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Review

ADVANCING THE
CHRISTIAN TRADITION
IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

VOLUME 15 • NUMBER 1 • 2006

AND LORD, WE ASK YOU, LORD,
TO HELP US, LORD, AND LORD...



WELL, THANKS SO MUCH FOR
LEADING US IN PRAYER, BILL.



NO PROBLEM, TOM. I'M ALWAYS GLAD,
TOM, TO HELP OUT, TOM, WHEN I CAN, TOM.



JAYYON

CORNELIUS VAN TIL'S CONCEPT OF MAN AS THE ANALOGUE OF GOD



JOEL R. BEEKE &
MICHAEL D. BELL

Understanding the relationship between the infinite Creator and his finite, created universe is an age-old problem. It has ramifications in metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, philosophy, and theology. Over the centuries, non-theistic alternatives such as deism, pantheism, and atheism have attempted to prove that the relationship between God and man is either entirely disparate or illusory. For those who approach philosophy from a Word-centered perspective, however, such alternatives are unacceptable. Consequently, many Christian philosophers and theologians have grappled with the relationship between God and man, usually called the study of analogy (from the Greek, *analogia*), referring to the proportion or relation of likeness between them. Even then, a positive presentation of analogy between God and man has always proven more difficult to expound than refuting false forms of analogy.

Christian theologians, principally Thomas Aquinas, have long employed the device of reasoning by analogy. On the

assumption that God and man are the same in their being, the difference between God and man being only one of degree or magnitude, what was true of man was by analogy extended to God and held to be true of God, albeit on a larger or grander scale. Hence, there is no difference, for example, between man's knowledge and God's knowledge, save for the fact that God's superior rank on the scale of being puts him in a position to know a great deal more than man knows.

Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987), a well-known professor of systematic theology and apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, rejected this use of analogy outright in the name of the Creator-creature distinction. This article shows that he constructed a very different analogy along the lines of that distinction, taking into account the uniqueness of man as a creature made in the image and likeness of God. In this analogy, or comparison, between God and man, God is of necessity the original, or archetype; man is only the copy, or ectype, a finite reflection or miniature of his Creator. Since God knows all things from the beginning, what man comes to know is only what God has known long since; hence, man is said to "think God's thoughts after him" as the analogue of God. Moreover, man can only know as much, and know it in a manner, as is commensurate with his limits as a mere creature. These limits he cannot transcend.

After providing a brief sketch of Van Til's life, we will present an important aspect of his apologetics: man as the analogue of God. The article concludes with an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Van Til's analogy.

LIFE AND CHARACTER

Cornelius Van Til was born May 3, 1895, at Grootegast, in the province of Groningen, the Netherlands, the sixth son of godly parents, Ite Van Til, a dairy farmer, and his wife, Klazina. They raised their son in a loving, strict, Calvinistic home. The doctrinal standards of the Christian Reformed Church (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*) in which Van Til grew up were the Three Forms of Unity: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg

Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. From early on, those standards were important influences on Van Til and his interpretation of Scripture.¹

In 1905, the Van Til family immigrated to Highland, Indiana (near Chicago), to farm. There they continued to be ardent supporters of Calvinistic principles and active members in the Christian Reformed Church.²

Cornelius felt called to the ministry as a teenager. In 1914, he moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, to study at Calvin Preparatory School, Calvin College, and, for one year, at Calvin Theological Seminary. During those years he was influenced by Calvin professors Louis Berkhof, Samuel Volbeda, and W. Henry Jellema. He also immersed himself in the writings of philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer.

In 1922, Van Til transferred to Princeton Theological Seminary, earning his ThM degree in 1925. In 1926, he married Rena Klooster, his longtime sweetheart. The following year he completed his doctorate in philosophy at Princeton University. His dissertation was titled "God and the Absolute." Throughout his years at Princeton, Van Til studied under a variety of renowned thinkers, including Geerhardus Vos, Caspar W. Hodge, William P. Armstrong, Robert D. Wilson, Oswald T. Allis, W. P. Greene, and J. Gresham Machen.

The 1920s were a time of crisis for the once staunchly Reformed seminary at Princeton, as the traditional thinking of Archibald Alexander, Charles and A. A. Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield was challenged by more liberal-minded professors. After serving one year as pastor of the Christian Reformed Church of Spring Lake, Michigan, Van Til took a leave of absence to teach apologetics at Princeton Seminary (1928–29). The seminary board at Princeton offered him the Stuart Chair of Apologetics and Ethics, but Van Til's appointment was not confirmed by the 1929 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. That assembly had reorganized Princeton Seminary, giving more power to those who favored liberal views.

Van Til returned to the pastorate at Spring Lake, determined neither to cooperate in the liberal reorganization of Princeton Seminary nor to teach in the newly organized Westminster Seminary, which intended to carry on the tradition of old Princeton. Nevertheless, he was persuaded to join the Westminster faculty by its founder, J. Gresham Machen, and two professors, Oswald Allis and Ned Stonehouse, all of whom visited Van Til in Michigan.

