



# VAN TILLIAN Apologetics

May 15th, 2022 - Part 5

Jon Kaus

- 1 Stated three central tenets of Van Tillian apologetics.
- 2 Showed the inconsistency of these three tenets with probability apologetics.
- 3 Addressed Frame's claim that fallible man rarely produces infallible arguments.
- 4 Refuted Frame's claim that traditional arguments support Van Til's premises.
- 5 Discussed Frame's use of "narrow" and "broad" circularity.

# Van Tillian Apologetics

Setting forth the truth of Christianity  
over against all contrary propositions  
through the use of certainty

1 John 4:19

We love him, because

he first loved us.

John 10:27

My sheep hear my voice,  
and I know them, and  
they follow me.

# ROMANS 8:16

The Spirit itself beareth  
witness with our spirit, that  
we are the children of God.

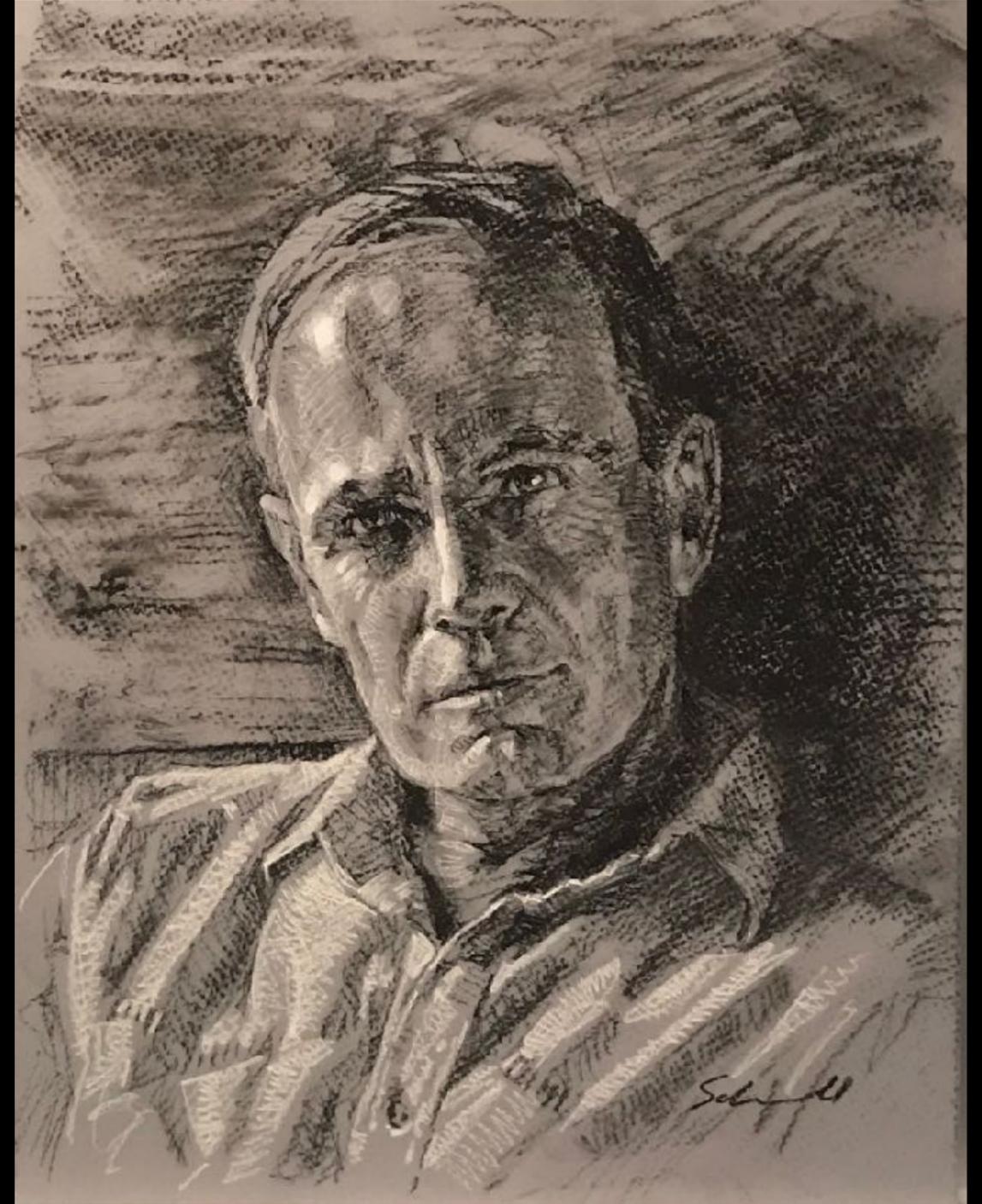
# 1 Peter 3:15

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready **always to give an answer** to every man that asketh **you a reason of the hope that is in you** with meekness and fear.

The Creator of the  
world testifies to me  
that I am his child.

Nor does God whisper through the trees. His voice is not to be mistaken. When men hear it they fall to their knees and their souls are riven and they cry out to Him and there is no fear in them but only that wildness of heart

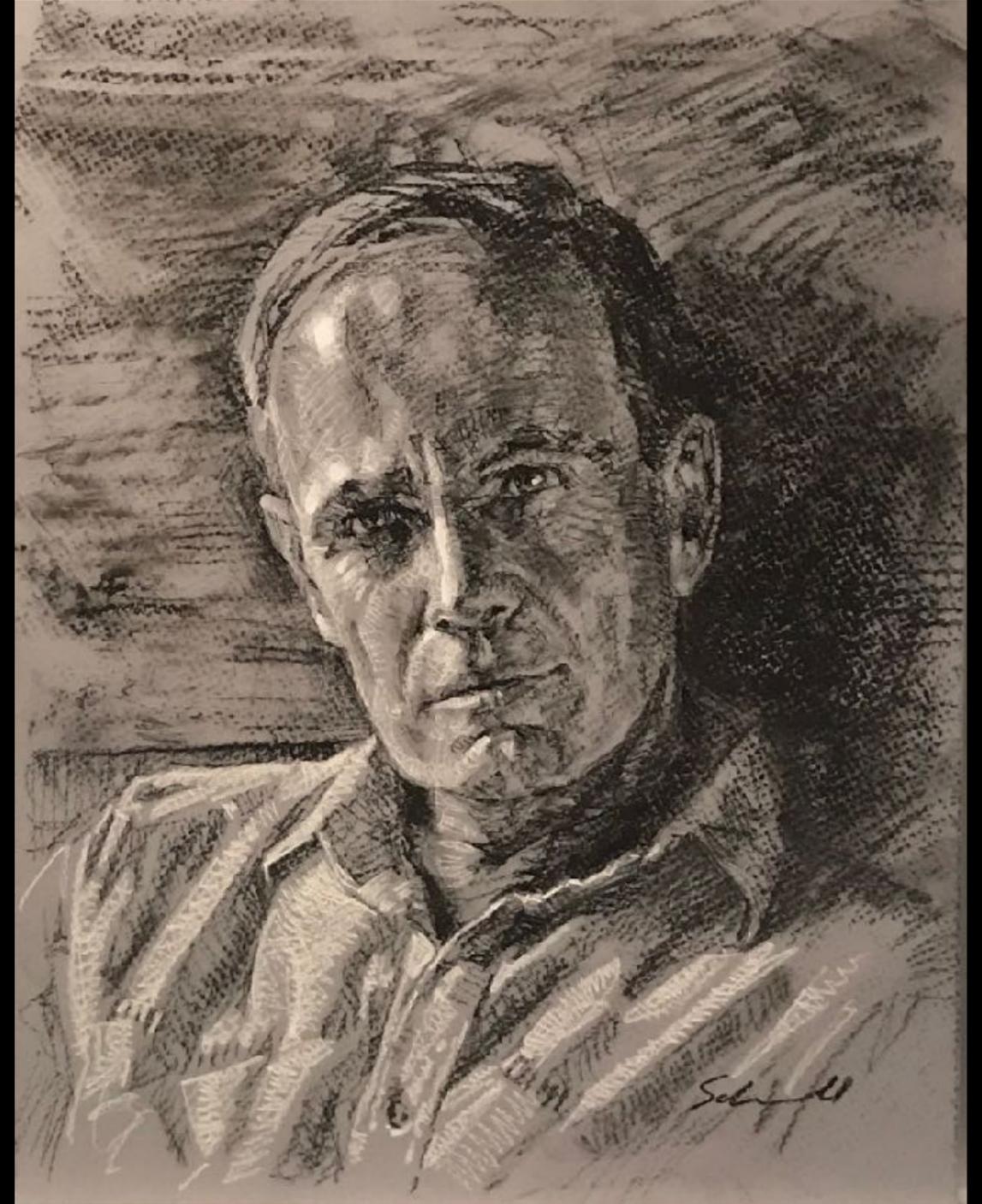
Cormac McCarthy  
The Crossing, 152



that springs from such longing and  
they cry out to stay his presence for  
they know at once that while godless  
men may live well enough in their  
exile those to whom He has spoken  
can contemplate no life without Him  
but only darkness and despair.

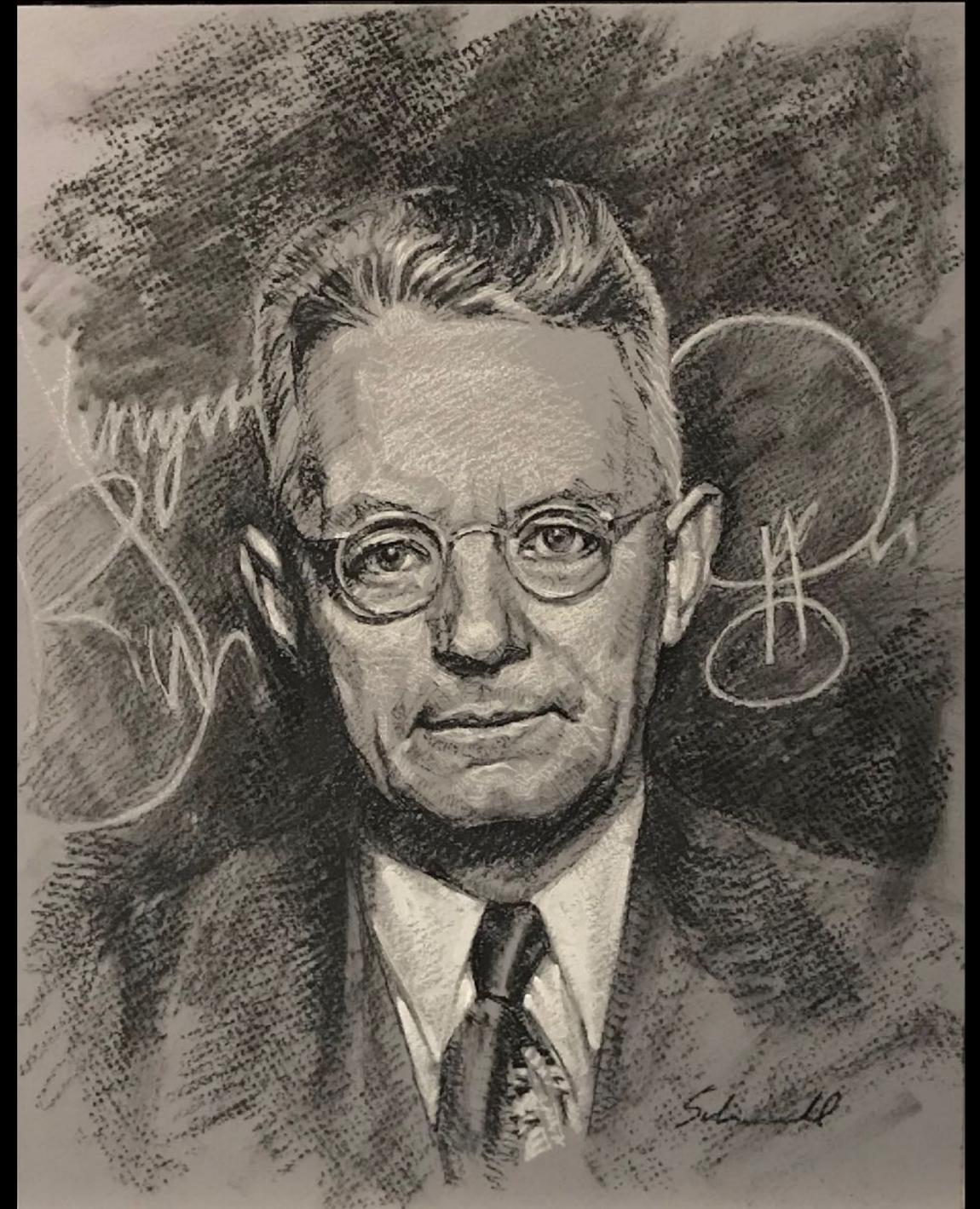
Cormac McCarthy

The Crossing, 152



I believe in this God because  
He Himself has told me in the  
Bible Who He is, what I am,  
and what He, in Christ and by  
the Holy Spirit, has done for  
me.

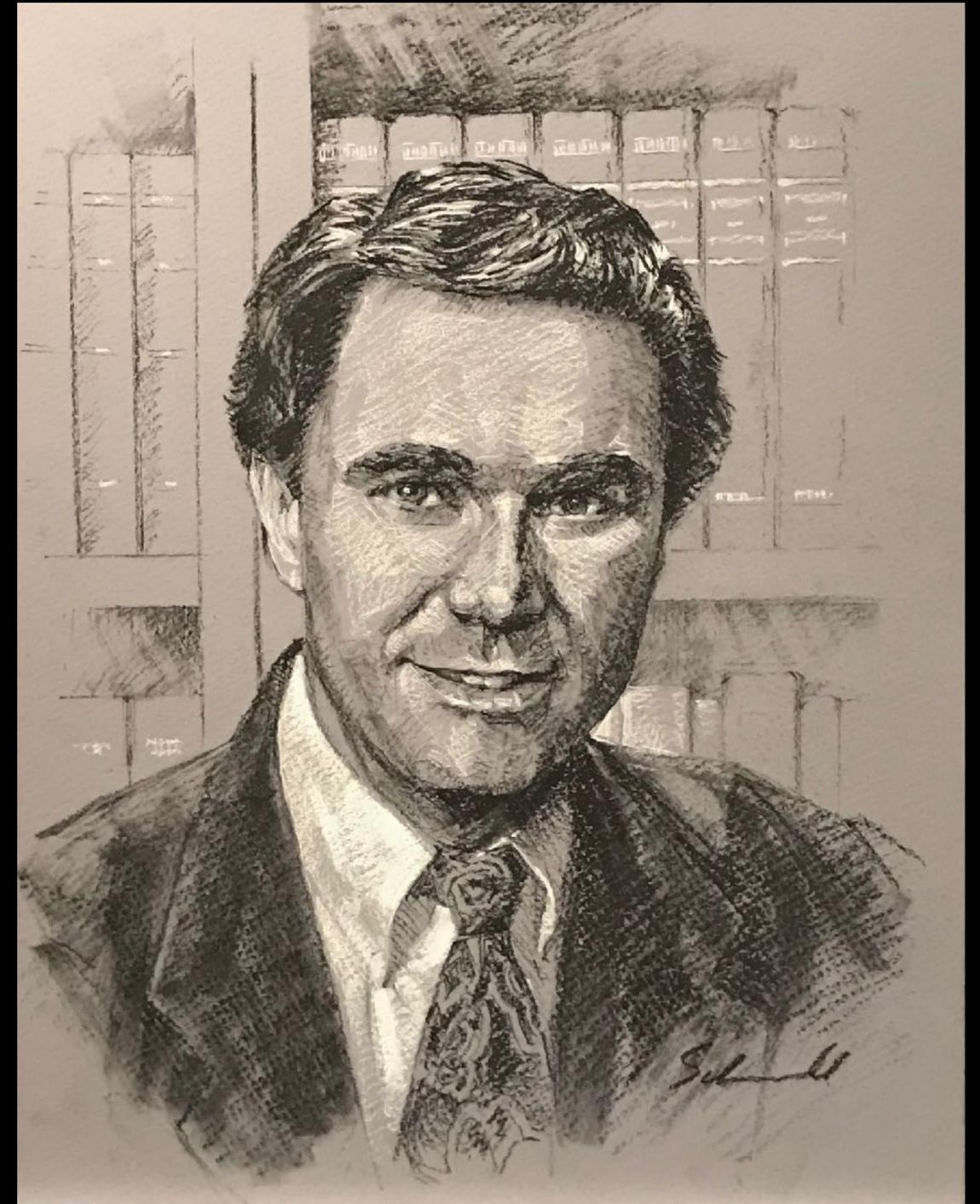
Cornelius Van Til  
Toward a Reformed Apologetic, 2



The Creator of the  
world testifies to me  
that I am his child.

