OUR MISSION IS TO SUPPORT THE CHURCH IN HER CHARGE OF PRESENTING EVERY PERSON MATURE IN CHRIST (COL. 1:28).

REFORMED FORUM

FALL/WINTER
2020
NEWSLETTER

INTRODUCTION TO CORNELIUS VAN TIL

Lane Tipton introduces his latest on-demand course, which is part of a new Fellowship in Reformed Apologetics. p. 6

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Reformed Academy Reaching the World

More than 1,400 students representing 50 countries are learning the rich redemptive-historical truth of Christ crucified and raised for sinners. p. 2



Our mission is to support the church in her charge of presenting every person mature in Christ (Col. 1:28).

Our podcasts and articles serve this basic mission, but I am especially pleased to introduce our latest educational intiative. Reformed Academy seeks to provide educational guidance through a structured learning environment. Reformed Academy is platform intended for anyone who desires to grow in their understanding of Scripture and the theology that faithfully summarizes its teachings. Students may enroll in courses, watch videos, study suggested books and articles, complete assessments, interact with other students, and engage our faculty.

We are actively developing theological curricula for people whether they are new to the Reformed tradition, church officers, or post-doctoral students. In this newsletter, we feature three of our newest courses available throug our online academy—each of which is available online entirely for free.

In just two months, ***we have welcomed more than 1,400 students representing 50 countries throughout the world***. We have received notes of encouragement from enthusiastic students in Colombia, Kenya, Philippines, and Brazil to name a few. Give thanks to the Lord with us!

Many of these students do not otherwise have access to theological education. Reformed Academy is a means by which many believers may transcend geographic and economic barriers to learn the deep truths of Christ crucified and raised. We have translated many of these lectures to make them accessible to a wider range of international students. But there are countless more that must be reached.

Donate today to make new courses and translations available around the world.

Your gift will directly contribute to reaching the world with resources expounding the redemptive-historical riches of God's infallible Word.

Camden Bucey
Executive Director

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INTRODUCTION TO THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

JAMES J. CASSIDY



"Now this is the commandment, the statutes, and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over to possess it … You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise." — Deuteronomy 6:1, 7



The Westminster Shorter Catechism is a wonderful tool for teaching the truth of God's Word. From the very beginning, God's people have been called, commissioned, and even commanded to teach the truth about God to the next generation. The Westminster Shorter Catechism is a tool that was designed in the seventeenth century to do just that—to inculcate within each generation the truth of God's Word in a clear and systematic way. In this class, I seek to encourage and equip students both to grow in their understanding of the faith once for all delivered to the saints and to pass it on to others.

But before we get there, you might ask: why a catechism? What is the significance of a catechism? Isn't a catechism a Roman Catholic thing? Why are we as Protestants using this? Isn't the Bible enough?

First of all, we have to say "yes," the Bible is enough. The Bible is altogether sufficient for us to understand who God is, what he wants us to believe, and what duty he requires of us. But he also teaches us that we are to teach one another what the Bible says about God and what he commands us to do. Protestants picked that up in the sixteenth century during the time of the Reformation. It was a time when there was widespread ignorance about doctrine and practice throughout the church. And the Reformers wanted to restore Christian education to the people in the pews. The catechism was a tool by which the church could train up a child in the faith.

But is it biblical? Well, nowhere in the Scriptures can we find a passage that says "thou shall teach your children the Westminster Shorter Catechism." So, if you are looking for that, you will not find it. But there are portions of Scripture that do instruct us to teach the next generation such as Deuteronomy 6. But Judges 2 gives us a negative example of why we need to do catechesis. It gives us a very sober warning about what

Continued on p. 4.



happens when we don't train the next generation in the faith. Consider Judges 2:10, "And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel." What is in view here is the generation of the Israelites who died in the wilderness, who did not come into the land because they did not obey the Lord. But Joshua would bring a new generation into the land. And when he brought that generation into the land and established them in that place, there rose up after him a new generation that unfortunately did not know about the things of the Lord. And we know from the rest of the book of Judges the consequences of not knowing the Lord. To not know the Lord—to not be taught who God is and his wonderful works (the *Magnalia Dei*) means that the next generation will fall from the faith. And that is what we see in the book of Judges immediately following this. We see the ongoing and persistent disobedience of the people of Israel, because they "did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel." Who God is, the mighty deeds he has wrought for our salvation, and what duty he requires of us—this is what that generation in the days of Joshua and the Judges needed. But it is also, of course, needed in our generation and the next.