From the opening of Westminster Seminary in 1929 until his emeritation in the 1970s, Van Til taught Reformed apologetics and related courses from a biblical perspective within the parameters of confessional Reformed theology. As R. J. Rushdoony points out, the new ground in Christian apologetics broken by Van Til placed him in the center of controversy: "By breaking with the old Princeton apologetics, and by calling attention to the inconsistencies, in terms of their healthy presuppositions, in the Amsterdam apologetics, he [Van Til] has aroused the ire of the traditionalists in Reformed and Presbyterian circles, while his analysis of neo-orthodoxy has made him anathema in those circles."³

Van Til exerted a steadily growing influence on many graduate students and conservative Reformed evangelicals throughout the world. Today, his views continue to be developed by some of his students; and they are still frequently debated by orthodox Reformed theologians and apologists. As John Campbell says of Van Til,

His presuppositional approach to truth is superficially shared by an interesting spectrum of writers. To his right are the theologians such as Rousas Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, and Gary North, while to his left are the philosophers of the law-idea like Herman Dooyeweerd. Van Til has attracted positive attention from purists such as Douglas Vickers to classical apologetes, including R. C. Sproul and John Gerstner; from strident critics like James Daane and J. Oliver Buswell to friendly but critical disciples like John M. Frame.⁴

Van Til wrote more than twenty books in addition to

numerous articles and thirty unpublished class syllabi, which were widely circulated and are still valued.⁵ Though he often dealt harshly with theological opponents in writing, his personality was charming, gracious, compassionate, generous, and witty. Stories abound at Westminster about his captivating lecture style, which included poignant illustrations and considerable interaction with the students. Sometimes he would throw chalk at students who deserved a reprimand. As a preacher, he was eloquent, personal, and challenging.

Van Til was unusual in that he moved in many worlds. By background, he was thoroughly steeped in the doctrine, piety, and literature of the Dutch Reformed tradition. By training and profession, he was immersed in the confessional heritage and latter-day conflicts of the Old Princeton tradition of American Presbyterianism. At the same time, he was ever engaged in dialogue with his contemporaries in the Netherlands and kept abreast of the latest developments in international Calvinism. His death on April 7, 1987, at the age of ninety-one, signaled the end of an era for Westminster Seminary and Reformed apologetics.

Van Til's name is inseparable from Reformed apologetics and presuppositionalism. C. Gregg Singer has written, "Cornelius Van Til has given to the church a truly monumental apologetics."⁶ Richard Pratt named Van Til in 1979 "undoubtedly the greatest defender of the Christian faith in our generation."⁷ And John Frame said that Van Til's "contribution to theology is of virtually Copernican dimensions. . . . One searches for superlatives to describe the significance of Van Til's overall approach."⁸

THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

Theology and philosophy molded the person and work of Cornelius Van Til. Theologically, Van Til remained unequivocally Reformed in principle and practice. Next to the Scriptures, the works of John Calvin influenced him the most. Also influential were the Heidelberg Catechism (from his Dutch Reformed upbringing) and the Westminster Confession of

Faith and Catechisms (from connections with conservative Presbyterianism at Princeton and Westminster). In 1936, Van Til transferred membership from the Christian Reformed Church to the newly organized Orthodox Presbyterian Church, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Van Til's theological convictions were also significantly influenced by the Dutch theologians Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854–1921).⁹ Though Van Til rejected Kuyper's notion of presumptive regeneration, he did embrace a number of Kuyper's theological principles, such as the absolute sovereignty of God over all creation; the focus on the soul as the center of man's existence and relationship to God; the conviction that all of life is religious and is acted out in either a godward or anti-godward direction; the notion of "sphere sovereignty";¹⁰ and the pursuit of Christian philosophy in every area by examining that area's created order, dysfunction through sin and the fall, and postlapsarian restoration in Christ.¹¹ Though Van Til often sought to rework or expand the thinking of Kuyper and Bavinck, he never swerved from their principal thesis that "the Christianity set forth in the Bible is the one God-revealed religion, and that Calvinism is the clearest and most consistent expression of that religion—both in content and in its life-and-world presentation."¹²

Kuyper's Calvinistic principles made a major impact on the school of thought sometimes called the "Amsterdam Philosophy" or "Calvinistic Philosophy," which in turn influenced Van Til, particularly in his early Westminster years.¹³ This philosophy grew out of the writings and teachings of Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977) and Dirk Hendrik Theodore Vollenhoven (1892–1978), brothers-in-law who were simultaneously appointed to the chairs of jurisprudence and philosophy in 1926 at the Free University of Amsterdam. Dooyeweerd sought to build his philosophical system, known as "The Philosophy of the Idea of Law" or "Cosmonomic Idea," on the basis of the Christian "ground-motive" of creation, fall, and redemption.¹⁴

In the last decades of his life, Van Til became critical of

several aspects of the Amsterdam philosophy.¹⁵ He criticized Dooyeweerd for being willing to dialogue congenially with non-Christian thinking. That is not surprising, for Van Til had developed an increasing antipathy against any philosophy that attempted to synthesize Christian and non-Christian forms of thought. Accordingly, he lashed out against Aristotle, Kant, and Hegelian-type Idealism, but also against Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth in their roles as Christian philosopher-theologians.

Against this background, Van Til's concept of analogy must be scrutinized with care. To this task we now turn.

Getting Oriented to Van Til's Analogy

To grasp the specifics of Van Til's analogy, one must understand a few basics of Van Til's thought. First, no aspect of Van Til's thought can be understood apart from his basic presupposition of "the existence of God who has revealed himself to man in Scripture."¹⁶ To obtain a viable starting point in understanding the God-man relationship, Van Til declares God to be the constitutive concept. He teaches that this presupposed, constitutive concept of God must be assumed without man's finite mind presuming to be able to define or embrace God. Like Calvin, Van Til subjects all thought of God to revealed Scripture. In presupposing both a Creator-creature relation and the ultimate incomprehensibility of the self-revealing God as he is in himself, Van Til by no means implies that combining "univocity" (i.e., having a single meaning) and "equivocity" (literally, having two voices that are equally correct) must result in skepticism.¹⁷ Rather, Van Til's presuppositional convictions reject both univocism and equivocism in order to establish an alternative notion of analogy that rings true to Scripture.