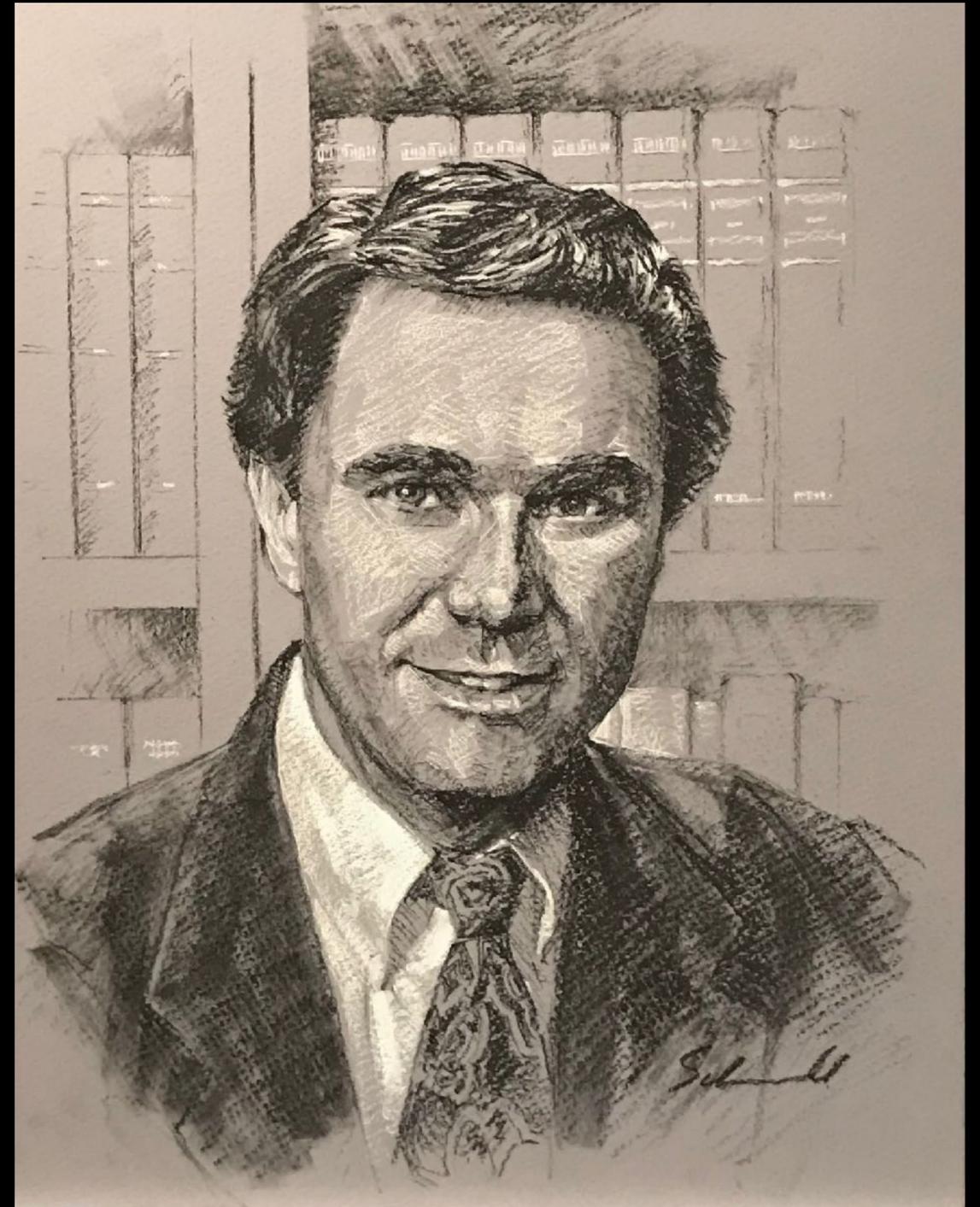
It is **certainly true that Christianity**  
**brings us a sense of personal peace**  
**and confidence before God**, and this  
inner experience of the faith being  
right and our own coming to be right  
with God (cf. the witness of the  
Spirit, Rom. 8:16) cannot

Greg Bahnsen  
Always Ready, 126



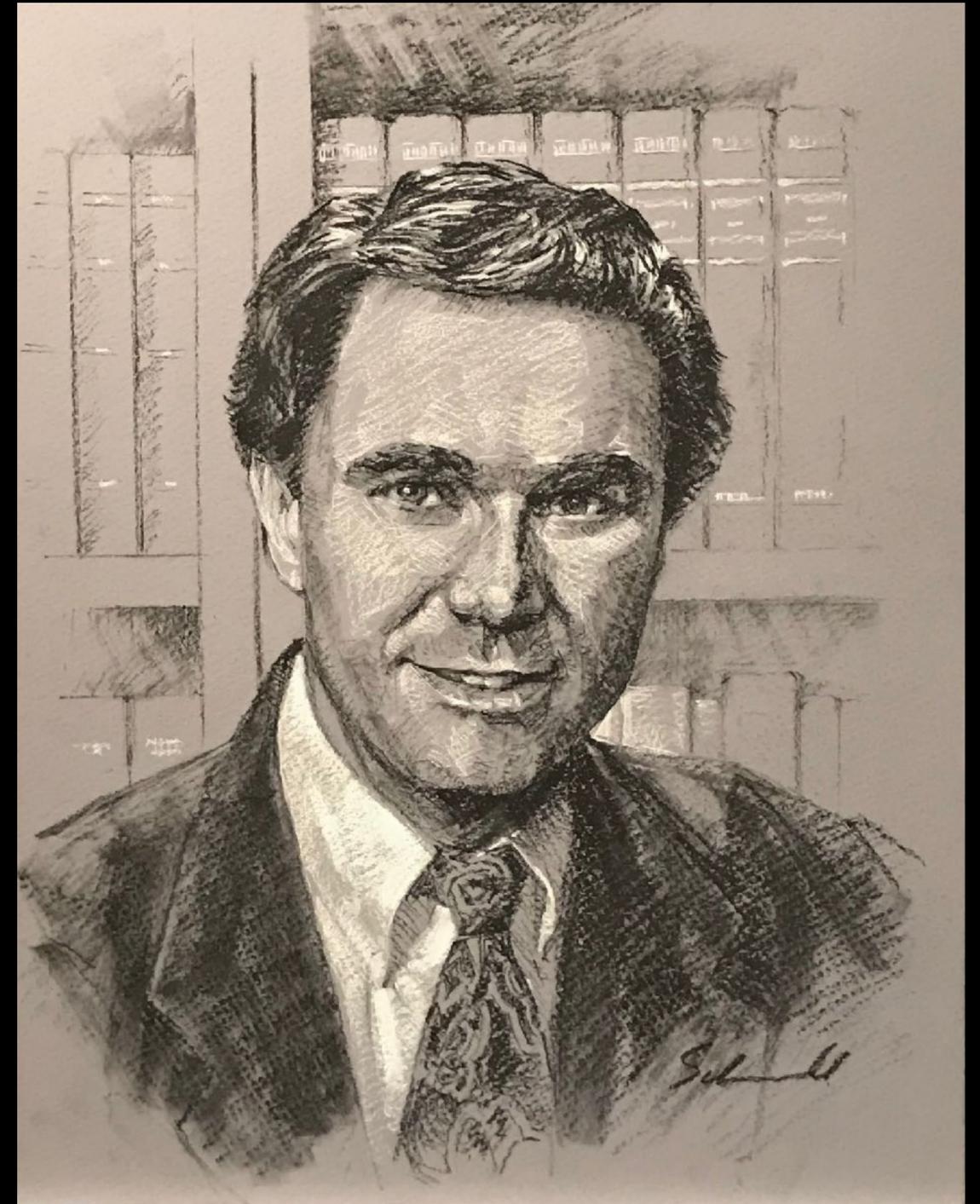
adequately be communicated  
in words. However **appeals to  
this inner feeling do not  
constitute an argument which  
should persuade others of the  
truth of Christianity.**

Greg Bahnsen  
Always Ready, 126



That is, the apologist maintains that **its truth has a public nature, open to inspection, and independent of what anybody thinks or feels about it (positively or negatively).**

Greg Bahnsen  
Always Ready, 127



# 2 Corinthians 10:5

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing  
that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,  
and bringing into captivity every thought to the  
obedience of Christ.

# Psalm 14:1

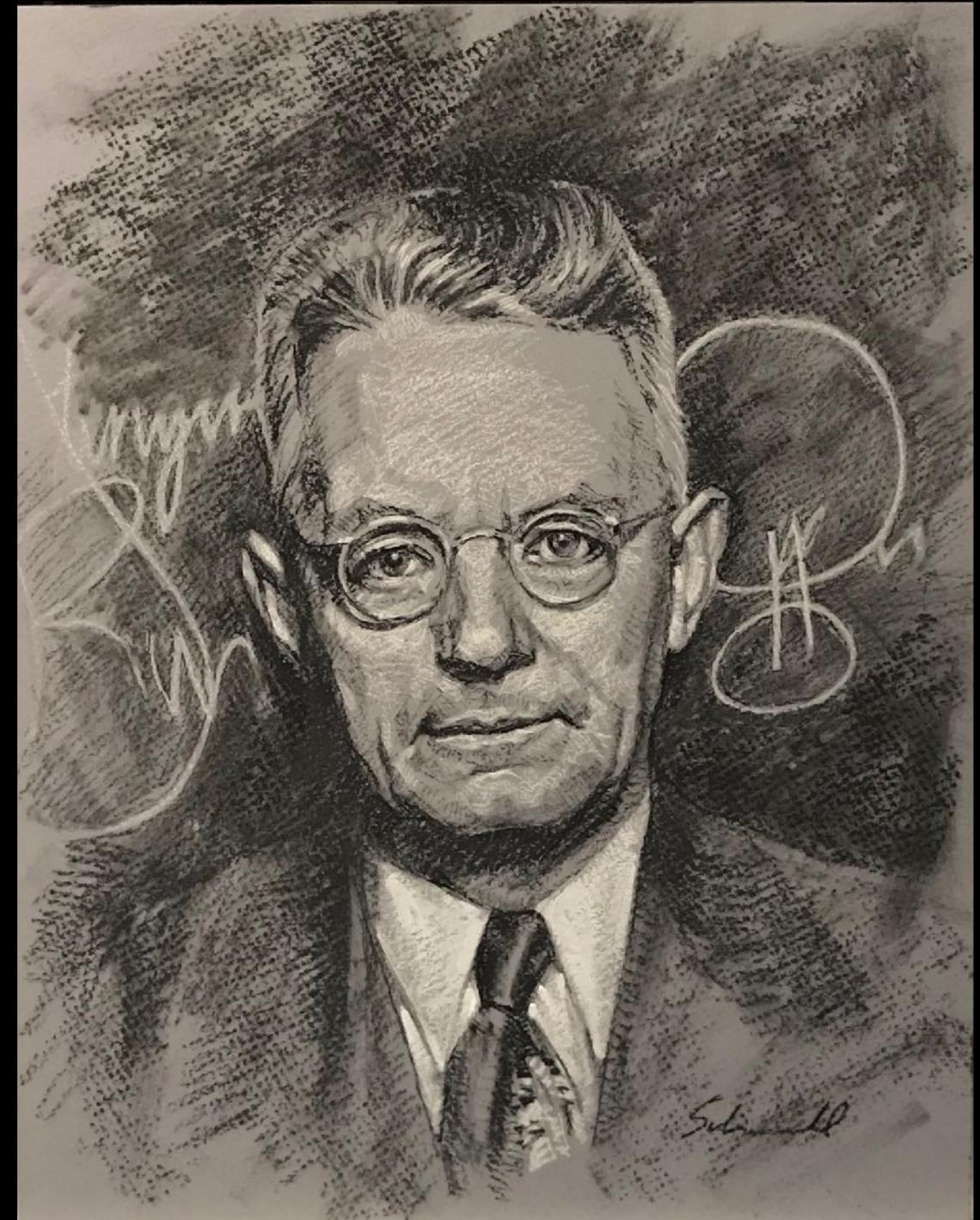
The fool hath said in his heart,  
There is no God. They are corrupt,  
they have done abominable works,  
there is none that doeth good.

# 1 Corinthians 1:20

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where  
is the disputer of this world? hath not God made  
foolish the wisdom of this world?

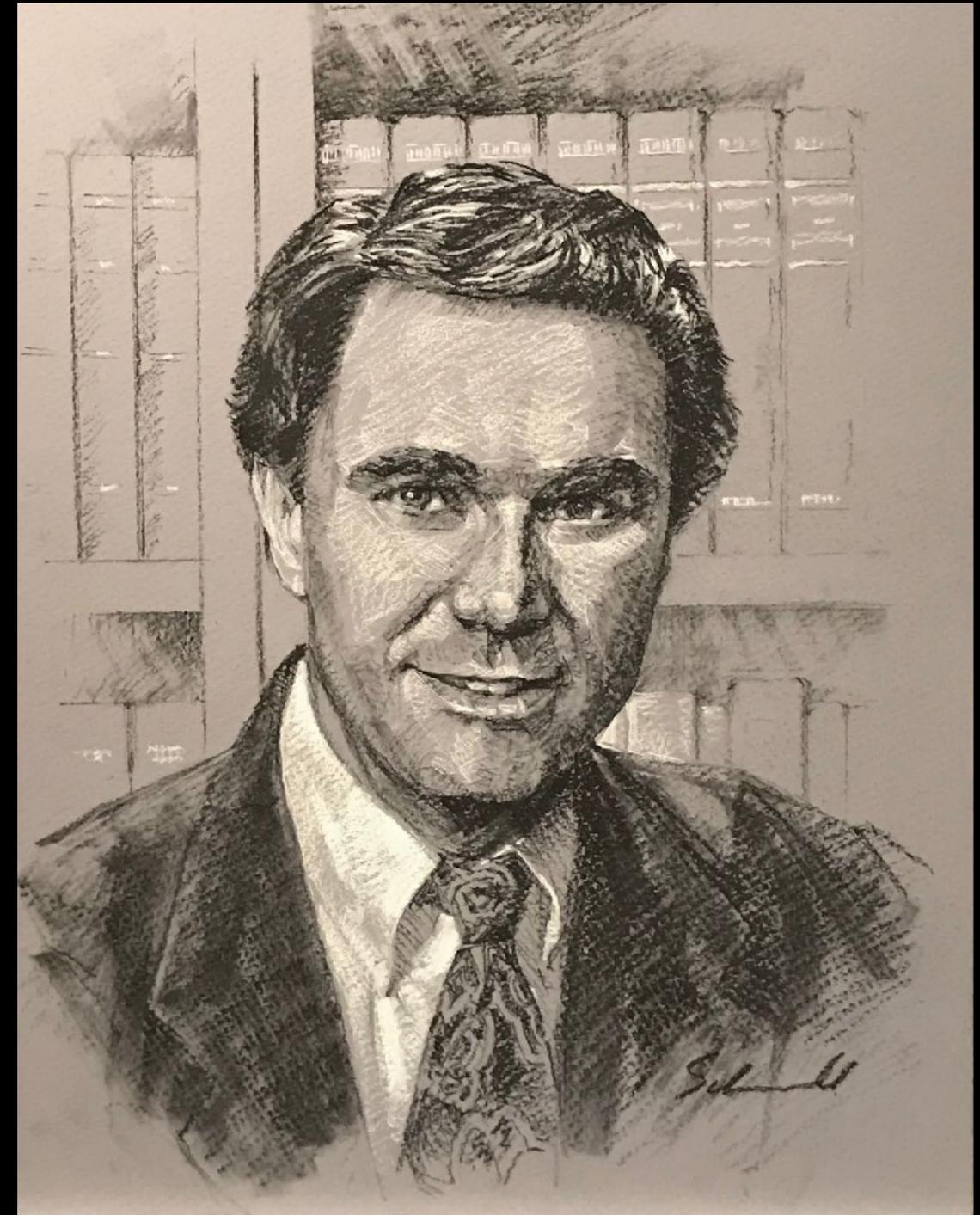
In the first place I believe that Christian Apologetics, and in particular Reformed apologetics, is not really transcendental in its method unless it says at the **outset of its dialogue** with non-believers that the **Christian position** must be accepted on the **authority** of the **self-identifying Christ of Scripture** as the presupposition of human predication in any field.

Cornelius Van Til  
Jerusalem and Athens, 98



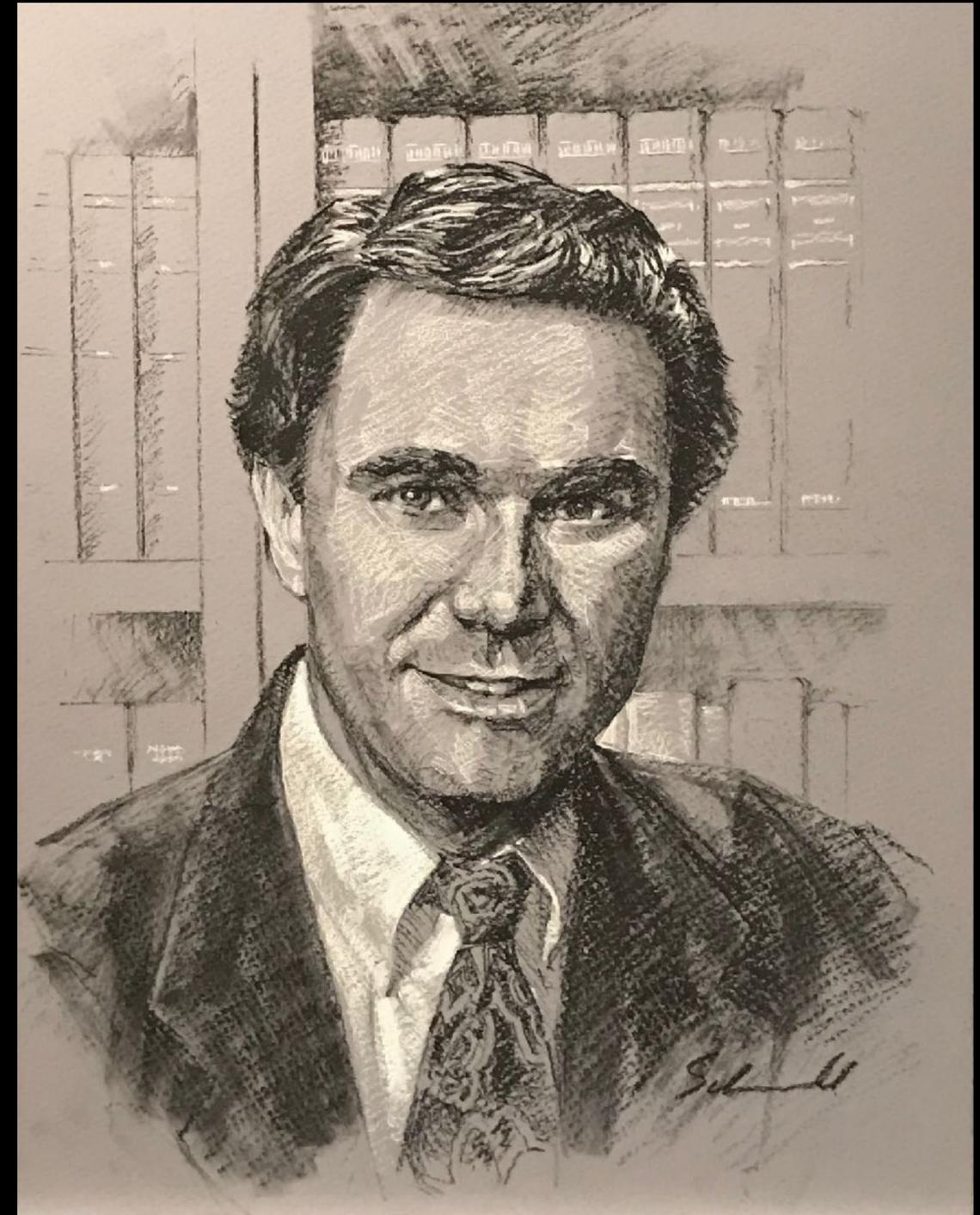
If the apologist treats the **starting point** of knowledge as something **other than reverence for God**, then unconditional submission to the unsurpassed greatness of God's wisdom at the end of his argumentation does not really make sense. There would **always be something greater than God's wisdom**—namely, the supposed **wisdom of one's intellectual starting point**.