Psalm 78:1–8 gives us an example of the catechetical idea in poetic form. There, we are told how Israel's forefathers were to "tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done." (v. 4) The rest of this lengthy psalm goes on to do just that—to tell of God's mighty deeds of redeeming grace with special reference to the Exodus, Israel's desert disobedience, and the establishment of the Davidic throne. This shows that the essential tool of catechesis can come in various forms, including poetry and music.

We could commend, of course, the Heidelberg Catechism as a faithful resource that is robustly Reformed. But in this class we are going to be focusing in on the Westminster Shorter Catechism as we introduce you to the Reformed faith, which B. B. Warfield said is only "Christianity come to its own." Therefore, I would like to encourage you that as you continue to study through these lectures to grow in your faith and equip yourself to pass it on to the next generation. That way, by God's grace, a generation might not rise up ignorant of the things of God, but rather might know him and his wonderful works. And in knowing him also glorify and enjoy him forever. ❋

For Further Reading:

- Kuiper, R. B. *God-Centered Evangelism*. Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 2012.
- Packer, J. I. and Parrett Gary. *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way*. Baker: Grand Rapids, 2010.
- Trueman, Carl. *The Creedal Imperative*. Crossway: Wheaton, 2012.
- Williamson, G. I. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: A Guide for Study Classes*. P&R: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2003.

Register now for Introduction to the Westminster Shorter Catechism. This free on-demand course covers the first thirty-eight questions of the Shorter Catechism. Segmented into brief video lessons and organized into a ten-week schedule, this course is particularly suited to Sunday school courses. We have included corresponding course materials and suggested readings. We also have integrated ten quizzes you may use to enhance your learning experience through self-assessment.



Jim Cassidy is pastor of South Austin OPC in South Austin, Texas and President of the Board of Directors of Reformed Forum.

INTRODUCTION TO COVENANT THEOLOGY

THE BIG PICTURE OF COVENANT HISTORY

CAMDEN M. BUCEY

God desires to bring his people into a greater fellowship with him in heavenly places. And he mediates and organizes this relationship and its trajectory through covenants.

Covenant theology is foundational and informs our understanding of the entire scope of the Bible. It is not an imposition upon Scripture but flows forth from it, and in that sense, covenant theology is both biblical and systematic. Systematic theology is a discipline that looks to organize and understand the truth of Scripture topically, whereas biblical theology seeks to organize and understand Scripture in its redemptive-historical context as it progressively unfolds as Christ reveals himself through all of the events in Scripture. But we cannot prioritize one way of studying God's Word over the other. We need both. We not only need to understand the big picture of everything God has done but also how he is working and how he has developed his message and revealed it in successive stages throughout history.

While this study is essential to the Christian faith, there is a question deeper than the "what" of covenant theology. It is the "why?" We are not merely concerned with what the biblical covenants are, but more basically, why God uses them. And perhaps the greatest "why" question for us is: *Why did God create us in his image?*

The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins with the question: *What is the chief end of man?* It answers: *Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever*. This answer helps orient our thoughts toward the fundamental purpose of covenant theology. God desires to bring his people into a greater fellowship with him—into a greater, higher, and more glorious union and communion with him.

God desires to bring those made in his image from the earth, the visible earth, the visible heavens unto the heavenly places where Christ currently is seated at the right hand of God in glory. The prophet Isaiah was given a vision of this place (Isa. 6). It may be tempting to think of this as the place where God has been dwelling for all eternity, but we must recognize that even this throne room is a created place, which God created in the absolute beginning (Gen. 1:1). Prior to creation, there was no place. Only God existed. But God created the heavens as his throne and the earth as his footstool (Isa. 66:1).

There is a two-level architecture to creation, and the goal has always been for human beings made in God's image to move from the visible heavens and earth into the consummate realm of the presently invisible heavens. This is where all of covenant history is pointed. At the end of days when the Lord returns, the invisible heavens will descend, and the new heavens and the new earth will come forth, transformed and translated in consummate glory (Rev. 21:1–2). This is God's great plan and purpose, which organizes and governs all of Scripture. In order properly to understand anything else that God does, we must understand this.