Second, Van Til's conviction that analogy must be inherently revelational flows from his presuppositions about God and his Word. In their very nature, creaturely analogues must reveal the true and living God; their primary function as analogies is to reveal the infinite Creator.

Third, unlike many other concepts that view analogy as a means of predication about God, or confine analogy to ontology, Van Til regards analogy as the warp and woof of life itself. In Van Til's thought, analogical doctrine must address every area of life, including ethics, apologetics, and theology. They must also be an integral part of metaphysics and epistemology. Not only being but also thinking and acting must be analogical. By thinking analogically, man learns to think God's thoughts after him. In terms of everyday life, here is the essence of covenant keeping versus covenant breaking. Robert D. Knudsen, former professor of Calvinistic philosophy at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, put it this way:

It is indeed of the utmost importance to claim, as Van Til does, that there is an analogical relationship between man and God, and between God's activity and man's activity, in the sense that they never should be thought to be over against each other. Man's thought and activity must always be related to God's. Man lives *coram Deo*. As Van Til himself puts it, man must be aware that he is living in a totally personal environment and that in all parts of his self and his activity he is responsible and responding to God in his self-disclosure. Precisely how should that analogical relationship between God and man be conceived, however? At which point does man's life come to a focus in its relationship to God? Van Til would undoubtedly reply, as he has done many times, that the focal point is at the very heart of man's existence, as Kuyper put it, where the rays of his life come together.¹⁸

Fourth, Van Til asserts that Reformed theology requires a distinctively Reformed concept of analogy. Consequently, a God-man relationship cannot circumscribe basic Reformed citadels, such as the absolute sovereignty and independence of God in relation to his creation, the denial of any autonomously inclined view of the will of man,¹⁹ and the principle that finite beings cannot comprehend the infinite Creator.²⁰

Finally, Van Til posits three types of human consciousness:

the Adamic, the unregenerate, and the regenerate. The Adamic consciousness is "the reason of man as it existed before the fall of man."²¹ Man's reason and knowledge were right with God. Van Til writes, "Man's knowledge was self-consciously analogical; man wanted to know the facts of the universe in order to fulfill his task as a covenant-keeper."²²

Human reason as it became after the entrance of sin represents the second type of human consciousness: the sinful and unregenerate. With this type of consciousness, fallen man seeks to be what he cannot be; he desires to be absolute judge and interpreter of being, knowledge, and action. As Van Til says, "The non-regenerate man takes for granted that the meaning of the space-time world is immanent in itself, and that man is the ultimate interpreter of this world, instead of its humble re-interpreter. The natural man wants to be creatively constructive instead of receptively reconstructive."²³ Van Til goes on to describe the unregenerate man's relationship to God as an "*absolute ethical antithesis*." Thus, the unregenerate knows "nothing *truly* as he ought to know it,"²⁴ for, while knowing certain facts outwardly through common grace, he seeks to suppress such knowledge, thereby losing the true knowledge of these facts.²⁵

Finally, Van Til explains the regenerate consciousness as "the Adamic consciousness *restored* and *supplemented*, but restored and supplemented in principle or standing only." Due to God's life-giving power, the regenerate man is able to realize his function as a true analogue of God via grace; consequently, he once again views his rightful place as derivative and reinterprets in relation to God. Though not restored in degree (1 John 1:8), for Christ's sake the regenerate are, as 1 John 3:9 says, in the position of being "able not to sin" (*non posse peccare*). Nevertheless, the struggle of Romans 7:14-25 remains until the regenerate die. In sum, since the fall, mankind has been divided into two groups: the regenerate, who are covenant-keepers in principle, and the unregenerate, who are covenant-breakers perennially.²⁶ Only two starting points remain in postlapsarian time: the believing one and the unbelieving one.²⁷

Principles of Continuity and Discontinuity

Though Van Til criticizes Thomas Aquinas²⁸ for having both a principle of continuity and a principle of discontinuity, he is keenly aware that every theory of analogy must deal with both. He believes that Aquinas's principles are actually non-Christian and tear apart the true analogous concept of God and the world. To set forth a biblically accurate picture of God and man, one must reason in a transcendental way, Van Til asserts. Rather than reasoning in straight-line logic, as it were, one must ask about the presupposition that lies at the very foundation of human experience. From Van Til's perspective, three matters must be addressed to develop a scripturally analogical God-man relationship: (1) the discontinuity of God and man, (2) the continuity of God and man, and (3) the transcendental-presuppositional approach that attempts to reach beyond the dialectical principle of continuity-discontinuity. Let's look at each of them.

The Discontinuity of God and Man

In his dissertation and syllabus, "God and the Absolute," Van Til criticized Idealism as an autonomous venture that did not submit to God's law.²⁹ Nevertheless, he appreciated one aspect of its approach, namely, its striving to obtain ultimate presuppositions in reference to one's starting point.