Greg Bahnsen  
Van Til's Apologetic, 3



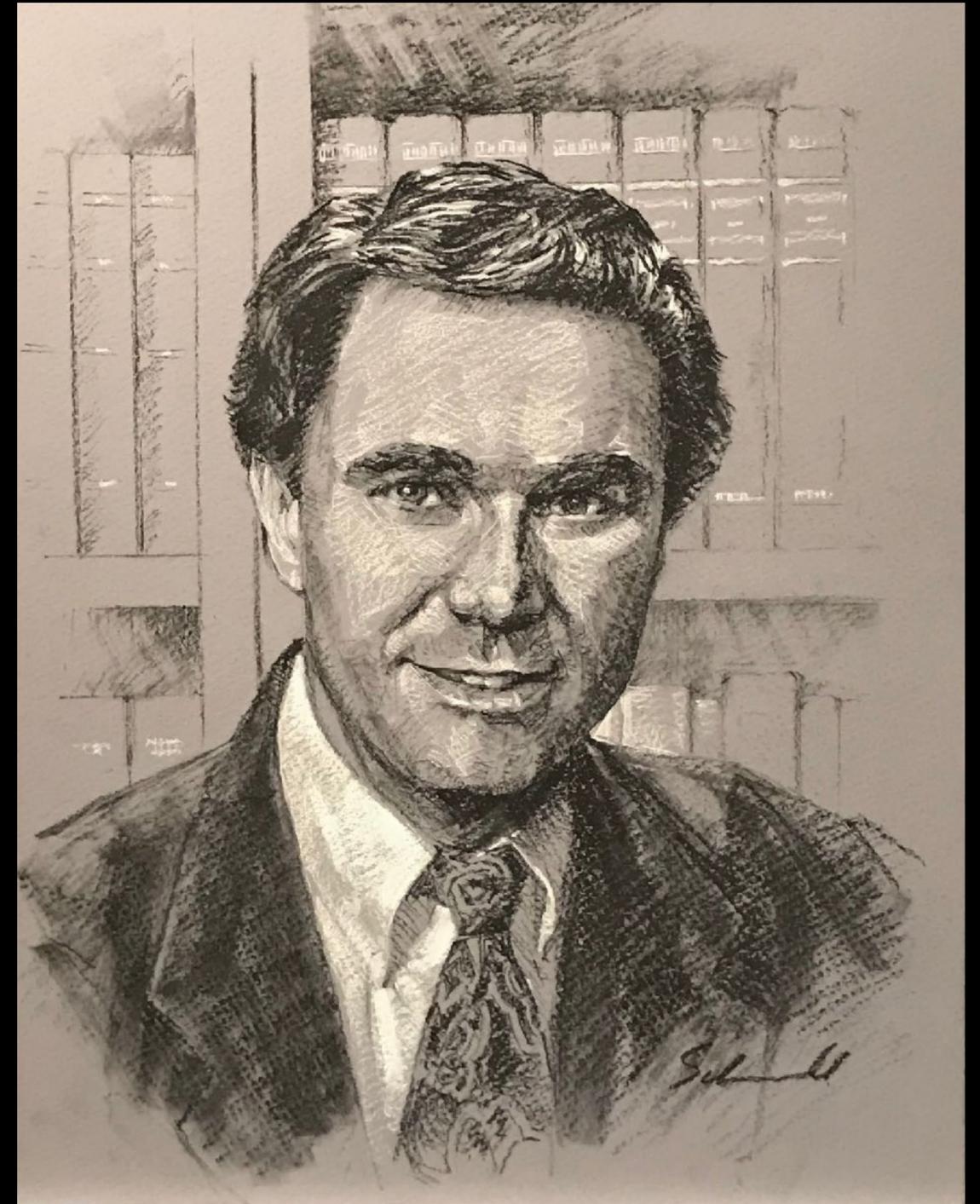
Therefore, the **authority of Christ**  
**and His word**, rather than  
intellectual autonomy must  
**govern the starting point and**  
method of his apologetics, as  
well as its conclusion.

Greg Bahnsen  
Van Til's Apologetic, 3



Likewise, the presuppositional argument **does not first debate** the formal **possibility of a book** from God, but rather **begins** the argument from the outset with the **actuality of the Bible.**

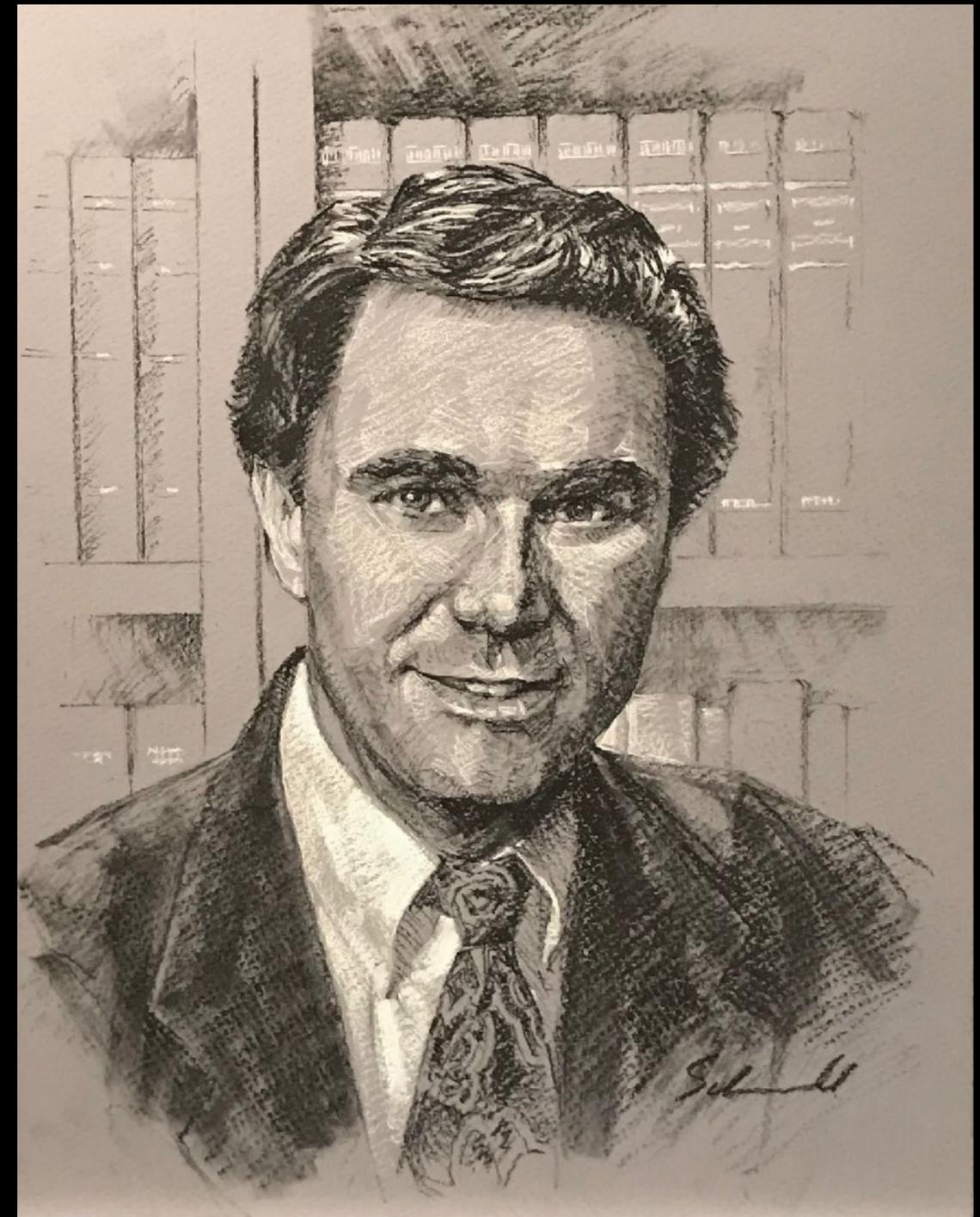
Greg Bahnsen  
Van Til's Apologetic, 508



No wonder, then, that the epistemological position of biblical and reformed thinking stands out in stark contrast! It challenges the status quo, demands a reorienting of our lives and thoughts, and threatens to “turn the world upside down.” **It appears dogmatic and absolutistic because, it is dogmatic and absolutistic.**

Greg Bahnsen

Always Ready, 31

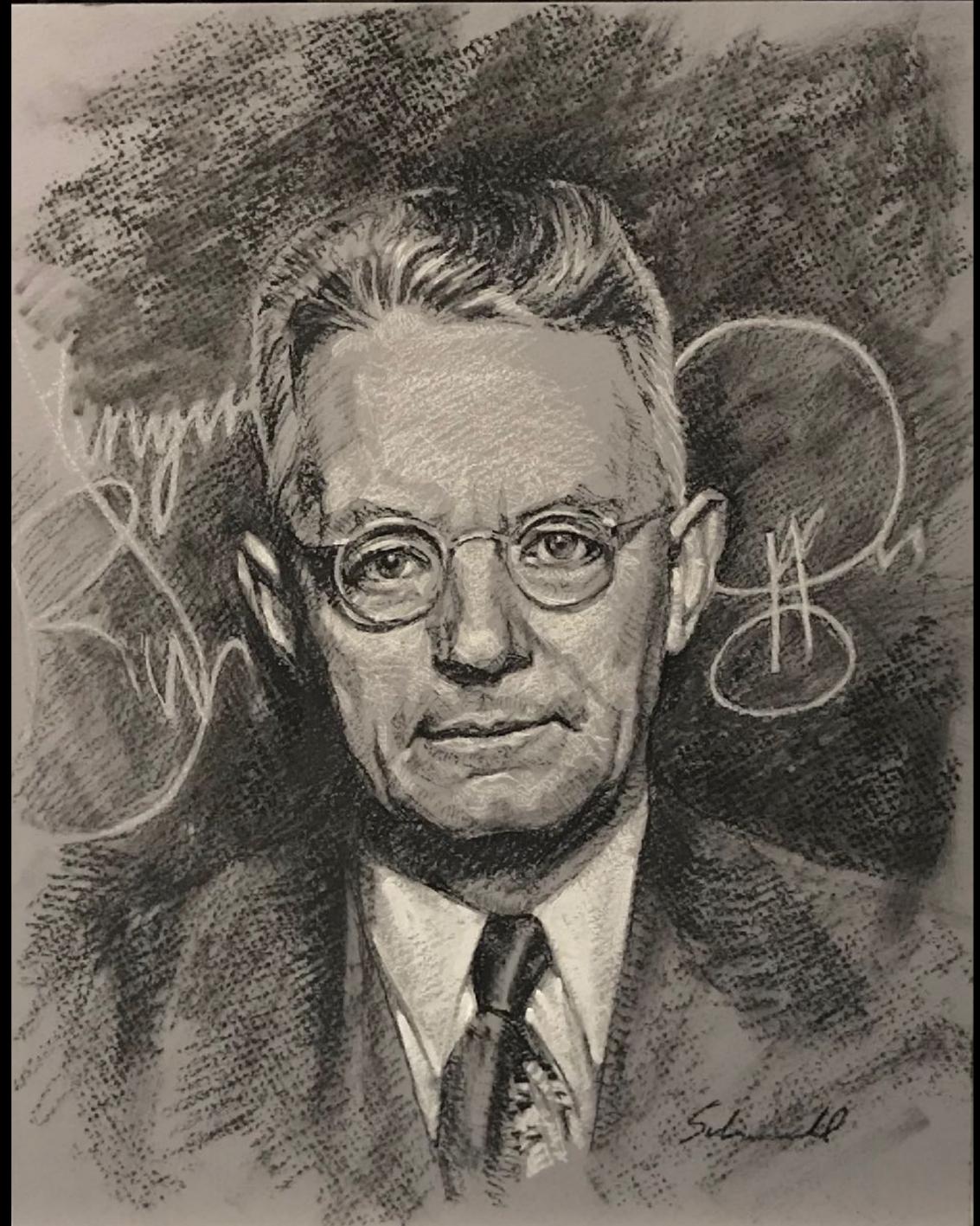


1

Start with the Bible.

This does **not imply** that **philosophy** and **science** must be **exclusively dependent upon theology** for their **basic principles**. It implies only that philosophy and science must, as well as theology, **turn to Scripture** for **whatever light it has to offer** on general principles and particular facts.

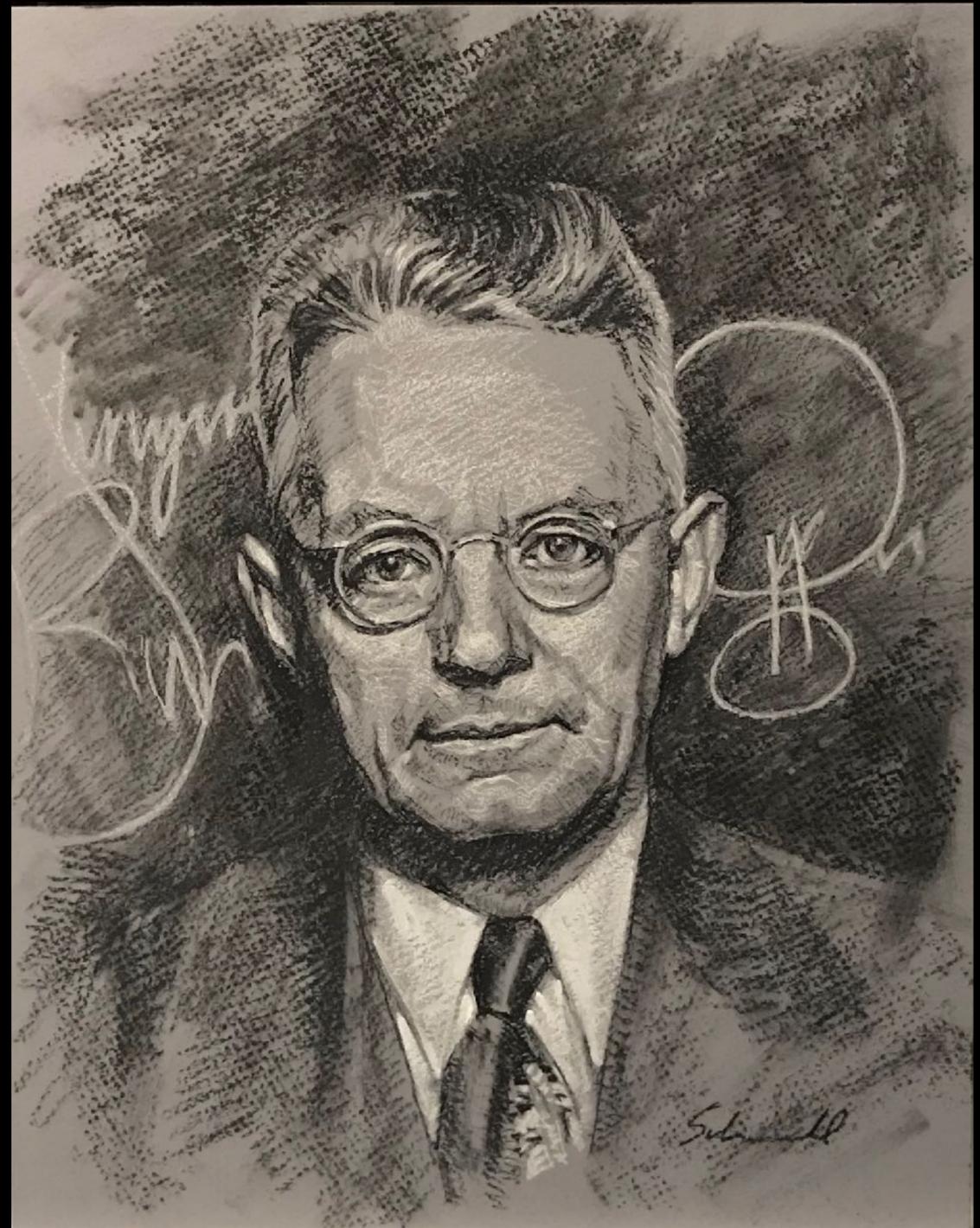
Cornelius Van Til  
Apologetics, 26



The entire house of the interpretation of life had to be broken down. Many of the **building blocks** that they had gathered **could no doubt be used**, but only if the **totally new architectural plan** that Paul proposed **were followed**.