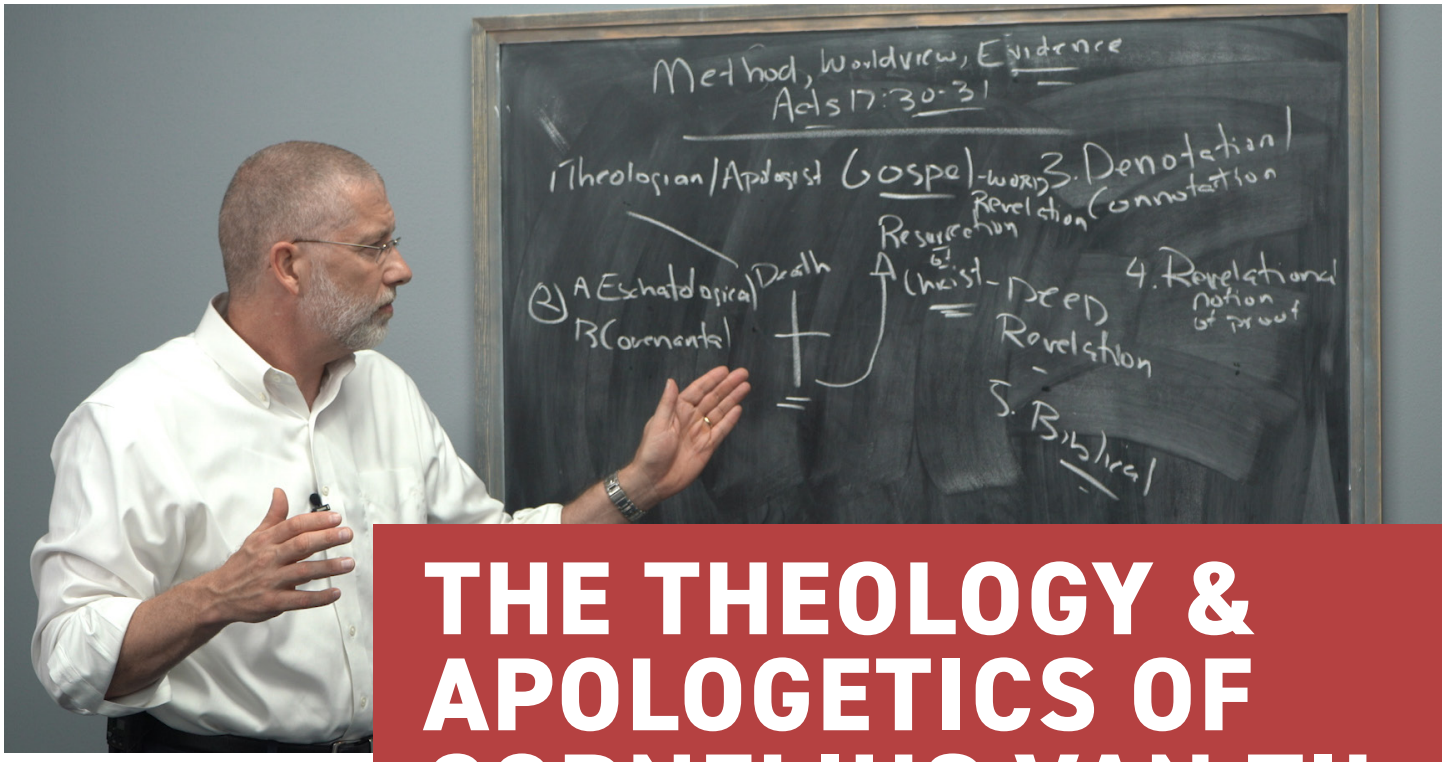
Westminster Confession of Faith 7:1 says, "the distance between God and the creature is so great that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant." Just as soon as Adam was created, God placed him in the garden and spoke the words of the covenant to him (Gen. 2:15–17). This primeval chronology demonstrates that there is no time period in which human beings exist outside an express covenantal relationship to God. All human beings are related to God, because they are made in his image. You cannot cease to be in some form of a relationship with God other than by ceasing to exist. And when the Lord spoke his Word to Adam in the garden, he established a particular kind of relationship with him to be carried out according to his special plan and purpose.

God desires to bring his people into a greater fellowship with him in heavenly places. And he mediates and organizes this relationship and its trajectory through covenants. ❋

Register now for Introduction to Covenant Theology. This free on-demand course includes forty-three video lessons totaling nearly five hours of instruction. Along with corresponding course handouts, we also have integrated eight quizzes you may use to enhance your learning experience through self-assessment. You may engage all of these resources on your own schedule and at your own pace from your computer or mobile device on our website.