As we have seen, Van Til's fundamental presupposition is the existence of God, who is essentially transcendent in his being. Van Til's accent in analogy, therefore, is upon the discontinuity rather than continuity between God and man. For Van Til, God is self-contained. He says, "God's being is self-sufficient, his knowledge is analytical and his will is self-referential. In his being, knowledge, and will God is *self-contained*. There is nothing correlative to him. He does not depend in his being, knowledge, or will upon the being, knowledge, or will of his own creatures. God is *absolute*. He is *autonomous*."³⁰

God is the "All-Conscious One," the "All-Conditioner," in and outside of whom there is no "non-Being," no given

element through which this self-sufficient Being can and may know himself.³¹ He is mysterious only "because He is, within himself, wholly rational."³² As the "self-contained Rational Deity," God is not an "accumulating, but an externally complete and therefore wholly systematic and fully self-conscious Experience."³³ He is the "Great Orderer who is in back of Everything."³⁴ Everything that is and shall be, and all contingencies, are known by him who knows "His end from His beginning." Nothing falls outside of his counsel, will, or dominion. He is a complete system of unity within himself. Indeed, he functions as "the principle of unity" and "the ultimate constitutive concept." Consequently, there are no brute, uninterpreted facts as Idealism proposes.³⁵

In stressing discontinuity in the God-man analogy, Van Til's most frequent method of procedure is to invoke the Creator-creature distinction. He writes, "The Christian believer holds that he knows nothing truly unless his *primum notum* is the Creator-creature distinction, and this is expressed in every fact that he sees and in every relation he observes."³⁶

This Creator-creature distinction is Van Til's first notion in a truly Christian analogy, even though he had just criticized Aquinas's analogy because its first notion was the concept of "being."³⁷ To explain this distinction, Van Til comments elsewhere that "affirming the primacy of the Creator-creature relationship, [which is] the Christian position consistently expressed in the Reformed faith, maintains that man does not at any point in his mind have exactly the same thought content that God has in his mind."³⁸ God is "supra-ordinated" to all human thinking; all thought must transpire under the horizon of the Creator-creature relation. Thus, the incomprehensibility of the divine essence is assured through the essential diversity between Creator and creature.

Van Til also affirms the God-man discontinuity through several tangential concepts. God is self-contained and independent, in contrast to man who is completely dependent and in no sense autonomous;³⁹ God is also essentially infinite and unlimited, whereas man is finite and limited.⁴⁰ As John Vander Stelt summarizes:

The finite cannot grasp the infinite. Man's knowledge is not all-comprehensive. This dimension of God's incomprehensibility is, however, not a reason for alarm nor a concession to ignorance and skepticism. As he is human, man cannot "experience the experience of God." The only way to avoid the false dilemma of "absolute ignorance or absolute omniscience" . . . is to acknowledge God's incomprehensibility as the correlate of His all-controlling power and knowledge.⁴¹

Due to God being primary in his relation to man, Van Til consistently contends that God, *the Original*, must be kept distinct from man, *the derivative*, who is brought into being by the free act of God in creation. Man is derivative in every aspect of his being, thought, and action. In his being he is derivative because he has received, and continues to receive, life and existence from God. In his thinking he is derivative because he can only interpret reality, which, in itself, is already fully comprehended by divine thought. Consequently, "Man's thought must move from God to His revelation, to His counsel, to clarity, necessity, sufficiency, authority, to man's analogical being, and to the covenant (-keeper and -breaker)."⁴² His actions are derivative because they occur against the backdrop of God's act of creation, which gives attention to all other acts.

Because of these discontinuities, Van Til posits that God is the only interpreter of the time-space world, and man is called merely to reinterpret it along the lines of God's interpretation. He writes:

The necessity of reasoning analogically is always implied in the theistic conception of God. If God is to be thought of at all as necessary for man's interpretation of the facts or objects of knowledge, he must be thought of as being determinative of the objects of knowledge. In other words, he must then be thought of as the only ultimate interpreter, and man must be thought of as finite reinterpreter.⁴³

If, as Van Til asserts, God is the interpreter and man is God's reinterpreter, only God may be viewed as "creatively

constructive," whereas man is at best "receptively reconstructive" or "analogical of God's thought."⁴⁴

In short, man serves as the analogue of God. Man's being as "a copy of that which God has revealed with respect to himself" is analogous to God's being.⁴⁵ Hence, man's system of knowledge must be "an analogical replica of the system of knowledge which belongs to God."⁴⁶ The believer's consistency must thus reflect God's internal consistency. Van Til says, "This consistency in the believer consists in willingness to think God's thoughts after him . . . to do God's will after him, and to feel God's feelings after him."⁴⁷ Van Til concludes, "One must choose between saying that God is a self-contained being and that human beings are created analogues of him while he is the original and not the analogue of them, and saying that there is a vague general being that divides itself by the process of limitation into various modes."⁴⁸

According to Van Til, all non-Christian thinking (which essentially denies this first option of analogical, Christian structure of created reality and seeks to make man creatively constructive of the facts of reality⁴⁹) is sinful and unbelieving, because it reaches for autonomy and makes God finite.⁵⁰ Christian thinking, by contrast, asserts a radical discontinuity between the holiness of God and the sinfulness of unregenerate man. It proves that the unbeliever is unable to reason and act analogously because of his ethical separation from God.⁵¹

Finally, Van Til states there are only two levels of being: the uncreated and the created. He summarizes the first, the uncreated, level as "self-contained" and "self-existent," and the second as "derivative."⁵² Vander Stelt says of Van Til's first level, "By 'ontological,' Van Til means God within Himself, as a metaphysical, self-contained, autonomous Being, in distinction from the 'economical' God, who is related to the universe, as its Father, through His creation and providence; as the Son, through the objective work of redemption; and as the Spirit, through the subjective work of salvation."⁵³

On the derivative level, Van Til asserts that though man is in some ways analogous to the Trinity, he does not participate in the Godhead but remains a "finite replication of the divine

being."⁵⁴ God and man must never be placed on the same level of being, for this would result in an unintelligible, monistic, or univocal theory of knowledge.⁵⁵ Hence, God's revelation of himself at every juncture of his relationship with the believer in no wise implies essential continuity; rather, God's self-revelation represents his gracious accommodation to finite beings by speaking in anthropomorphic terms.