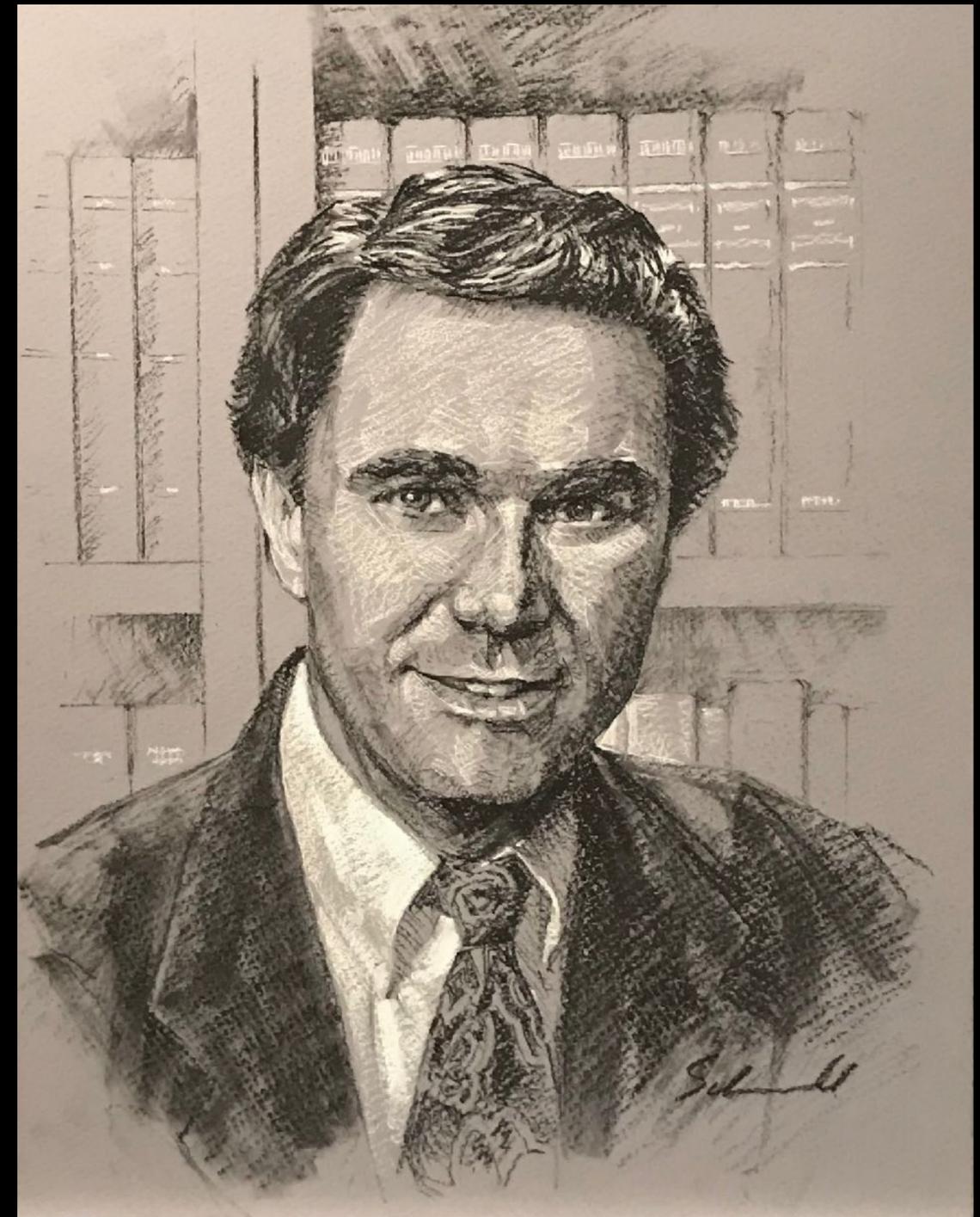
Cornelius Van Til

The Intellectual Challenge of the Gospel, 4



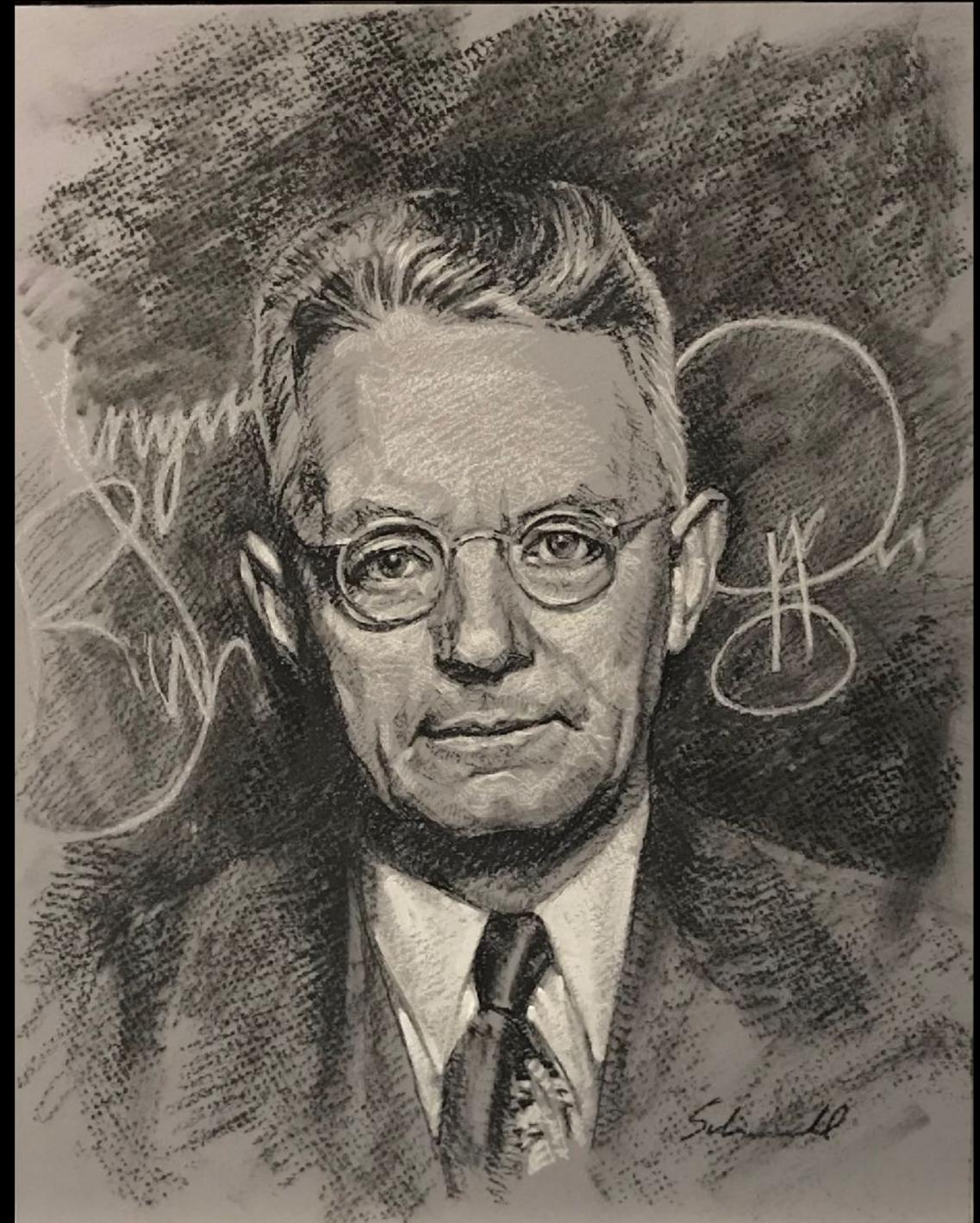
In terms of the analogy, the new **architectural plan** represents the newly adopted **worldview of Christianity** (with its own revealed theory of reality, theory of knowledge, and theory of ethics). **Within this context**, the “discoveries” or **accomplishments of the unbeliever** can be seen to be meaningful—to “make sense”—and to be **profitably applied**.

Greg Bahnsen  
Van Til's Apologetic, 83



We all make assumptions, but we alone do not make false assumptions. The fact that all make assumptions is in itself a mere psychological and formal matter. The question is as to who makes the right assumptions or presuppositions. On this point there ought to be no doubt.

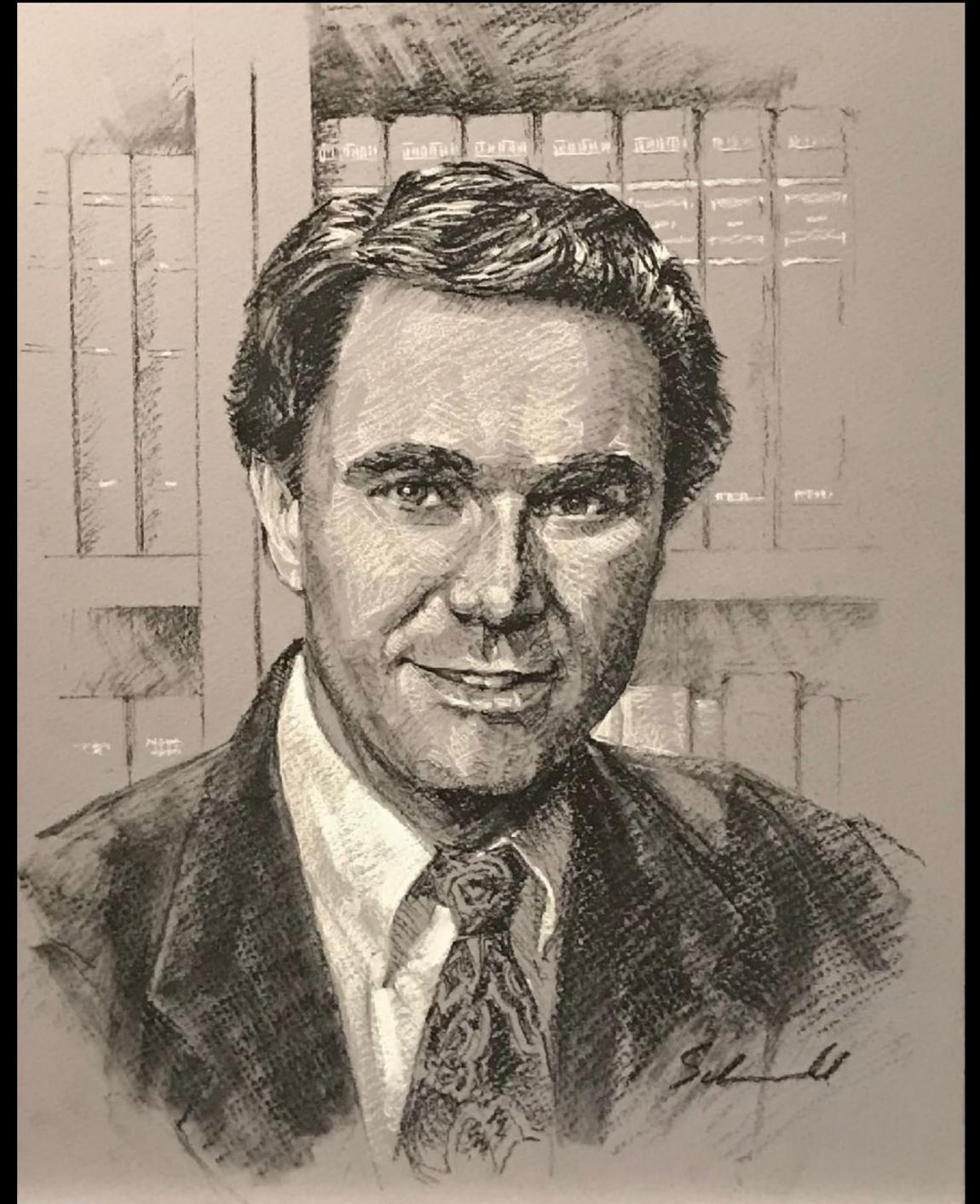
Cornelius Van Til  
Common Grace and the Gospel, 63



No one could intend to convince his opponent of the truth without the conviction that each of them **shared an initially true premise**; this conviction can be based **only on a word from God**.

Greg Bahnsen

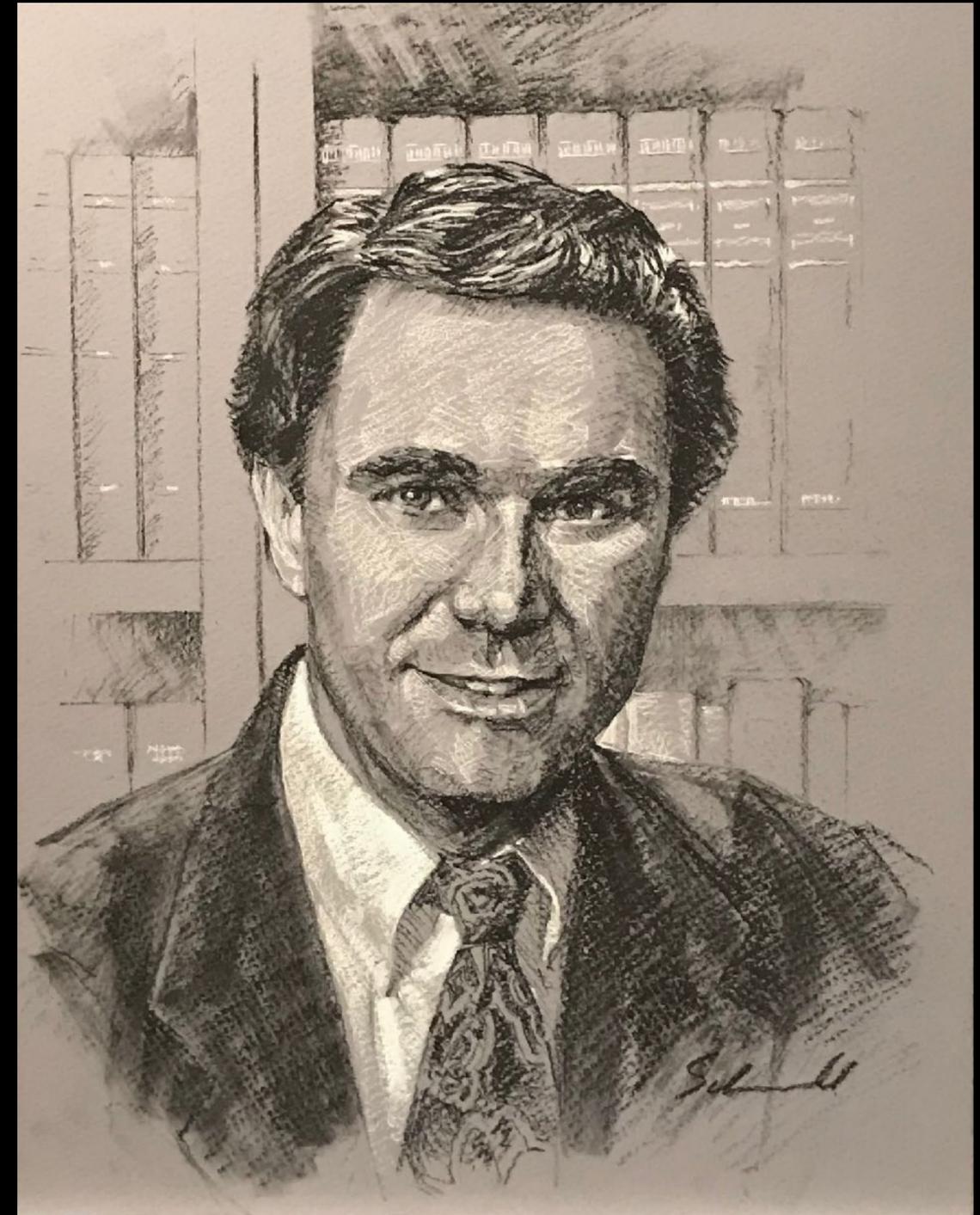
Presuppositional Apologetics, 288



If argumentation is going to be possible we need not just any presupposition, but we require clearly revealed and universally necessary ones—presuppositions that Scripture declares God has provided all men.

Greg Bahnsen

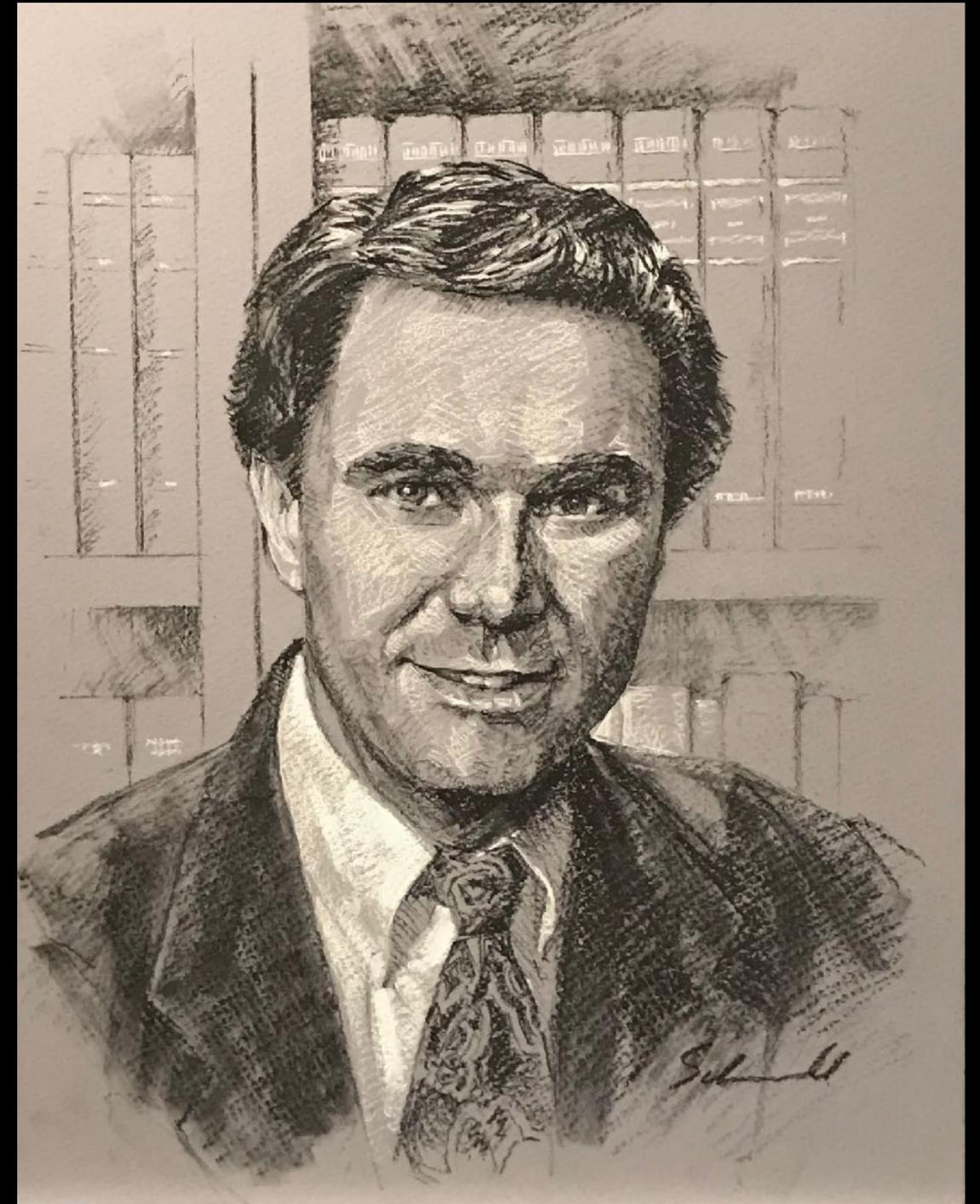
Presuppositional Apologetics, 288



Only the Christian, depending upon the verbal revelation of God, can be assured that God has revealed certain unquestionable truths to all men in all ages.

Greg Bahnsen

Presuppositional Apologetics, 289



1

Start with the Bible.