Camden M. Bucey is Executive Director of Reformed Forum.



THE THEOLOGY & APOLOGETICS OF CORNELIUS VAN TIL

LANE G. TIPTON

Cornelius Van Til's theology and apologetics remains a topic of great importance in the twenty-first century. With the rise of interest in Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas in recent decades, we ought to appreciate afresh Van Til's distinctive theological system and apologetical approach. Van Til did not reject historic Reformed theology and eschew the task of apologetics (Barth), nor did he advocate a Roman Catholic theology and apply that theology to a block-house apologetical method (Thomas Aquinas). Rather, Van Til sought to defend classical Reformed trinitarian and covenant theology by using an apologetical method that sought consistently to set forth and defend the system of truth contained in the Scriptures and summarized in the ecumenical creeds and Reformed confessions.

As a theologian, Van Til sought above all else to set forth the glory of the self-contained ontological Trinity as the starting point for theology and apologetics. The self-contained Trinity lies at the heart of the Christian faith, and the Reformed apologist ought to reason in a manner that glorifies the triune personal God and submits to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Van Til taught that the self-contained ontological Trinity is "our interpretive concept everywhere." The triune God is simple, immutable, impassible, and self-sufficient in all of his works, whether we think of the works of God *ad intra* (the eternal processions) or the works of God *ad extra* (decree, creation, providence, redemption).

Scholars readily recognize that Van Til maintains this view of the self-contained ontological Trinity when it comes to the Creator-creature distinction. However, Van Til also insisted that what we maintain about God in the Creator-creature distinction must be maintained at every point in the Creator-creature relation. What this means is critical to grasp if we are to understand Van Til.

Van Til, following his favorite professor, Geerhardus Vos, insisted that the triune Creator remains self-contained and immutably absolute at every point in his sovereignly willed new relation to creation (James 1:17). God as Creator does not participate in the becoming of the created order. The God of the covenant does not change in his relation to his people (Mal. 3:6). He does not take to himself accidental properties that he did not have prior to and apart from the eternal decree and the work of creation.

Following Geerhardus Vos (*Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:177–178) and Herman Bavinck (*Reformed Dogmatics* 2:158–159), Van Til vigorously advocated the Reformed theology of the "new relation" of creation. The logic of that "new relation" is quite clear. The relation between God and the image-bearing creature changes, the image-bearing creature in the relation changes, but the triune Creator does not change in the relation. Contrary to the Barthian claim that both God and the creature participate in a "third time" (a *tertium quid*), Van Til insists that God at no point participates in a third thing in his sovereignly willed relation to creation.

There are for Van Til only two categories of reality. There is the immutable and self-contained triune Creator, and there is the mutable and dependent creature. There is no third thing that somehow unites the Creator and the creature, whether that third thing is time, being, historical contingency, or anything else. As Bavinck stated so clearly, "There is nothing intermediate between these two classes of categories: a deep chasm separates God's being from that of all creatures. . . . Without losing himself, God can give himself, and, while absolutely maintaining his immutability, he can enter into an infinite number of relations to his creatures" (*Reformed Dogmatics* 2:158–159).

Van Til also expressed the classical Reformed theology of the image of God and the covenant of works. Over against Roman Catholicism that construes Adam as the natural image of God as tending toward sin and in need of the supplemental and deifying grace of the *donum superadditum*, Van Til insists that Adam, the image of God, was created in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, wholly inclined toward God in natural

religious fellowship and placed under the covenant of works.

The fall brought about the loss of this original righteousness, the guilt of sin, and the corruption of the entire nature in total depravity (Eph. 4:17–24), issuing in an absolute ethical antithesis to God that inheres in fallen man (Gen. 3:14–15; Rom. 8:7–8; 1 Cor. 2:10–14), and demonstrating the absolute need for regeneration, salvation and union with Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:1–10), the "only Mediator between God and man" (1 Tim. 2:5), and who as raised from the dead is judge of all, (Acts 17:31).

The trinitarian and covenantal theology, rooted in the Scriptures, informs at every point Van Til's insistence that the apologist present the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ within the framework of covenant history, as interpreted in the inerrant and God-breathed Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16). Van Til's apologetics attempts to defend the entire Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life. Speaking of Paul's defense of the faith in Acts 17, and demonstrating so clearly the influence of Vos, Van Til says, "[Paul] was not interested in having them endorse the Resurrection as an *isolated event* . . . He was, rather, concerned that they accept it as the climax of the work of redemption from sin by Jesus, truly God and truly man. . . . In short, men should not existentially accept the resurrection unless, in doing so, they received it as part of the *entire biblical redemptive framework*" (emphasis mine).