In sum, no matter how much continuity there may be between God and man (see below), discontinuity between the Creator and creature must receive the heavier accent. Van Til concludes that an analogical "position is best known by its most basic differentiation."⁵⁶ Nevertheless, continuity between God and man remains substantially vital in any doctrine of analogy.

The Continuity of God and Man

Van Til's question on how the two levels of being and knowledge are related in God and man lies at the heart of the answer that he calls analogy. Man is the finite analogue of his Creator in both being and knowledge because he is like God in some sense.⁵⁷ Van Til delineates this point of contact between the infinite and the finite through the concept of man as the image of God (*imago Dei*). Since man is inherently an image-bearer of God and should function as such, he is like God in that his very nature is a positive revelation of the nature of God. Van Til writes, "Our reflection on the knowledge of God should always begin with the positive self-revelation of God. The way of negation is the way by which creatures, made in the image of God, realizing that their position is a derivative one, reach up to their original. As made in the image of God, these creatures have received a positive revelation of God."⁵⁸

Van Til explains that the term *image* is "the divinely chosen metaphor drawn from the relation between an object and its reflection in a mirror or pool of water."⁵⁹ At this point, Van Til is consistent with his criticisms of Aquinas, for there is no talk of "being" as the point of contact between God and

man; rather, contact begins with the direct revelation of God himself in the *imago Dei*. Like Augustine, Van Til asserts that creation in God's image provides the basis for testifying, "God is light and therefore we have light."⁶⁰

As Greg Bahnsen points out, being made in the image of God, man knows anything he knows, whether about God or himself or the world, "by thinking 'analogously' to God's thinking. God and man know the same objects or truths, according to Van Til, and the standard of truth for both God and man is the same, namely, God's thoughts about whatever we know." By viewing man's knowledge as analogical to God's, Van Til intended to "express and guard the truthfulness and reliability of what man knows," though, of course, there is also discontinuity between God and man's acts of knowing, since God's thoughts are always above man's thoughts (Isaiah 55:9).⁶¹

Van Til also describes continuity between God and man through the notions of *archetype* (pattern) and *ectype* (copy). "God's knowledge is archetypal and ours [is] ectypal," Van Til says.⁶² Although these terms are not as common as the *imago Dei*, they retain a significant niche in his teaching on analogy. Since Van Til does not explain precisely how he uses these terms, his intent must be inferred. Vander Stelt explains Van Til's use of these terms this way:

As the "ectypes" of God who is the "archetype," human beings can only approximate, but never fully comprehend the ultimate starting point of all human knowledge. As finite creatures and unwilling sinners, human creatures can never attain exhaustive knowledge of the whole system of truth. Man knows something, not everything. His mind is not the same as the mind of God in this respect.⁶³

John Frame rightly states, "The terminology is from Kuyper's *Encyclopedia*,"⁶⁴ but it was already used in Reformed theology by the scholastics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Before that it was used in ancient philosophy. The notion of an archetype, prototype, or exemplar is Platonic and

Neoplatonic. It refers to an original blueprint or design from which ectypes are constructed or created. In Plato, the forms or ideas were the archetypes, and sensible objects were their derivative types.

This does not solve the enigma of Van Til's use of archetype and ectype in his doctrine of analogy, however. In Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophical theology, this distinction was helpful because the concept of participation was an integral part of the system. Its use in Reformed orthodoxy and scholasticism is also understandable because divines frequently borrowed from both Platonic and Aristotelian ideas. But the notion that man participated in any sense in the being and knowledge of God is repugnant to Van Til. Believing that such a notion is evident in Aquinas's analogy of being (*analogia entis*), Van Til severely criticizes it. We would surmise that Van Til retains the archetype-ectype distinction because, much like the image of God concept, it signifies derivative though true similarity to some original object. And his view of analogy values this original (God) and derivative (man) aspect. Thus, though he is critical of Aquinas's idea of man's participation in God, he may still feel compelled to retain the archetype-ectype notion to uphold continuity between God and man.

Finally, Van Til reveals his notion of continuity between God and man when he asserts that though unregenerate man finds himself in ethical antithesis to God, he is not totally separated metaphysically from God. In response to some critical remarks made by William Masselink concerning his view of common grace, Van Til states, for "creatures made in God's image, surrounded by a world that reveals in its every fact God's power and divinity, their antithesis to God can never be metaphysical. They can never escape facing God in the universe about them and in their own constitution. Their antithesis to God is therefore an ethical one."⁶⁵ Man cannot exist in metaphysical separation from God.