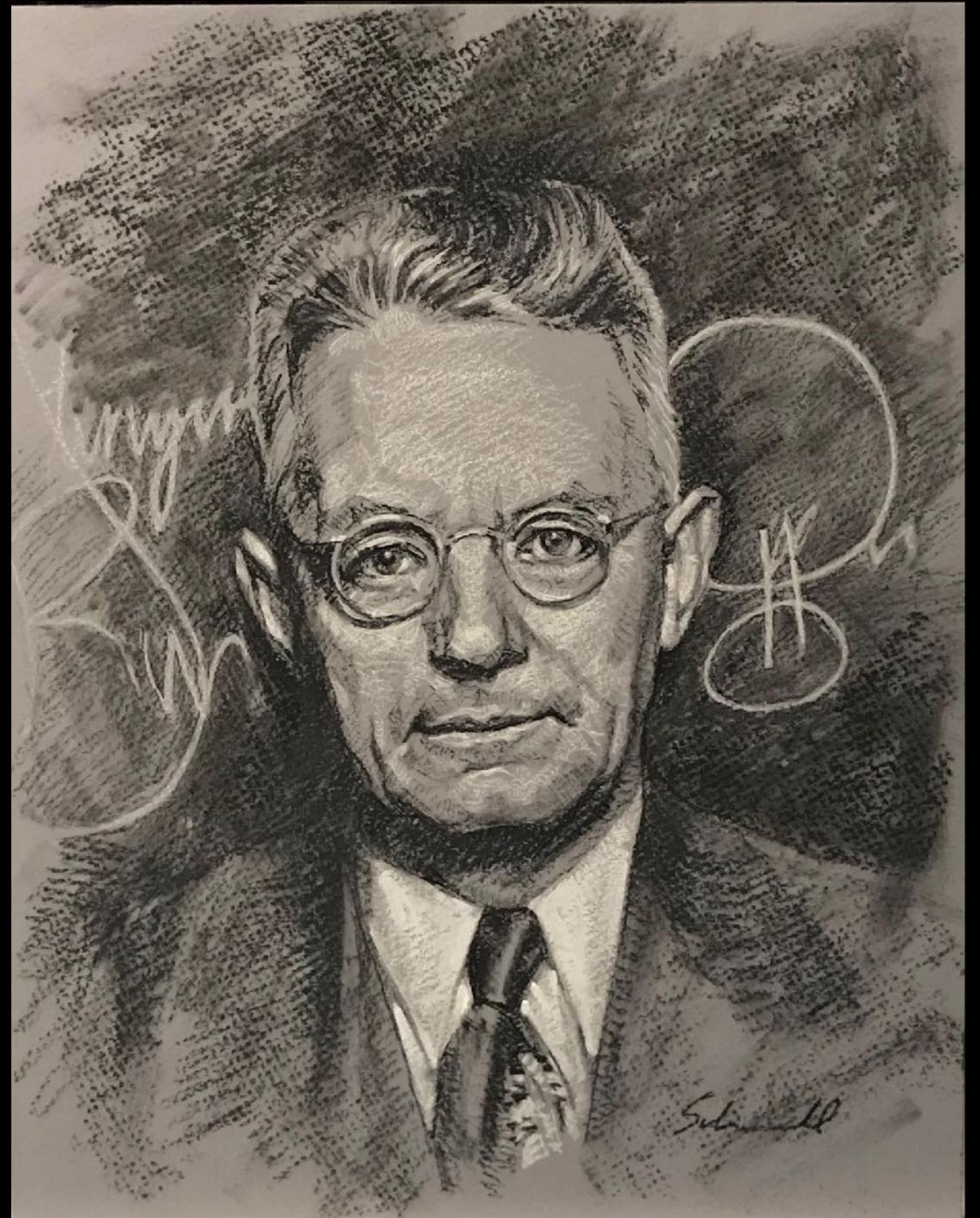
2

Basic principles (axioms) need to be consistent with the Bible.

It is an **insult to the living God** to say that **his revelation of himself** so lacks in clarity that **man**, himself through and through a revelation of God, **does justice by it** when he says that **God probably exists**.

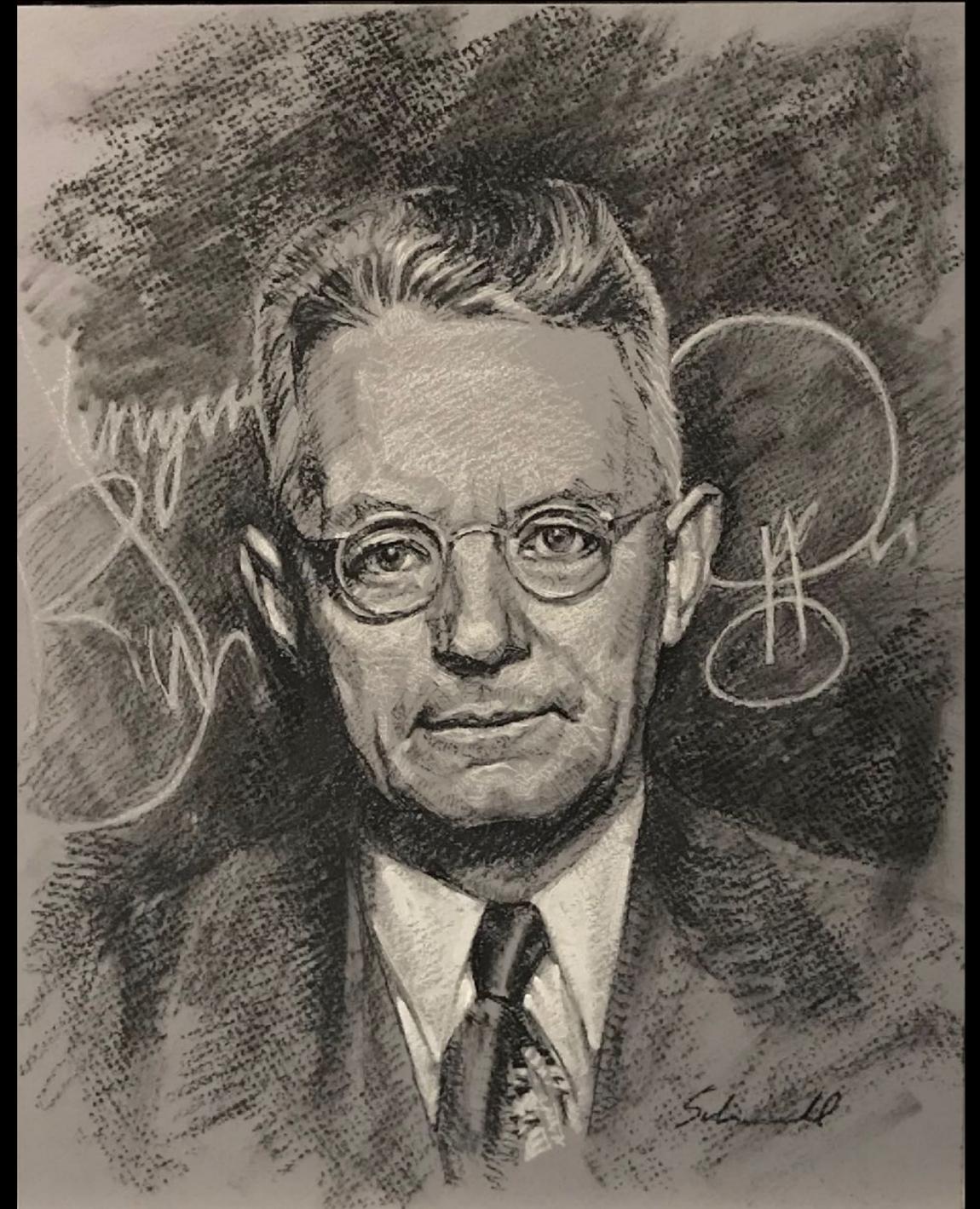
Cornelius Van Til

The Defense of the Faith, 255



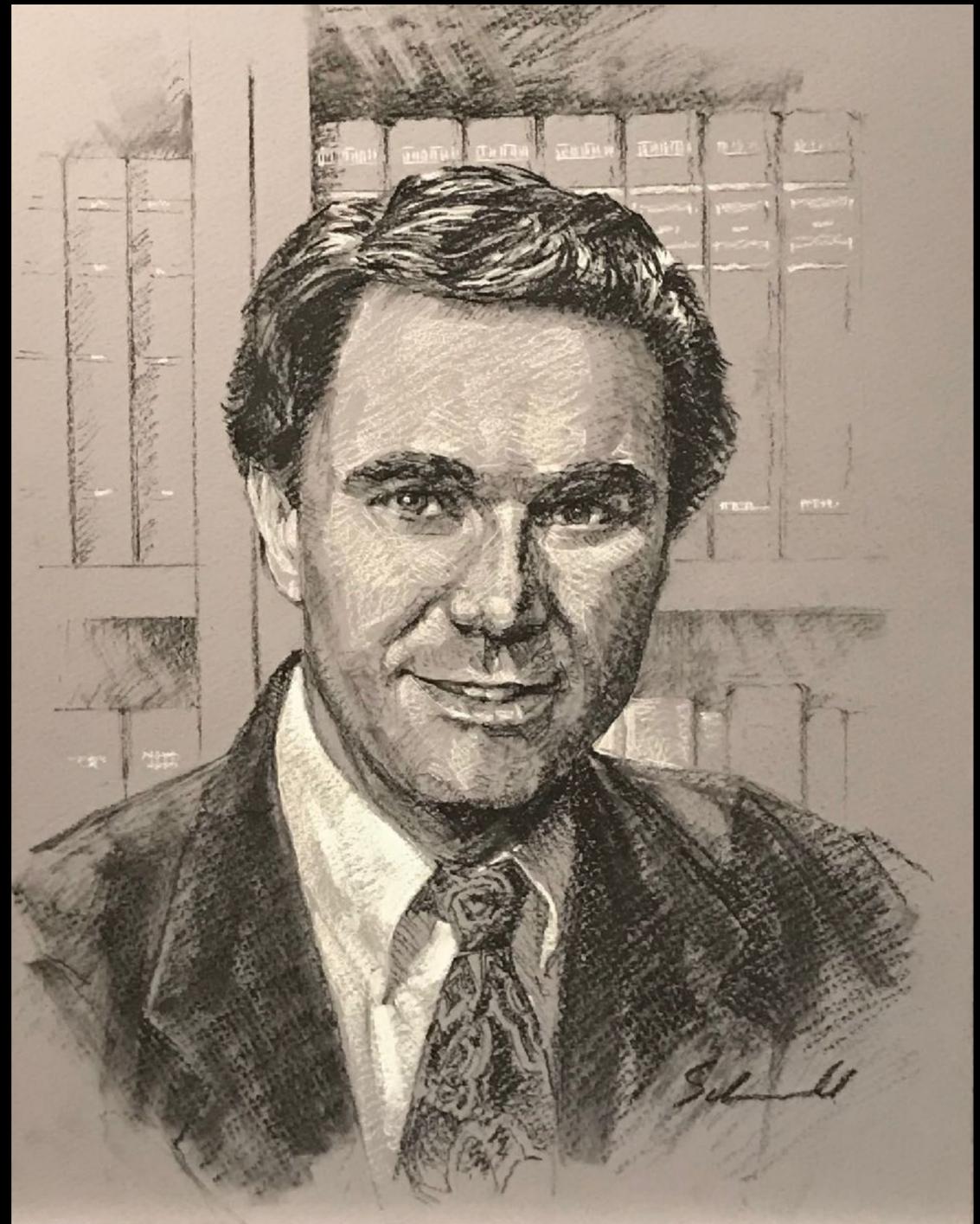
But the best and **only possible**  
**proof** for the **existence** of such  
**a God** is that his existence is  
**required** for the **uniformity** of  
**nature** and for the **coherence**  
of all things in the world.

Cornelius Van Til  
The Defense of the Faith, 125-126



Van til aims for rational  
certainty, while his  
critics settle for far  
less, namely, probability.

Greg Bahnsen  
Van Til's Apologetic, 76



1

Start with the Bible.

2

Basic principles (axioms) need to be consistent with the Bible.

3

Argument is sufficient for rational (epistemic) certainty.

# What makes an argument epistemically certain?

- 1 The argument is deductively valid.

- 1 If the Bible is true, then Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
- 2 The Bible is true.
- ∴ Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

1

If the Bible is true, then Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

2

The Bible is true.

∴

Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

1

If the Bible is true, then Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

2

The Bible is true.

∴

Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

- 1 If the Bible is false, then Jesus Christ is not the Son of God.
- 2 The Bible is false.
- ∴ Jesus Christ is not the Son of God.

# What makes an argument epistemically certain?

- 1 The argument is deductively valid.
- 2 The falsehood of any axiom leads to absurdity.
- 3 The definitions are not disputable.

1

Start with the Bible.

2

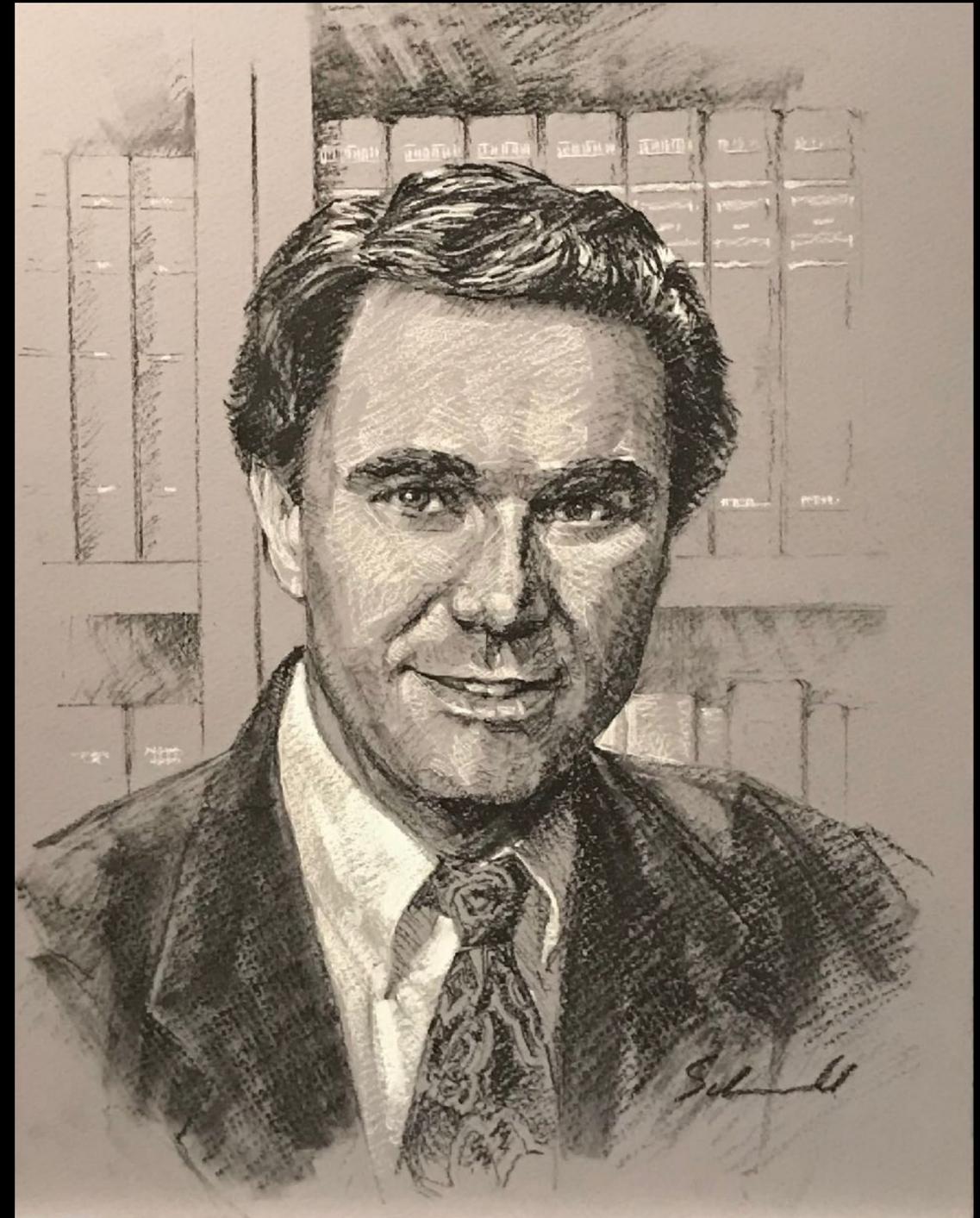
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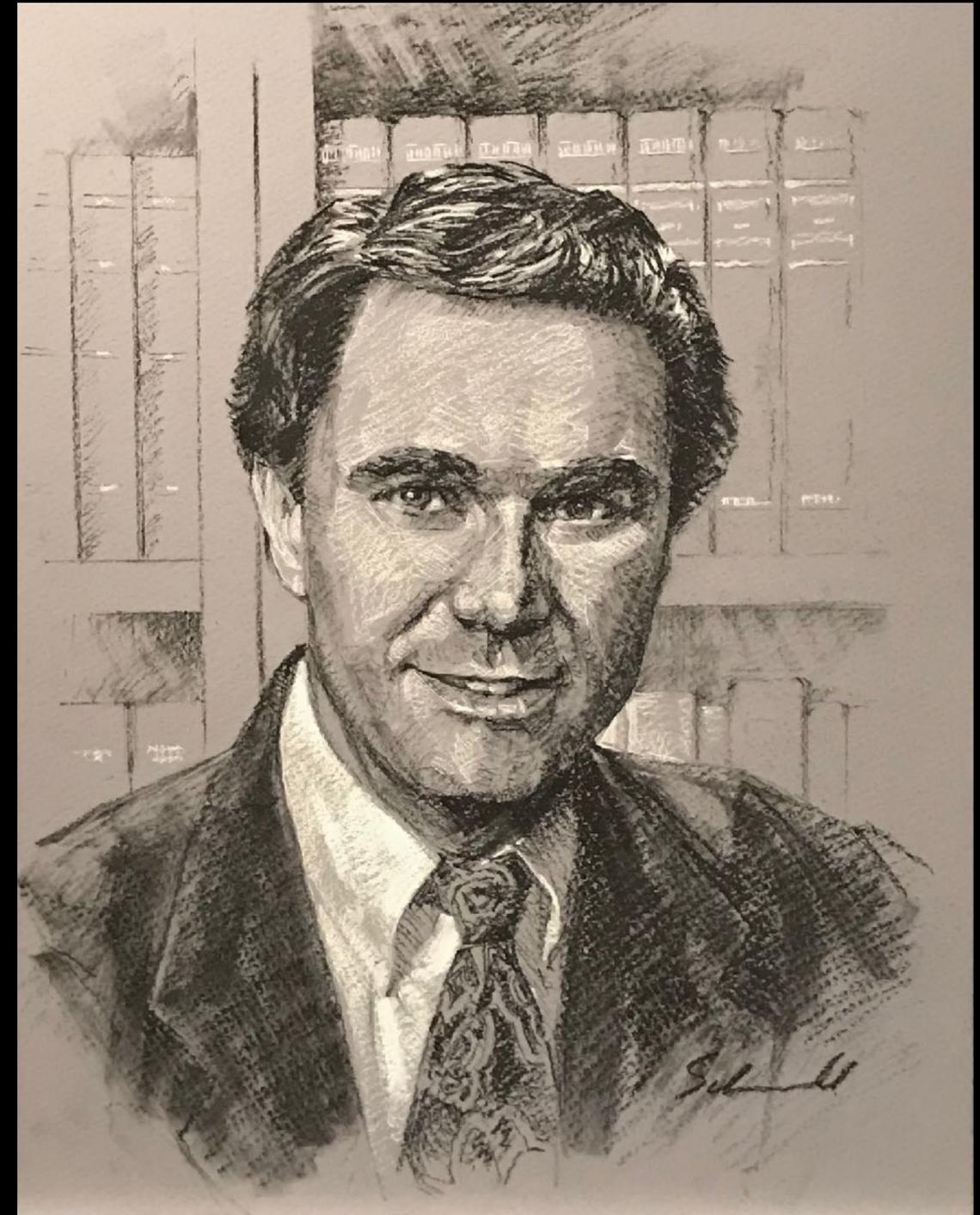
It should be clear from the context here that **Van Til meant to claim more than** that the argument is “**valid**” (i.e., that its conclusion necessarily follows from the premises). In the first place, the strong kind of argument that **he is advocating** would also be “**sound**” (i.e., its premises would be true).