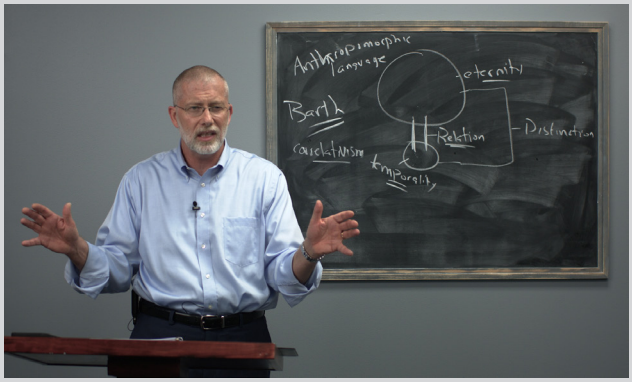
It is just in light of the entire history of special revelation, infallibly and authoritatively set forth in Scripture, that Van Til affirmed we must continue to present the gospel of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Van Til never tired of presenting the fact of Jesus's resurrection and ascension in light of its meaning as revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament (1 Cor. 15:1–4; Luke 24:25–27).

In this course, *Introduction to the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, I offer a survey that encapsulates the core of Van Til's theology and apologetics as summarized above. This course investigates the context, structure, and significance of Van Til's theology and apologetics at an introductory level. It is designed to introduce the student to the main influences and fundamental concerns of Van Til's theological approach to apologetics. Topics include a general introduction, Trinity, image of God, covenant, revelation, worldview, antithesis, common grace, and idealism. Special attention is given to the programmatic deep structures of Van Til's thought, distinguishing his views from Roman Catholicism, Barth, and Evangelical approaches to theology and apologetics. Other courses that follow in this series will investigate Van Til on the same topics with greater depth as we continue to strive to give a "reason for the hope" that is in us in our union and communion with the ascended Christ (1 Pet. 3:15) to the glory of the triune God (1 Cor. 10:31). ❁



Lane Tipton is Pastor of Trinity Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Easton, Pennsylvania and Fellow of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Reformed Forum.

THE FELLOWSHIP IN REFORMED APOLOGETICS



Reformed Forum's Fellowship in Reformed Apologetics is a unique academic program offering intensive training in the tradition of Cornelius Van Til. The program is dedicated to fostering a rigorous and collaborative learning environment in order to produce theological leadership for the Church. Designed with flexibility in mind, this program adapts to the needs of each student—from full-time workers without formal theological education to postdoctoral students seeking an advanced research opportunity.

This is not a degree program. Nonetheless, students and faculty alike will benefit from a collegial community actively engaged in lectures, critical reading, and seminar discussions. Students who complete the program will demonstrate a thorough understanding of Reformed apologetics through original research in service of the Church.

CURRICULUM

Introduction to the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til is the first in a series of eight scheduled courses in Reformed apologetics.

- Introduction to the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til
- Trinitarian Theology
- Common Grace and the Antithesis
- Apologetic Method
- Covenant Theology and Redemptive-Historical Hermeneutics
- Doctrine of Revelation
- Van Til and Barth
- Idealism

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A small group of students will meet regularly to discuss lectures and readings with faculty members in a format inspired by traditional PhD/ThM seminars. The first course is available now and its accompanying cohorts are currently meeting. As we produce additional courses in the curriculum, we will establish cohorts for each course.

Learn more at www.reformedforum.org/fellowship

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MID-AMERICA LECTURE EVENT

VAN TIL'S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY: REFORMED OR REVISIONIST?

We are pleased to announce a lecture event in partnership with Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana. On October 8, 2020 from 7–9 pm (U.S. Central), Dr. Lane Tipton will lecture on the theme "Van Til's Trinitarian Theology: Reformed or Revisionist?"

Registration is free, but given that space is limited due to social distancing requirements, you must register in advance. The event will be livestreamed on YouTube and recorded. Visit the website for a detailed schedule, to register, and to view the livestream.

THURSDAY
8 OCTOBER

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Serving pastors, scholars, and anyone who desires to grow in their understanding of Scripture and the theology that faithfully summarizes its teachings.

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