He further explains that "the whole point of the distinction between the antithesis as being ethical rather than metaphysical is that as a creature made in God's image, man's

constitution as a rational and moral being has not been destroyed."⁶⁶ In using this distinction, Van Til establishes the ontological continuity between the Creator and the creature. This distinction is integrally tied to his emphasis upon the *imago Dei* concept and draws upon the idea that even fallen man remains rational and moral.

In this context, Van Til contrasts his view of metaphysical continuity with Aquinas's view. He contends that the Roman Catholic views sin as partly metaphysical, which somehow further separates man from God on the scale of being. A scale of being is inevitable for Roman Catholicism because no distinction between the ethical and metaphysical antithesis has been made.⁶⁷ On the other hand, Van Til does not describe in what manner the *imago Dei* functions as the ontological linking point; he merely states that it does. Ultimately, he turns to transcendental argument to resolve the tension of continuity and discontinuity in analogy.

The Transcendental Argument in Analogy

In his "God and the Absolute" syllabus, Van Til writes, "The idea of a transcendent God is basic to the idea of an immanent God. The term transcendence is of course from our side relative to the term immanence, but that does not alter the fact that neither of them could for us have an intelligible connotation except upon the presupposition of a self-sufficient Absolute." He admits that he reaches the notion of a self-sufficient God, which has become a determining factor in all his thinking, "by transcendental argument, but once we have it we cannot modify it unless we find that our reasoning by which we came to the conception at the beginning was wrong."⁶⁸

Van Til accepts neither univocacy nor equivocacy. There is no one-to-one continuity between God and man, and no one-to-one discontinuity between God and man. Refusing to reason God in straight-line logic, Van Til prefers to reason transcendently by investigating the presuppositions that lie at the foundation of the possibility of our experience(s).⁶⁹

For Van Til, God is the foundation of all that we are and all that we experience. Thus, the analogical relation prefaces and comprehends all of life and thought. Nothing we think, say, or do can negate our presupposing God as Creator and our viewing of ourselves as creatures. Van Til finds his analogical anchor in God, in "the Creator-Redeemer, who is, in Himself, the Absolute and Eternal One-and-Many, in possession of His permanent and all-inclusive rational plan. When one thinks in terms of this God, his mind-set becomes inevitably one of white or black, either-or, all or nothing, meaning or meaningless, rationality or irrationality, absoluteness or contingency."⁷⁰ Hence, Van Til could posit, "The point of reference cannot but be the same for man as for God. There is no fact that man meets in any of his investigation where the face of God does not confront him."⁷¹

As a Calvinist, Van Til sees no opposition between God's existence and the regenerate's, no antithesis between God's activity and the regenerate's. Ultimately, there is no clear boundary between God and man, for the transcendent God works immanently in and through the believer, negating the very need to answer the unanswerable paradox: "Where does the Spirit's work stop and mine begin?"⁷²

The God-man analogical relation is not merely one of continuity and discontinuity for Van Til. Though these issues cannot be avoided altogether, Christian analogy must rise above these principles to realize that the God-man relationship is not just one among many in the cosmos. Having no parallel in the universe, the Christian God-man analogy must qualify everything the believer thinks, says, and does. By God's grace, we must strive to be his analogues, which "consists in willingness to think God's thoughts after him . . . to do God's will after him, and to feel God's feelings after him."⁷³

Strengths and Weaknesses in Van Til Analogy

Van Til did not have the last word on the problem of analogy; nevertheless, he offers major advances in the following areas.

First, the epistemological strength of Van Til's theory is his emphasis on the revelational character of analogy. Dividing theology into naturally revealed theology (*theologia revelata naturalis*) and specially revealed theology (*theologia revelata specialis*), Van Til's emphasis on revelation as the only means of attaining knowledge of God is critical, for it places the entire question of analogy in unique perspective. According to Van Til, man is no longer independently seeking to discover knowledge about the infinite reality of God; rather, it is always God who is giving true knowledge of himself to creatures whom he has made fit to receive this information. Thus the essential burden of analogy rests upon God's ability to reveal himself—an ability that cannot fail—rather than on man's ability to reason.

Second, Van Til uses the image of God as the point of man's contact with God. As an integral part of the revelatory nature of analogy, the *imago* is able to function both as a revelation of God and as an instrument for receiving this revelation.

Third, Van Til's analogy stresses the radical nature of regeneration. The notion that all men are supposed to live, think, and act analogously to God, but that only the regenerate man is enabled to do so, rings true to both Scripture and experience. Van Til brings analogy out of academia into daily life.

Fourth, Van Til's conception of analogy speaks of all analogical knowledge of God as related to man's capacity (*pro mensura humana*). This limits man and preserves the incomprehensibility of God; it establishes the view of man's being, knowledge, and action as ectypal.

Finally, Van Til emphasizes viewing God as the source of all reality. For Van Til, God is truly the ontological *primum analogatum*, i.e., the original pattern or analog; for all created being, thinking, and acting is not independently creative but functions only as a dependent, analogical re-creation against the background of God's being, thought, and action. Van Til's two-layer theory of reality is less problematic ontologically than the multileveled one often proposed in Aquinas and Roman Catholic thought.

The Van Tillian analogy does, however, have weaknesses.