Greg Bahnsen  
Van Til's Apologetic, 79-80



Moreover, the truth of its premises (or the soundness of secondary, tertiary, etc., arguments used for those premises) is acknowledged or knowable without prior acknowledgment or statement of the conclusion in the formulation(s). The kind of strong argument intended by Van Til represents

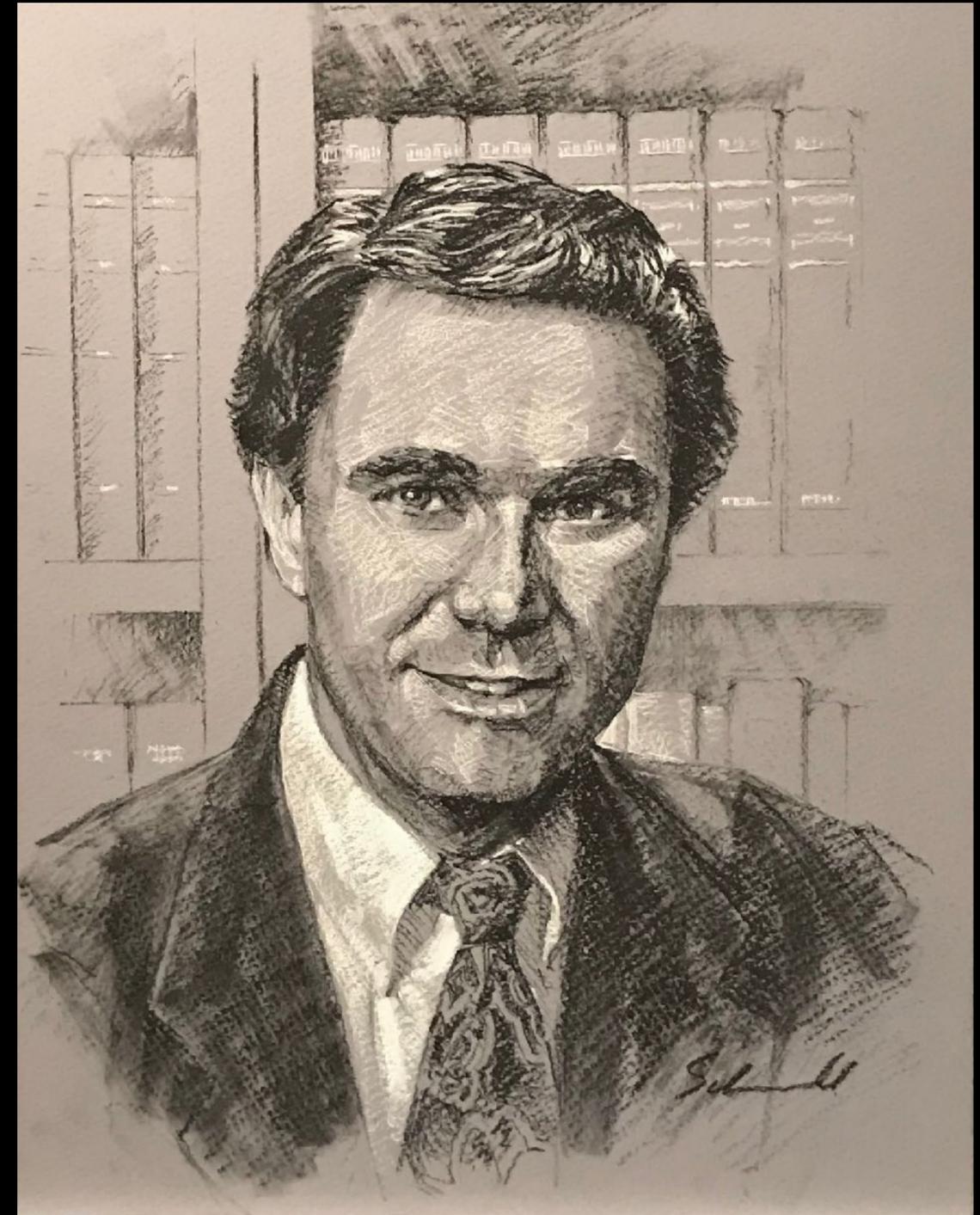
Greg Bahnsen  
Van Til's Apologetic, 79-80



a genuine “cognitive advance” (to use Mavrode’s expression) because things which the unbeliever will acknowledge turn out, **without him realizing it**, upon analysis to require or **imply the truth of the Christian worldview.**

Greg Bahnsen

Van Til’s Apologetic, 79-80



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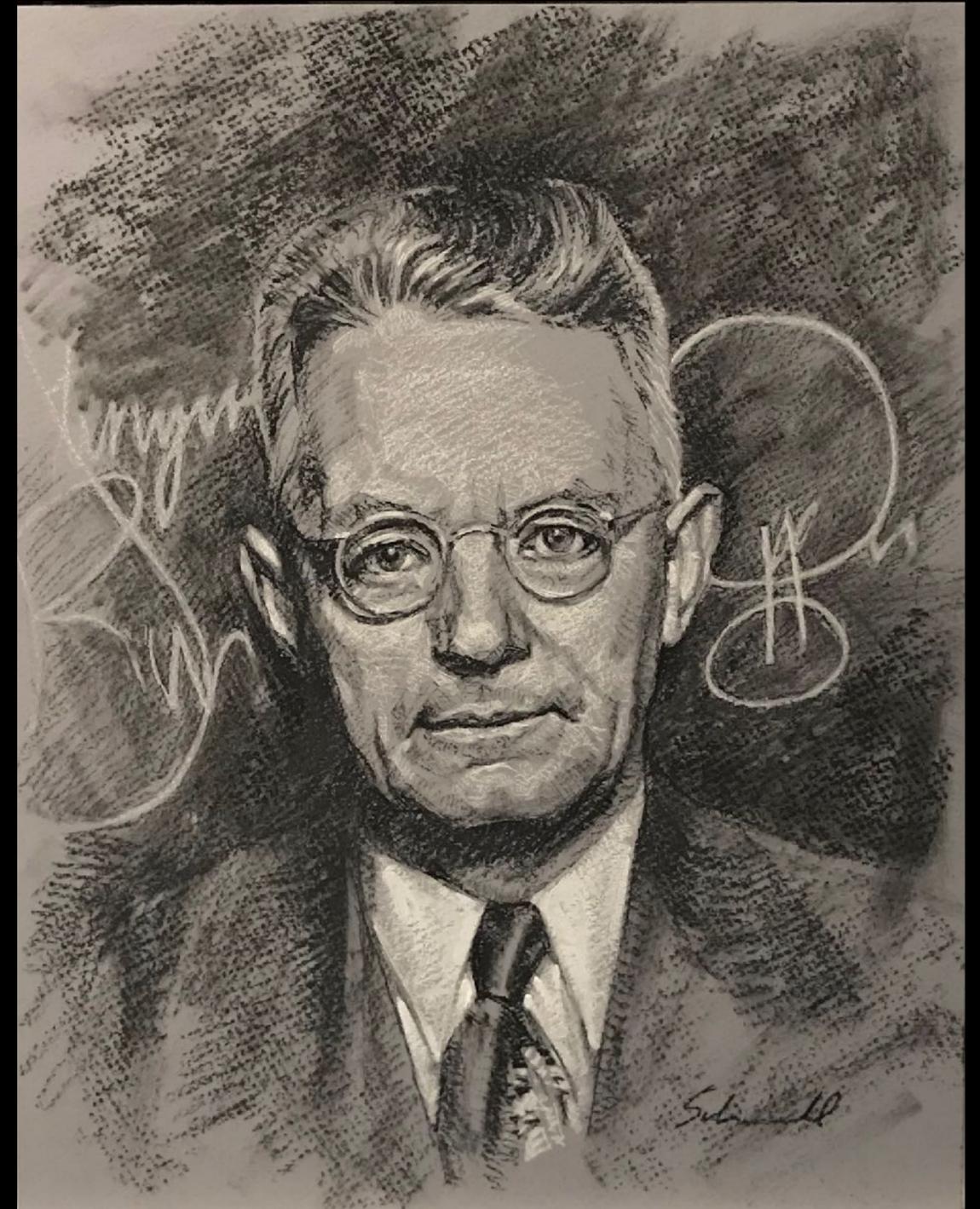
4

Axioms are knowable prior to acknowledging the conclusion.

And this brings up the point of circular reasoning. The charge is constantly made that if matters stand thus with Christianity, it has written its own death warrant as far as intelligent men are concerned. Who wishes to make such a simple blunder in elementary logic, as to say that we believe something to be true because it is in the Bible?

Cornelius Van Til

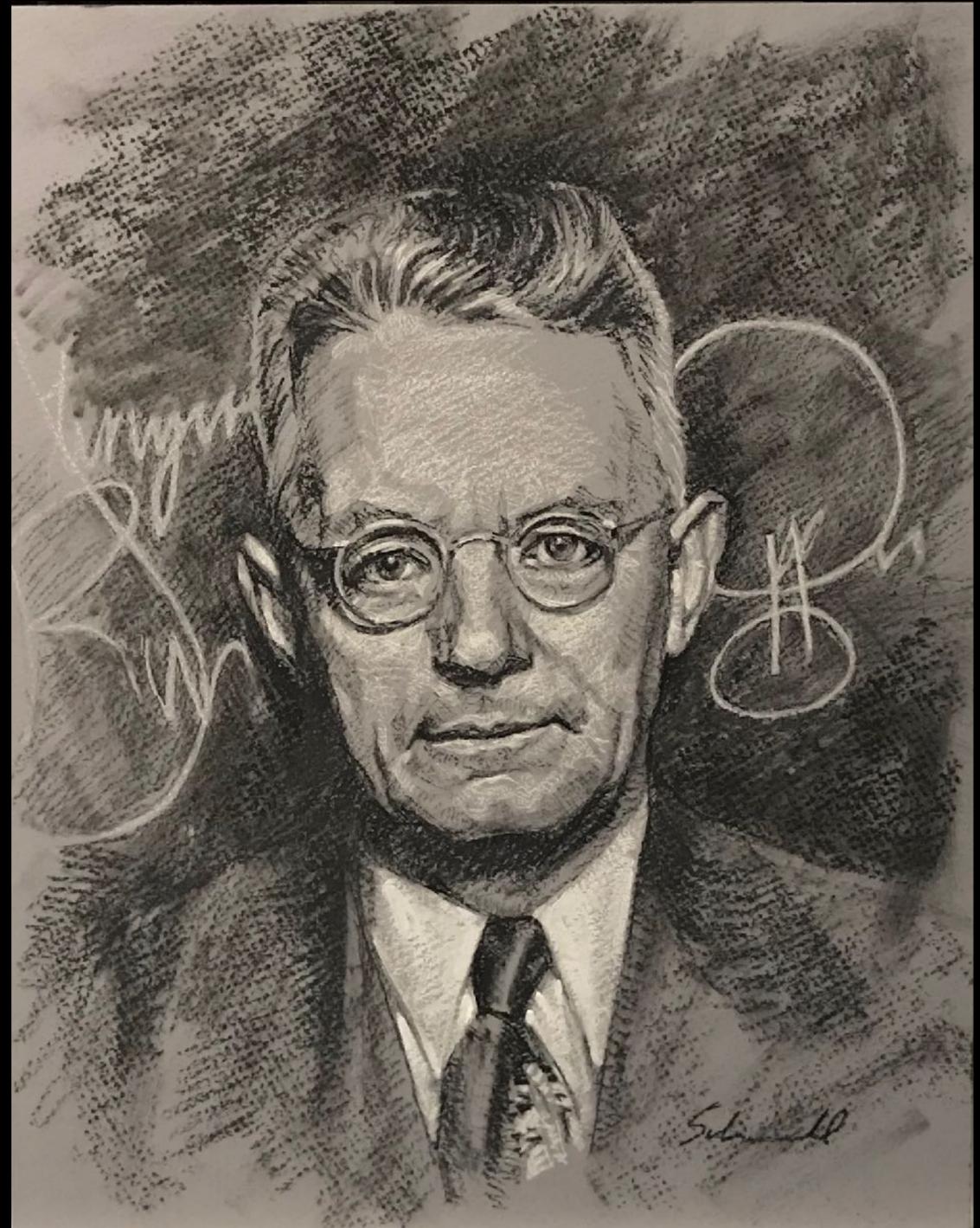
A Survey of Christian Epistemology, 12



Our answer to this is briefly that we prefer to **reason in a circle to not reasoning at all**. We hold it to be true that circular reasoning is the only reasoning that is possible to finite man. The method of implication as outlined above is circular reasoning. Or we may call it **spiral reasoning**. We must go round and round a thing to see more of its dimensions and

Cornelius Van Til

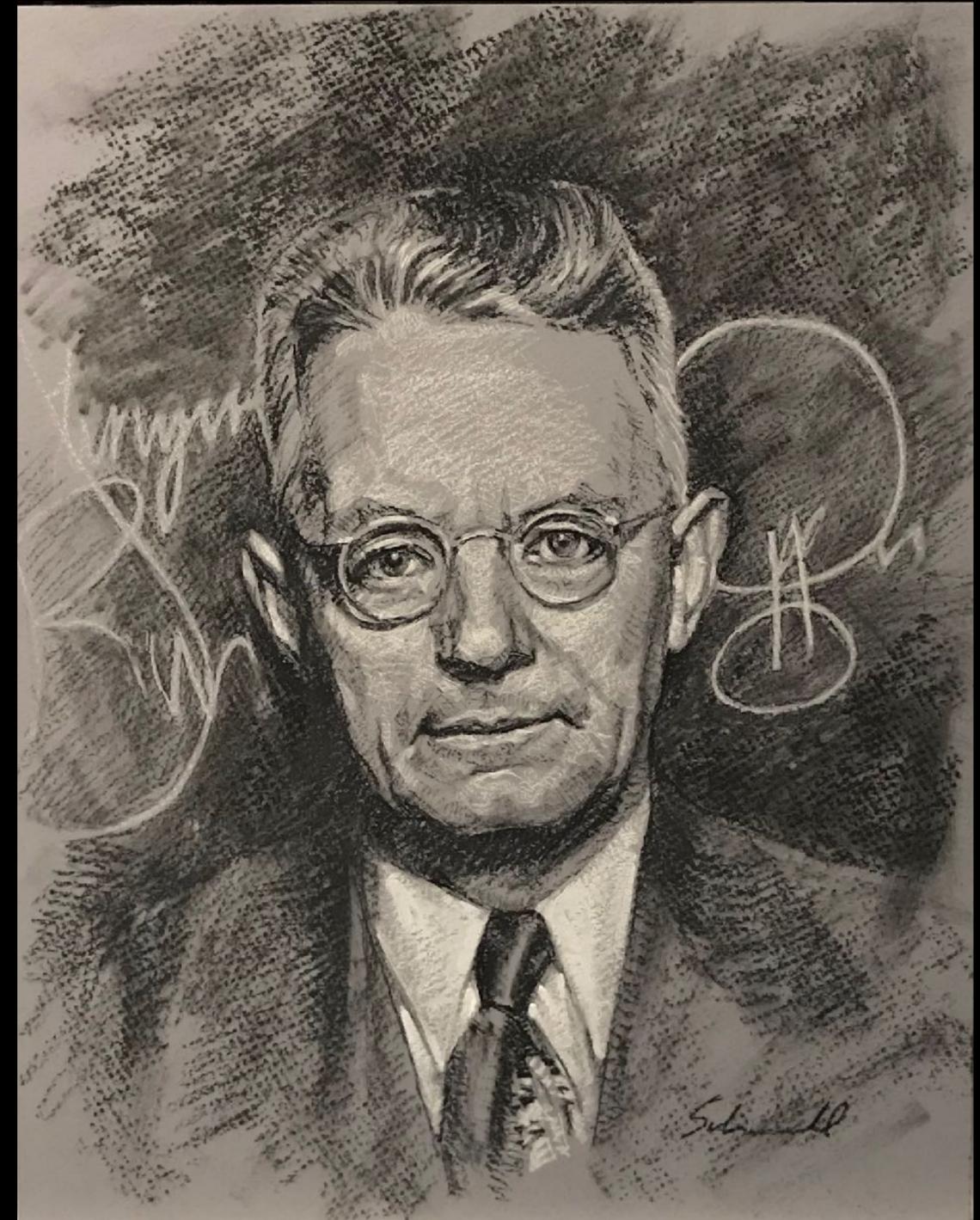
A Survey of Christian Epistemology, 12



to know more about it, in general, unless we are larger than that which we are investigating. Unless we are larger than God we cannot reason about him any other way, than by a **transcendental or circular argument**. The refusal to admit the necessity of circular reasoning is itself an evident token of opposition to Christianity.

