would vote for the learned Dr. Einstein. Not me. I wish to put forth as my candidate for the honor, Dr. Cornelius Van Til." (Loud applause.) "My reason for doing so is this: Only eleven people in the world understand Albert Einstein.... Nobody – but nobody in the world – understands Cornelius Van Til."¹⁸

¹⁷ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 172.

¹⁸ William White, Jr. *Van Til: Defender of the Faith*. Thomas Nelson, 1979, 181-182.

Van Til taught that logical paradox is an ineradicable characteristic of divine revelation, and hence a sign of Christian spirituality. He wrote, "All teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory."¹⁹ That phrase "all teaching" includes, of course, the doctrine of salvation. So when Norman Shepherd asserts that faith is the sole instrument of justification, and that works are also instruments of justification, he is merely following Van Til's prescription: All teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory. Van Til's writings are peppered with paradoxes, meaningless phrases, undefined terms, and misleading analogies. He wrote: "Now since God is not fully comprehensible to us we are bound to come into what seems to be contradiction in all our knowledge. Our knowledge is analogical and therefore must be paradoxical."²⁰ Our knowledge *must* be paradoxical. It can *never* make sense. So if Professor Shepherd blows hot and cold, that is a sign of confusion, and therefore of Christian spirituality.

As an example of his own contradictory thought, Van Til both affirmed and denied the proofs for the existence of God. He wrote: "I do not reject the 'theistic proofs' but merely insist on formulating them in such a way as not to compromise the doctrines of Scripture. 'That is to say, if the theistic proof is constructed as it ought to be constructed, it is objectively valid....'"²¹ On the other hand, he also wrote, "Of course Reformed believers do not seek to prove the existence of their God. To seek to prove or to disprove the existence of this God would be to deny him.... A God whose existence is 'proved' is not the God of Scripture."²²

Van Til's disdain for "mere human logic" was well-known. He warned about squeezing the events of history into the forms of logic: "We fall into logicism. We reduce the significance of the stream of history to the static categories of logic."²³ We hear the echoes of this phrase ("the static categories of logic") in the Neolegalists: Norman Shepherd and his disciples, Douglas Wilson, Steven Schlissel, Steven Wilkins, Andrew Sandlin, John Barach, and so on. They contrast the "static categories of God's decrees" with the "covenant dynamic." They decry "rationalism," "logicism," and "gnosticism." They assert the inadequacy of human language to express divine truth, and the futility of using human logic to understand

¹⁹ Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and Witness Bearing*, 22. At another time, Van Til denied that these paradoxes were merely apparent: After rejecting Barth's view that contradictions don't matter, he wrote: "Or shall we with Gordon Clark say that the 'contradiction' that we think we 'see' is not a real contradiction at all? We cannot follow any of these ways" (*Toward a Reformed Apologetics*, 4).

²⁰ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 1967, 44.

²¹ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 197.

²² Cornelius Van Til, *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture*, 1967, 137.

²³ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 256.

it. But the Second Person of the Trinity, the *Logos*, had no difficulty expressing divine truth in the human languages of Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew while he walked on Earth; and the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, wrote the perfect, completely accurate, fully adequate, and inerrant Scriptures in human language.

The Vantilians' disdain for systematic thought, their preference for "Biblical theology" (which is not Biblical at all), which frees its practitioners from the constraints of logic and allows them to interpret Scripture willy-nilly, without regard to context or other passages of Scripture,²⁴ is a result of their disdain for "mere human logic."

Writing of the statement in chapter 1, paragraph 6, of the *Westminster Confession* that "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," Van Til said: "*This statement should not be used as a justification for deductive exegesis.*"²⁵ But deductive exegesis is precisely what this Confessional statement endorses. In fact, correct exegesis is impossible without using logical deduction.

Norman Shepherd's subversion of chapter 11 of the *Westminster Confession* on Justification both depends upon and is required by Cornelius Van Til's subversion of chapter 1 of the *Westminster Confession*, on Scripture. In many ways, Norman Shepherd is the theological child of Van Til, working out in the field of soteriology Van Til's philosophical rejection of rational, systematic, noncontradictory revelation. It is not unexpected that those who begin with a medieval denial of divine propositional revelation—such as one finds in Bavinck's *Doctrine of God*—end with a medieval doctrine of salvation.

The fundamental problem with the theories of Bavinck, Van Til, Shepherd and their disciples is that divine revelation is given in human concepts, language, and words, so human concepts, language, and words are *ipso facto* adequate to express, discuss, and ponder all the divine truth that God has given to us. To deny that is to deny divine propositional revelation *in toto*.

Language, Logic, and Theology

The Dark Age views of Bavinck and Van Til on language, logic, and the knowledge of God are so radically Antichristian that they subvert all Christian doctrine. The doctrine of salvation was not the first doctrine to be corrupted by this irrationalism, which is a

²⁴ See, for example, Richard Gaffin's and Norman Shepherd's misinterpretation of *Romans* 2:13, without regard to its context or Paul's argument in *Romans* 1-3.

²⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 1969, 39. Emphasis is Van Til's.

revival of the mysticism of the Dark Ages, nor will it be the last. The rejection of literal, propositional truth about God, the assertion that human language cannot express divine truth adequately or accurately, the rejection of "mere human logic," the assertion that God is beyond "affirmation and negation," are denials of the first principle of Christianity, which is literal, propositional revelation from God, given in human language and thought categories, using human logic.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* makes Scripture the first principle of Christianity by placing the doctrine of Scripture in its first and longest chapter. All the rest of Christianity — all 32 subsequent chapters of the *Confession* — rest on the foundation of Scripture alone. Nothing is to be added to or removed from Scripture.

In its first chapter, the *Confession*, quoting Scripture itself, asserts the infallibility and sufficiency — not the inadequacy and inaccuracy — of the human words God himself put in Scripture. The *Confession*, echoing Scripture itself, asserts that Scripture is to be studied and understood, not blindly accepted. The *Confession*, echoing Scripture itself, asserts that logical deduction — "good and necessary consequence" — is the principal tool of understanding Scripture. Logical deduction must be used to compare Scripture with Scripture, for Scripture is its own infallible interpreter — it does not need a pope, priest, seminary professor, or psychologist in order to be understood.

Bavinck's and Van Til's view of language and logic is a rejection of the doctrine of Scripture. Rather than the inerrancy, infallibility, sufficiency, clarity, and authority of Scripture, their view asserts the inadequacy, inaccuracy, insufficiency, and murkiness of Scripture, to the point that, to quote Bavinck,

adequate knowledge of God does not exist. There is no name that makes known unto us his being.... The words Father, God, Lord are not real names.... what he is in his essence and nature is entirely incomprehensible and unknowable.... To say what he is, is impossible.... There is no concept, expression, or word by which God's being can be indicated.... We cannot form a conception of that unitary, unknown being...even negative theology fails to give us any knowledge of God's being....Whatever is said concerning God is not God.... There is no knowledge of God as he is in himself....

Bavinck's and Van Til's view of language and logic is a rejection of the Christian doctrine of God, for God is omnipotent, he is able to speak — and he has spoken in Scripture, in human words — exactly what he intends to say. Far from being hampered by human logic and language, God reveals himself as he is by human logic and language.

Bavinck's and Van Til's view of language and logic is a rejection of the doctrine of the Incarnation, for the Second Person of the Trinity, the *Logos*, became man, and expressed his divine thoughts in human words, using

human logic and categories. Jesus Christ spoke and wrote Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek; and the human words he spoke and wrote expressed his meaning perfectly, exactly, and fully.

Bavinck's and Van Til's view of language and logic is a rejection of the doctrine of man's creation in God's image, for God created Adam and gave Adam the gifts of language and logic so that he might talk to God, and God might talk to him. Communion with God was then and is still intellectual communion. That is why the Apostle Paul says of believers: "We have the mind of Christ."

Bavinck approvingly quoted medieval theologians attacking the Christian doctrine of revelation. The anti-theology he and they espouse led, and will always lead, to a Dark Age, when the light of God's Word and Gospel are virtually lost. The current and growing rejection of the Gospel of justification by faith alone is one result of that rejection of divine, literal, propositional revelation. That rejection is the heresy matrix, the source of all error and heresies.

***A Companion to
The Current Justification Controversy***

John W. Robbins
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Contents:

The Roots and Fruits of the Shepherd Controversy
John W. Robbins

The Sanders / Dunn "Fork in the Road" in the Current
Controversy over the Pauline Doctrine of Justification
by Faith
Robert L. Reymond

Some Reasons for Dissenting from the Majority Report
on the Subject of Justification by the Board of
Westminster Theological Seminary, April 1978
Philip E. Hughes

Letter of Concern, May 1981
45 Theologians

Reason and Specifications Supporting the Action of the
Board of Trustees in Removing Professor Shepherd,
February 1982
*Approved by the Executive Committee of the
Board*

A Resolution to the Eleventh General Assembly of the
Presbyterian Church in America, May 1983
O. Palmer Robertson

Index
Scripture Index
The Crisis of Our Time
Intellectual Ammunition

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Help Wanted

The Trinity Foundation is growing and needs help to continue to serve its readers well.

If you would like to work for the Foundation as it advances and defends the system of truth taught in Scripture, please let us know.

At this time we are looking for general office help, which requires familiarity with office equipment such as computers (PC), copiers, telephones, and files. Duties would include fulfillment of orders, shipping, and record-keeping. Additional responsibility will be given to the employee who shows initiative, reliability, and hard work.

If God continues to bless us, we will be needing more help in the future. If you think you have a skill that would enhance our service to the people of God, please send your resume and references.

Send your resume, references, and salary requirements to

John Robbins
The Trinity Foundation
Post Office Box 68
Unicoi, Tennessee 37692