First, Van Til's halfhearted attempt at a transcendental solution is confusing. Some of this difficulty may arise from his respect for both Reformed scholasticism and Dooyeweerdianism. This tension surfaces in his discussions with Dooyeweerd in *Jerusalem and Athens*,⁷⁴ after which Dooyeweerd accuses Van Til of retaining "scholastic" notions that are regarded as biblical, orthodox beliefs. Robert Knudsen suggested that this area of tension is rooted in Van Til's refusal to distinguish between pre-theoretical and theoretical thinking, for how can one retain the Dooyeweerdian transcendental approach while simultaneously rejecting pre-theoretical thinking? This tension compels Van Til to assert that God contains within himself a complete theoretical system, so that, before man ever begins to attempt to build up his system relatively, the answers to all theoretical problems are already in the mind of God.⁷⁵

Second, Van Til's downplaying of logic and reason in theology frequently leads him to subjective judgments. As John Frame points out: "In the one case, logical deduction is permitted, even demanded. In the other case, it is forbidden. Yet in this context, Van Til does not state clearly how the cases differ. Is it that the one sort of deduction is formally valid and the other one is not? Is it that one deduction takes account of all scriptural data while the other does not? Van Til does not say."⁷⁶

Unguarded subjectivism in the use or non-use of logic appears to prevail in several statements of Van Til,⁷⁷ though he does attempt to explain this weakness by saying, "We shun as poison the idea of the really contradictory [but] we embrace with passion the idea of the apparently contradictory."⁷⁸ The greatest problem here is not the idea of apparent contradiction but the undefined method of determining when one has an apparent contradiction in contrast to a real one.

Finally, Van Til often does not define his unique vocabulary well. For example, his definitions of *being*, *image of God*, and *archetype-ectype* cannot sustain the weight he places upon these concepts.

Hopefully, contemporary and future theologians will build on Van Til's positive strengths in analogy, overcome his weaknesses, and reinforce all of it with Word- and Christ-centered consistency. Van Til has led us out of the land of "analogical bondage," but we have a long journey to pursue in analogy before we shall arrive in the promised land. May God grant us to pursue it with relish and, above all, grant us grace through his Son to be his analogues in thought, word, and deed.

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NOTES

1. William White, *Van Til: Defender of the Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979), 21.
2. White, *Van Til*, 23–28.
3. Rousas John Rushdoony, *By What Standard? An Analysis of the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959), 207.
4. John W. Campbell, "With Mind and Heart: The Contribution of Cornelius Van Til to Christian Thought," in *Acorns to Oaks: The Primacy and Practice of Biblical Theology*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2003), 204. For additional introductions to Van Til's thought, see Gilbert B. Weaver, "The Concept of Truth in the Apologetic Systems of Gordon Haddon Clark and Cornelius Van Til" (PhD dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1967); Jim Halsey, *For a Time Such as This: An Introduction to the Reformed Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976); Rousas Rushdoony, *Van Til* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977); Douglas Vickers, *Cornelius Van Til and The Theologian's Theological Stance* (Wilmington, Delaware: Cross Publishing, n.d.); John C. Vander Stelt, *Philosophy and Scripture: A Study in Old Princeton and Westminster Theology* (Marlton, New Jersey: Mack, 1978); Thom Notaro, *Van Til and the Use of Evidence* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979); John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995); Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998).
5. For a listing of Van Til's works, see *The Works of Cornelius Van Til, 1895–1987*, ed. Eric Sigward, CD-ROM (New York: Labels Army Co., 1997); Eric Bristley, "A Guide to the Writings of Cornelius Van Til," www.wts.edu/bookstore/vantil/guide.htm. Frame's *Van Til* includes an annotated bibliography of Van Til's major works (445–50).
6. *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 328.
7. *Every Thought Captive* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), x.
8. *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1976), 295.
9. Van Til wrote, "My indebtedness to such former Reformed theologians as Louis Berkhof, and, back of him, Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper, is apparent throughout" (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology* [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974], vii). For brief summaries of the life and work of Kuyper and Bavinck, see Joel R. Beeke, "The Life and Vision of Abraham Kuyper," *Banner of Truth*, no. 483 (Dec. 2003): 12–21, and John Bolt, "Editor's Introduction," in Bavinck's

- Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 1: Prolegomena*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 11–19.
10. "Sphere-sovereignty" (*souvereiniteit in eigen kring*) is the title of Kuyper's renowned address at the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880, in which his goal was to establish scientific, Christian endeavor in every subject area as rooted in the subject matter itself. "The idea of 'sphere-sovereignty,' or as it has been called, 'sovereignty in the individual spheres of life,' [is] that God, whose absolute sovereignty extends over all of life, has ordained various spheres of society [e.g., state, church, family, science, industry, and education], each of which has a derived sovereignty in its orbit," so that one sphere may not transgress the boundaries of another (Robert D. Knudsen, "Calvinism as a Cultural Force," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982]), 25.
 11. Cf. Knudsen, "Calvinism as a Cultural Force," 13–32, for Kuyper's drawing together of these thought patterns via Calvin's teachings on culture, theonomy, and the "God-man" relationship.
 12. White, *Van Til*, 35.
 13. Salient points of Kuyperian thought which directly affected Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, and Van Til include the following: science is dependent on philosophical considerations and underlying principles to function rightly; to obtain a sense of totality in science or theology, a philosophical starting point is necessary, derived by spiraling down to the depths of any given; non-Christian philosophy can have no point of transcendence but must remain essentially within the cosmos; faith and thought operate always as functions moving in either a right or wrong direction; and logic must not be elevated in philosophical thinking.
 14. The former title was taken from the title of one of Dooyeweerd's early major works, *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1935–36); the latter title, first coined by H. DeJongste, was later accepted by Dooyeweerd himself. Additional names include Dooyeweerdianism and reformational philosophy. For the background and summary of this philosophy, see William Young, *Towards a Reformed Philosophy: The Development of a Protestant Philosophy in Dutch Calvinistic Thought since the Time of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Piet Hein, 1952), and L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy* (Toronto: Wedge, 1975).
 15. For Van Til's gradual withdrawal from unequivocal support of Dooyeweerd, cf. Van Til and Dooyeweerd's articles in *Jerusalem and Athens*; John Frame, *The Amsterdam Philosophy* (n.p., n.d.); Rushdoony, *By What Standard?*, 180–83; White, *Van Til*, 155–58.
 16. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 324.
 17. Van Til's usage of these terms harks back to late medieval theology debates, of which Richard Muller writes when defining the equivocal concept: "If, as the nominalist perspective in late medieval theology argued, there is no *analogia* [analogy] between God and the world, then the statement that God is good stands in no relation to the statement