Cornelius Van Til

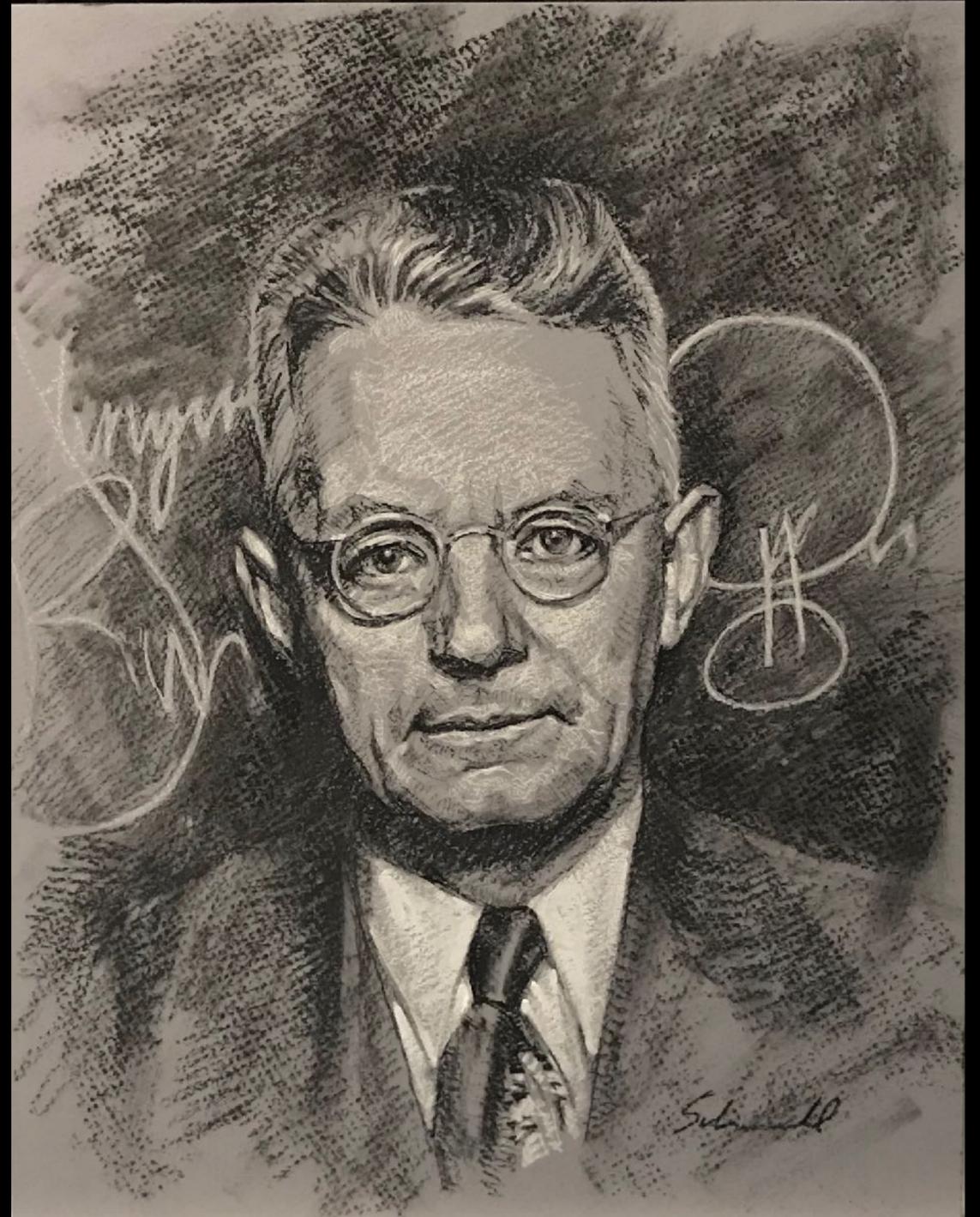
A Survey of Christian Epistemology, 12



Reasoning in a vicious circle is the only alternative to reasoning in a circle as discussed above.

Cornelius Van Til

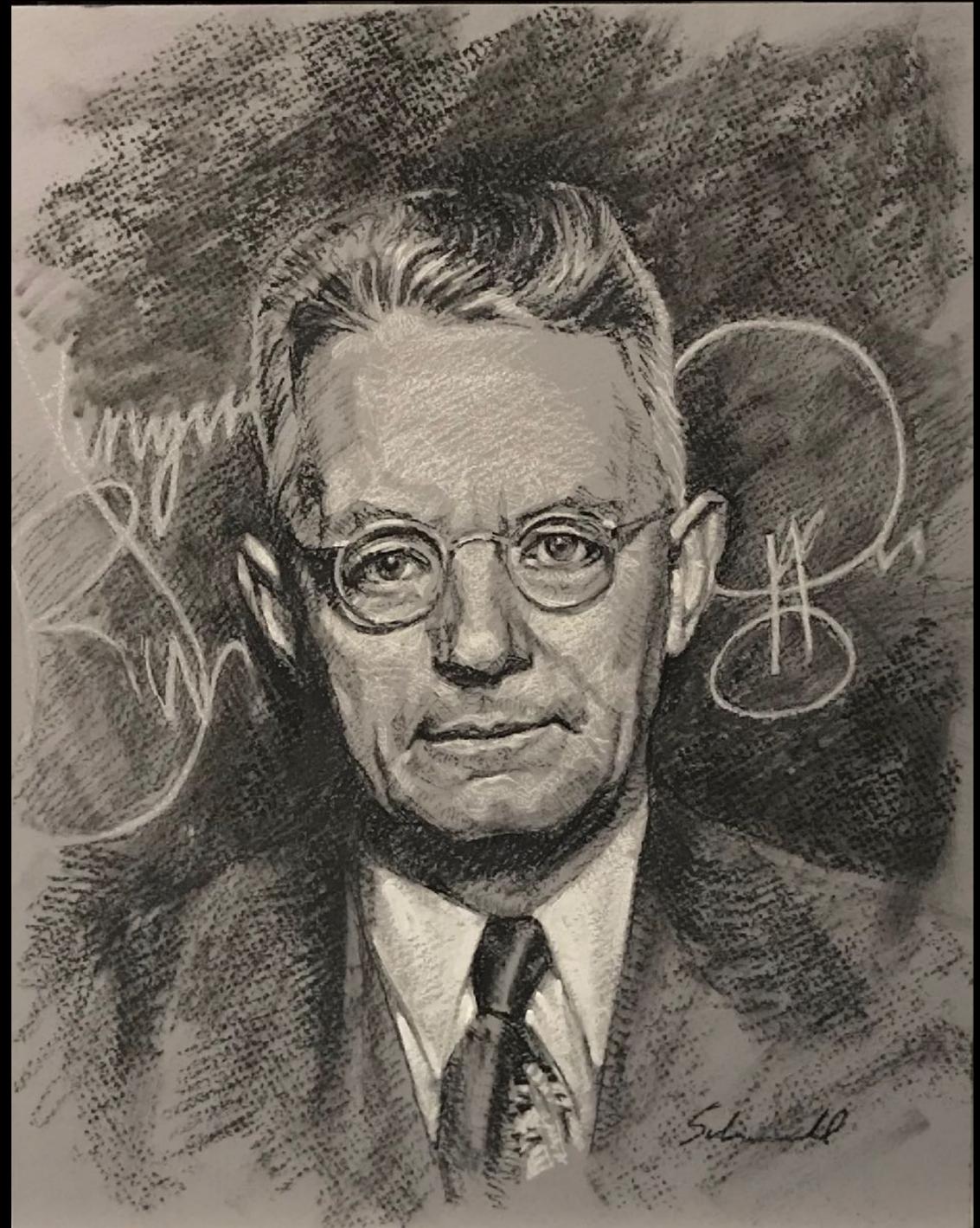
A Survey of Christian Epistemology, 12



Yet we hold that our reasoning **cannot fairly be called circular reasoning**, because we are not reasoning about and seeking to explain facts by assuming the existence and meaning of certain other facts on the same level of being with the facts we are investigating, and then explaining these facts in turn by the facts with which we began.

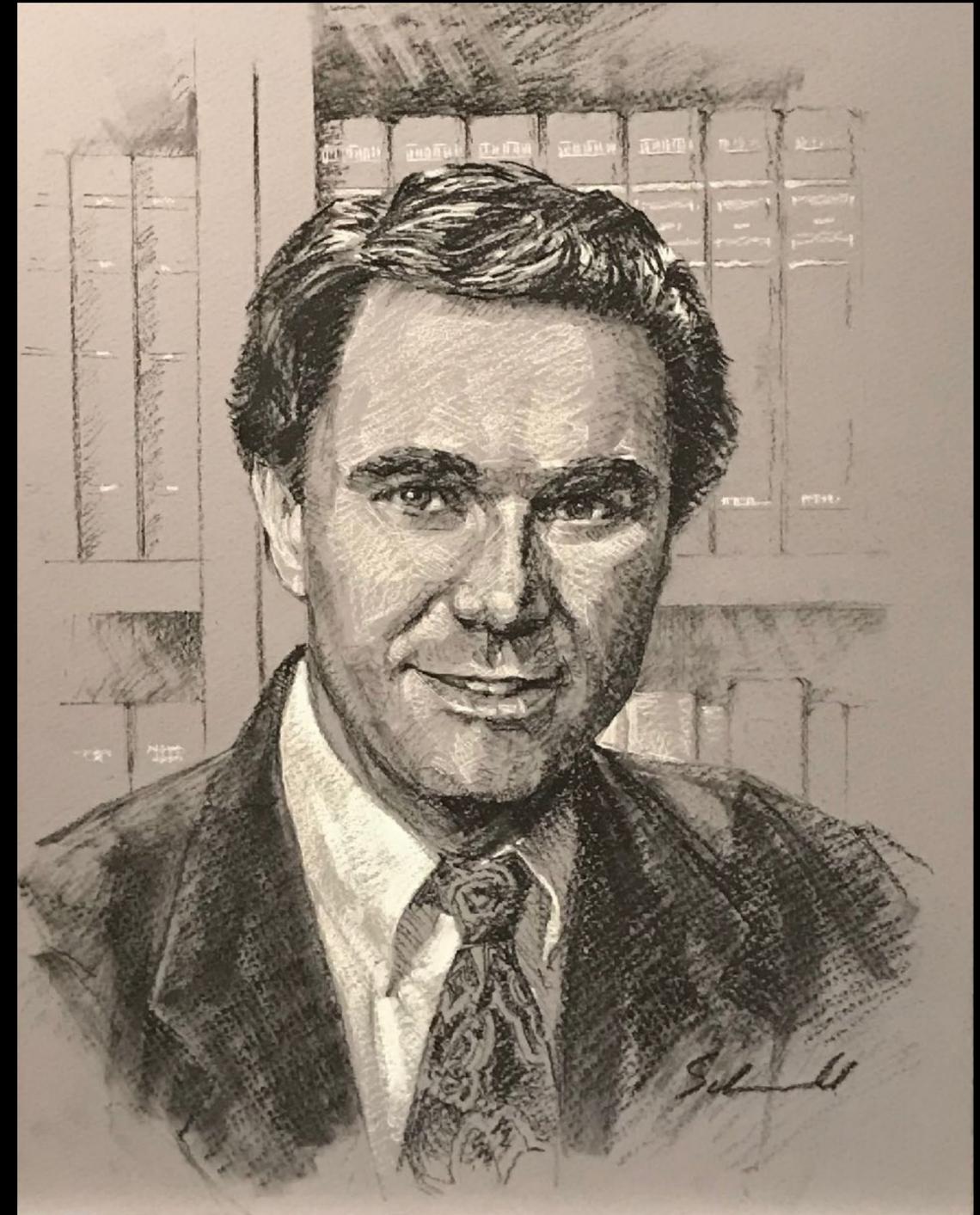
Cornelius Van Til

A Survey of Christian Epistemology, 201-202



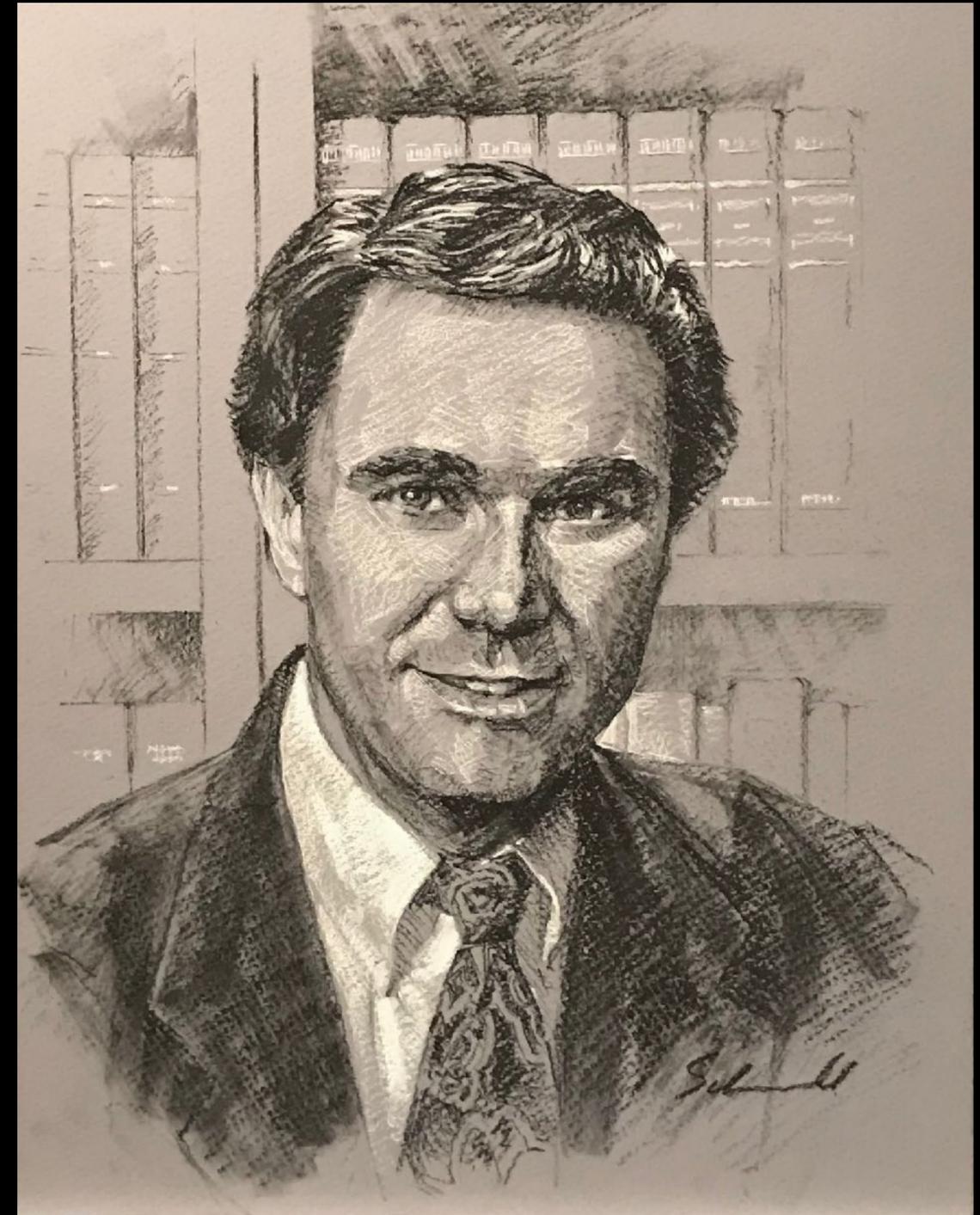
Because there is more than one kind of “circularity,” Van Til sometimes repudiated and sometimes tolerated the notion that his apologetic was circular—which has undoubtedly been confusing to his readers and students.

Greg Bahnsen  
Van Til's Apologetic, 518



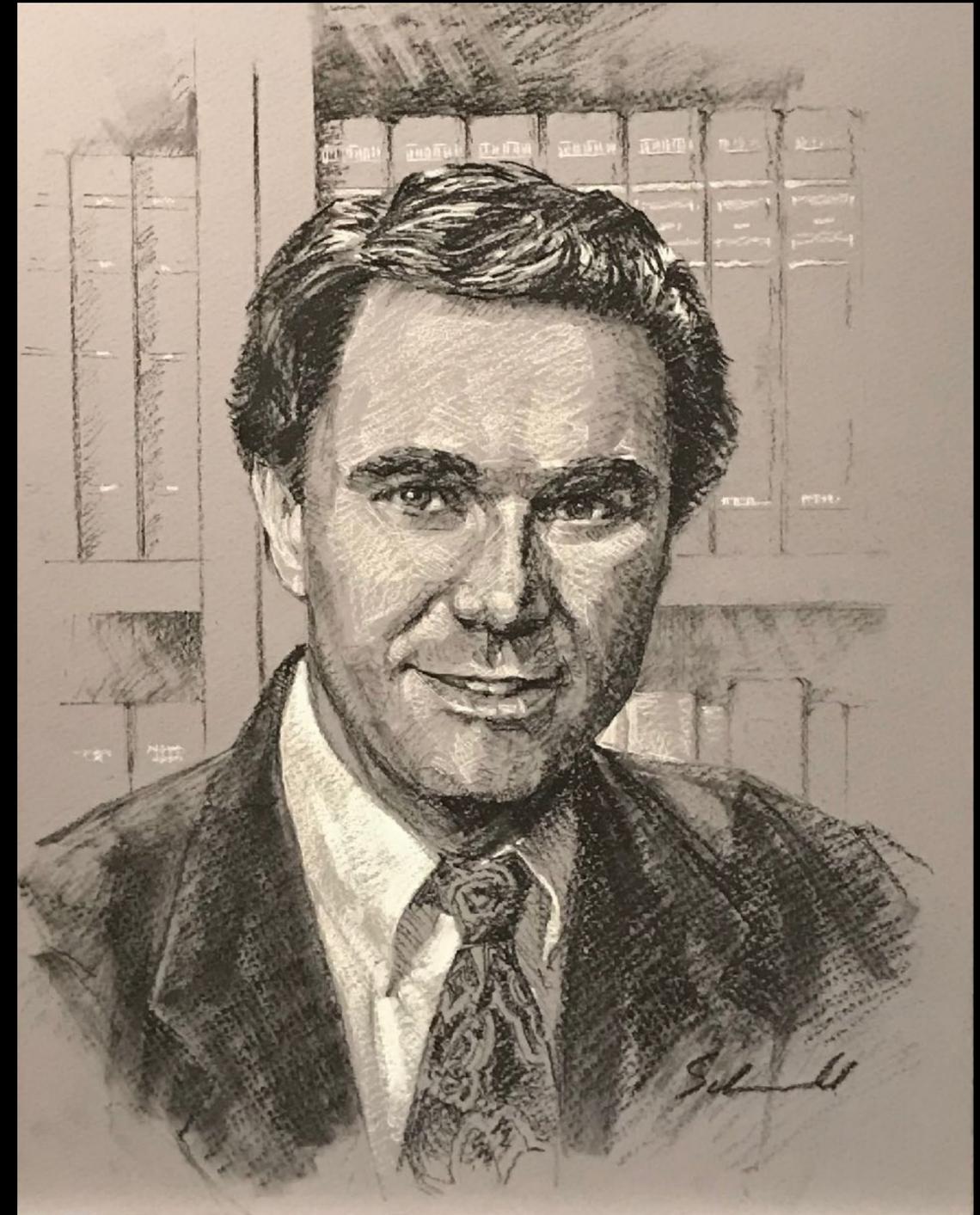
The “circularity” of a transcendental argument is not at all the same as the fallacious “circularity” of an argument in which the conclusion is a restatement (in one form or another) of one of its premises. Rather, it is the circularity . . . required when one reasons about a precondition for reasoning.