- that the church is good; the word 'good' has been used equivocally, and its usage lies beyond the grasp of reason" (*Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985], 28).
18. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 292–93.
 19. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 302.
 20. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 293.
 21. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 25.
 22. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 25.
 23. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 25.
 24. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 25.
 25. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 27.
 26. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 28.
 27. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 291.
 28. Cf. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 321–27, where Gilbert B. Weaver shows that Gordon Clark erroneously charges Van Til with skepticism and with kinship to Thomas's view on analogy. On the contrary, Van Til has repeatedly criticized Thomistic analogy on the following grounds: (1) there is an implicit monism within it; (2) it only speaks in terms of a quantitative difference between God and man; (3) man is viewed as partially composed of non-being and naturally tending towards it; (4) man is partially independent of God, making God dependent on man; (5) God is no longer the original and final reference point; and (6) despite all Thomas's effort, the marriage of pure Greek univocity and equivocity is both an unhappy and unworkable one. For additional material on analogy in Thomas Aquinas, see Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968); John McIntyre, "Analogy," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 12 (1959): 1–20; G. Klubertanz, "The Problem of the Analogy of Being," *The Review of Metaphysics* 10 (1957): 553–79.
 29. Van Til views Idealism's false approach to analogy (which claims to penetrate the essence of God) as both repugnant and absurd. Absolute Idealism cannot posit God on a separate tier of being; rather, it must grasp its idea of God as an extension of thought. Thus, though God may be "bigger" than the Idealist, he is no more than a "comprehensible extension" of his thought, for the core of his philosophy demands that his view of reality embrace both God and cosmos. The essence of God must then rest on the thought of man; hence, Idealism at root is merely a sophisticated expression of the autonomy of man.
 30. Cornelius Van Til, *Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 7, italics original.
 31. Cornelius Van Til, *Why I Believe in God* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.), 10, 12, 18.
 32. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 230.
 33. Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Idealism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), 89.

34. Van Til, *Christianity and Idealism*, 108.
35. Idealism's positing of a residue of brute or uninterpreted fact, in which contingency remains, Van Til views as a direct route to pragmatism. Lacking a principle of unity in God, Idealism must wind up where William James ends: "All reality is buzzing, blooming confusion."
36. Cornelius Van Til, "Christianity in Conflict" vol. 2, part 3 of syllabi (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1963), 28.
37. Van Til, "Christianity in Conflict," 28.
38. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 184. For a helpful explanation of what Van Til meant by "thought content," see Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 227.
39. Cornelius Van Til, *Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), 236.
40. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 211–12.
41. VanderStelt, *Philosophy and Scripture*, 239; Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 184–85.
42. Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 257–59.
43. Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), 203.
44. Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *Psychology of Religion* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 59, 63.
45. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 205.
46. Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 121.
47. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 245.
48. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 210.
49. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 26.
50. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 102, 212.
51. VanderStelt shows that this does not deny the feasibility of apologetics between believers and unbelievers (*Philosophy and Scripture*, 232).
52. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 12.
53. VanderStelt, *Philosophy and Scripture*, 235.
54. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 230, 232.
55. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 18, 27, 29.
56. Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 236.
57. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 324.
58. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 203.
59. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, 325.
60. Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 57.
61. *Van Til's Apologetic*, 169n, 225.
62. *Systematic Theology*, 203.
63. *Philosophy and Scripture*, 239.

64. Frame, *Van Til*, 20; Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 248–92.
65. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 196.
66. Van Til, *Common Grace*, 198.
67. Van Til, *Common Grace*, 198–99.
68. Van Til, "God and the Absolute," 14–15.
69. Weaver comments on the basic difference in Thomistic and Van Tillian analogy as follows: "The basic difference is that for Aquinas analogy purports to be a middle way between univocal and equivocal predication of names or words to subjects. . . . For [Van Til] analogy applies not to terms, but to the overall process of human thought: man is God's created analogue in both his being and his knowledge. . . . As the image of God, he is ordained to mirror in a finite way God's infinite knowledge of all things" (*Jerusalem and Athens*, 327).
70. VanderStelt, *Philosophy and Scripture*, 231.
71. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 170.
72. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 170.
73. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, 245.
74. Geehan, 81–89.
75. Knudsen, "Calvinistic Philosophy," audiotope no. 24 of class given at Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia).
76. Frame, *Van Til*, 32.
77. E.g., "All teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory" (*Common Grace*, 142).
78. Van Til, *Common Grace*, 10.