Greg Bahnsen  
Van Til's Apologetic, 518



Eventually all argumentation terminates in some logically primitive starting point, a view or premise held as unquestionable. Apologetics traces back to such ultimate starting points or presuppositions. . . . held to be self-evidencing.

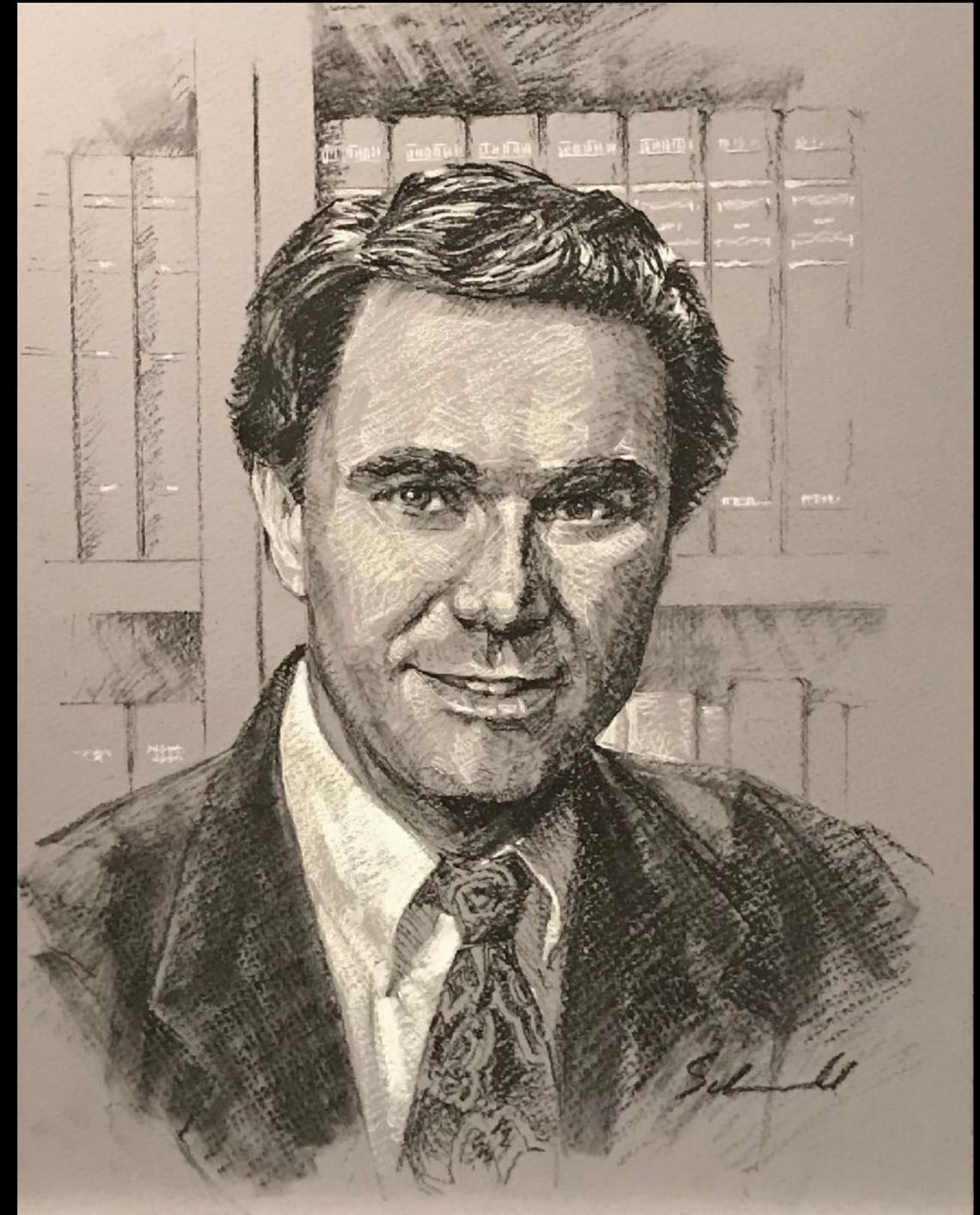
Greg Bahnsen  
Always Ready, 72



Christ demonstrated that **God's word** (and thus His own teaching) had highest authority in the world of thought; it was the firm starting point, **self-validating foundation**, and final standard of the truth. As such, **nothing was more ultimate than it** or could call it into question.

Greg Bahnsen

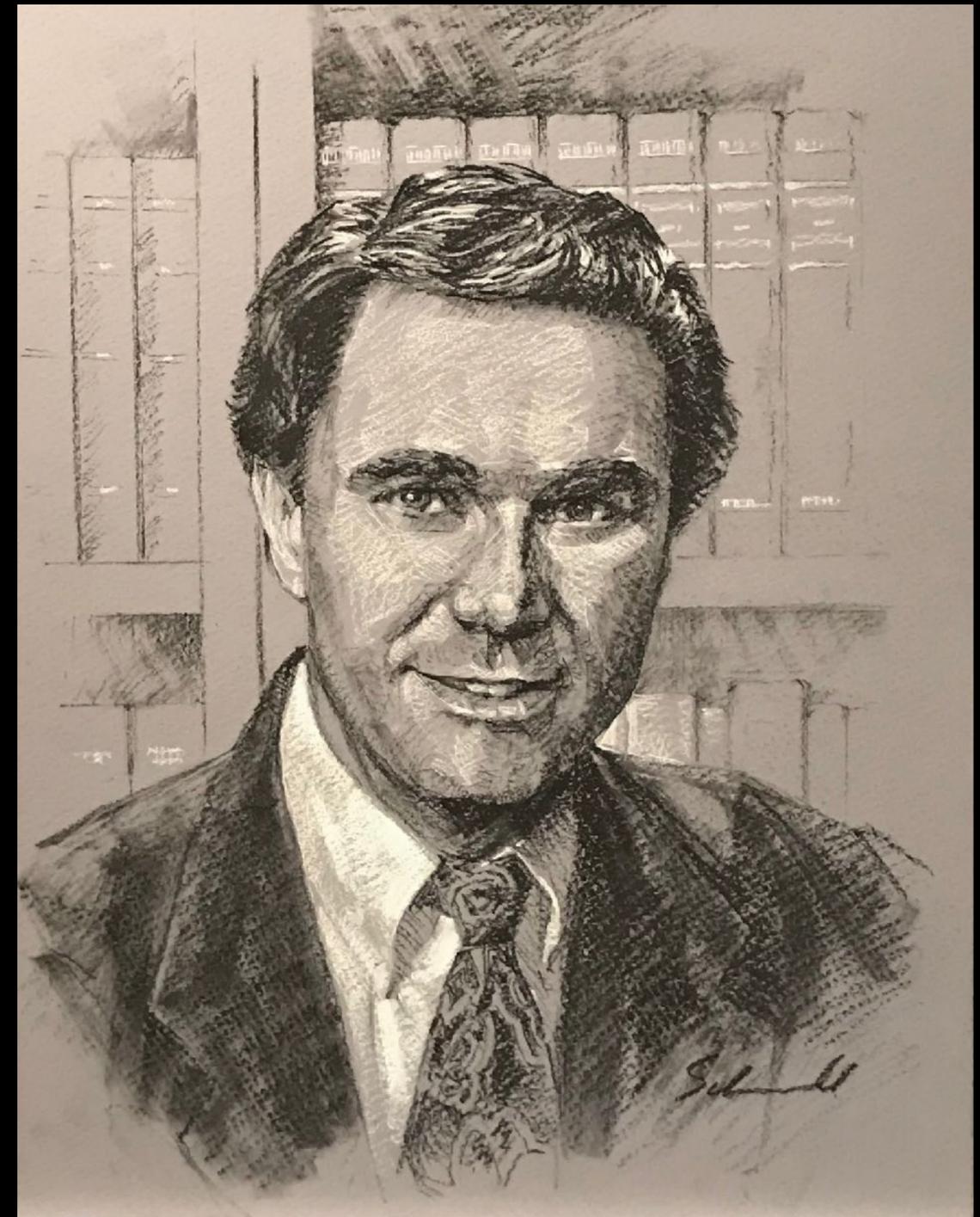
Always Ready, 73



Indeed, it is the case, as many will be quick to point out, that this presuppositional method of apologetics **assumes the truth of Scripture in order to argue for the truth of Scripture.** Such is unavoidable when ultimate truths are being debated. However, such is **not damaging,** for it is **not a flat circle** in which one reasons (i.e., **“the Bible is true because the Bible is true”**).

Greg Bahnsen

Always Ready, 75



1 Start with the Bible.

2 Basic principles (axioms) need to be consistent with the Bible.

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4 Axioms are knowable prior to acknowledging the conclusion.

5 May not assume the truth of the conclusion as an axiom.

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A1

Bible — all people know with certainty that God created the world.

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**A1** Bible ⊢ all people know with certainty that God created the world.

assumption within the argument

A1

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sixty six books of the protestant Scriptures

A1

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Bible — all people know with certainty that God created the world.  
the Bible plainly teaches

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justified true belief

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justified true belief such that the justification cannot be in error

A1

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ontological Trinity as revealed in the Bible

A1

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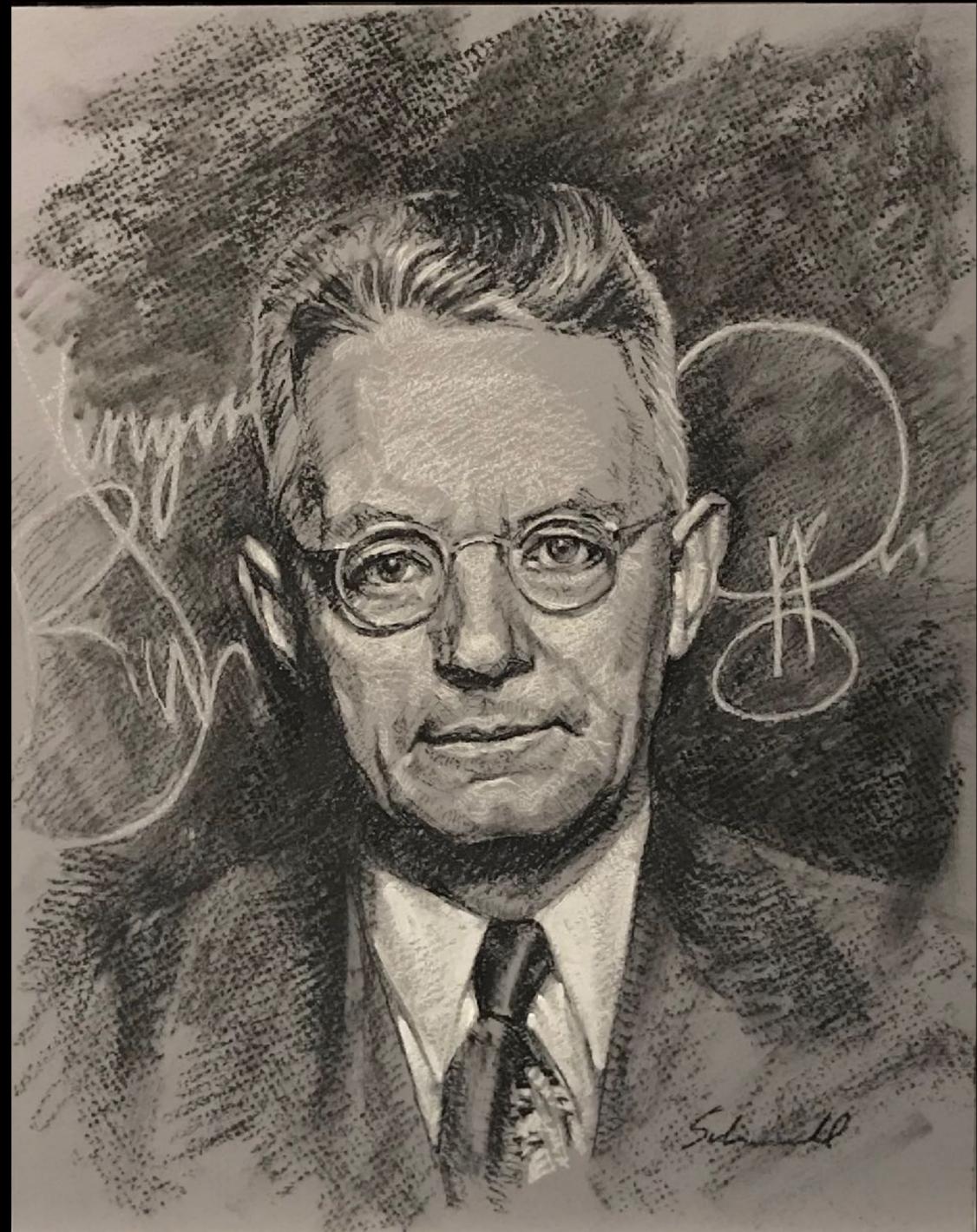
A1

Bible — all people know with certainty that God created the world.

space-time universe

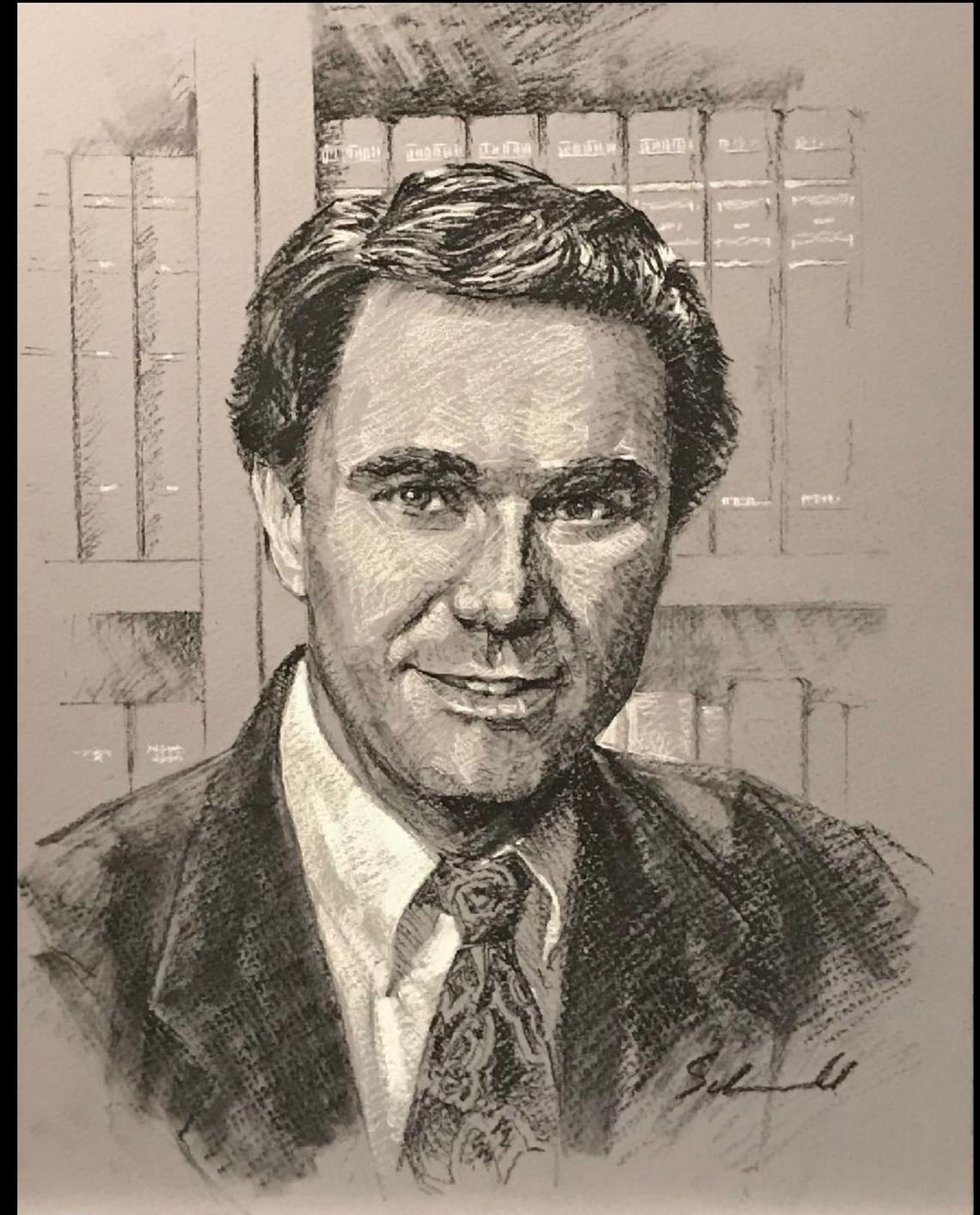
All men know not merely a God exists, but they know that God, the true God, the only God, exists. They cannot be conscious of themselves, says Calvin, except they be at the same time conscious of God as their creator.

Cornelius Van Til  
Common Grace and the Gospel, 150



Because he is made as God's image,  
confronted with God's inescapable  
revelation, and restrained by the  
common grace of the Holy Spirit, the  
unbeliever cannot fail to know God  
and, by extension, to understand  
something of himself and God's world.

Greg Bahnsen  
Van Til's Apologetic, 415



A1

Bible – all people know with certainty that God created the world.

Psalm 19: 1-4

1 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

3 There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

4 Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun.

A1

Bible – all people know with certainty that God created the world.

### Romans 1:18-25

18 For the wrath of God is **revealed from heaven** against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who **hold the truth in unrighteousness**;

19 Because **that** which may be **known of God** is **manifest in them**; for **God** hath **shewed it unto them**.

20 For the **invisible things of him** from the creation of the world are **clearly seen**, being **understood by the things that are made**, even his eternal power and **Godhead**; so that they are **without excuse**.

A1

Bible – all people know with certainty that God created the world.

Romans 1:18-25

21 Because that, when **they knew God**, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

25 Who **changed the truth of God into a lie**, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.