

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

AN INTRODUCTORY STUDY IN CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC METHODOLOGY

by

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at

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St. Louis, Missouri

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He who is not with me is against me.”—Jesus Christ

“Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”—
Paul

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the
reason for the hope that you have.”—Peter

* * * * *

“The apologetic strategy that would attract converts by the flattery of
accommodating the gospel to the ‘wisdom’ of sinful man was condemned by Paul
nineteen centuries ago, and the past hundred years have provided a fresh
demonstration of its bankruptcy.”—J. I. Packer

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Table of Contents

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE	<i>i</i>
<i>About the Author.....</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Preface.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Chapter 1 Just What is Christian Apologetics?.....</i>	<i>1</i>
Etymologically:.....	1
Scripturally:	1
Not Mere Excellence of Reasoning	2
Aspects of the Apologetic Task	2
Should Apologetics Precede Systematic Theology.....	3
...Or Are The Two Interdependent?.....	3
Systematic Theology First; Then Apologetics.....	3
The Tasks of Apologetics	3
1. <i>To Answer Particular Objections</i>	3
2. <i>To Give an Account of the Foundations of the Christian Faith</i>	4
3. <i>To Challenge Non-Christian Systems</i>	4
4. <i>To Persuade Men of the Truth</i>	5
The Major Problem Confronting Christian Apologetics.....	5
Major Apologetic Systems.....	6
<i>Chapter 2 The Faith we Defend</i>	<i>8</i>
The Doctrine of God	9
The Doctrine of Man.....	11
The Doctrine of Christ.....	21
The Doctrine of Salvation.....	24
The Doctrines of the Church and last Things.....	24
Apologetic Activity in Acts.....	25
A Christian Theory of Being	27
A Christian Theory of Knowing	28
<i>Chapter 3 Warfield: A Case Study In Traditional Apologetic Methodology.....</i>	<i>31</i>
Warfield’s Argument for Inspiration.....	31
Warfield’s Larger View of Apologetics.....	34
Warfield on Christian Certainty.....	37
“Old Princeton” and Earlier Reformers.....	39
Probability versus Presupposition	43
<i>Chapter 4 Presuppositional Apologetics</i>	<i>45</i>
FURTHER ELUCIDATION OF A BIBLICAL METHODOLOGY	45
Epistemology: The Crucial Issue	45
1. <i>The Learning Apparatus</i>	48

The Noetic Effects of Sin	54
The Noetic Effects of Palingenesis (Regeneration)	58
Approaching Men	59
Van Til and Man’s Analogical Knowledge.....	62
Clark and “Dogmatic” Apologetics.....	66
<i>Chapter 5 Empirical Apologetics.....</i>	<i>74</i>
Thomas Aquinas	74
Buswell’s Inductivistic Reformulation of the Theistic Proofs.....	79
Carnell’s Systematic Consistency.....	82
Schaeffer’s Evangelistic “Apologetic”	85
Montgomery’s Historical Apologetic for Christ’s Claims	93
Pinnock’s Evidential Methodology	98
McDowell’s Evidential Methodology	99

Preface

This book was originally written as a syllabus for an introductory course in Christian apologetics for students at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis. As I wrote, it was my awareness that it was to perform a classroom function that lay behind my decision to provide a good many quotations from the writings of Benjamin B. Warfield, Cornelius Van Til, Gordon H. Clark, Edward John Carnell, Francis Schaeffer, and others. I felt then it was the quickest way to introduce ministerial students to the apologetic systems of these important thinkers. As this work goes forth to a wider audience, I am still convinced that there is value in permitting an apologist to speak for himself. The reader is assured that the apologist is not being misrepresented, and in turn he gains an immediate firsthand acquaintance with the apologist. Therefore, while I have eliminated some quotations (and comments upon them) from the material which was used in the classroom, I have decided to let other original material remain.

No apologies are offered for the references to the *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms*. I am convinced that the system of doctrine contained therein is scriptural. It will help the non-Presbyterian reader, perhaps, to remember that Covenant Theological Seminary is committed confessionally to the Westminster standards, which will explain my readiness to quote from them.

While doubtless I have been influenced, either positively or negatively, to some degree by my reading of all the men mentioned above (and others, no doubt, too), I do not regard myself as an uncritical disciple of any of them, a fact which this book will bear out. I have tried to listen always and finally to the teachings of Holy Scripture and to evaluate each man I analyze in the light of God's revealed truth. In the interests then of objectivity and of truth, I would request that what I have written not be "categorized" or rejected before the reader has studied the teaching in the many Scripture passages to which I refer. It is by the teaching of Scripture that I am to be judged; if I am wrong on my understanding of Scripture, I will happily rethink my position. On the other hand, if I have understood the teaching of Scripture correctly, then the reader should accede to the suggestions I espouse and not set the book aside as only my own reflections. If there is strength in this book at all, I believe that it springs not from my arguments *per se* but from the degree that it reflects a right understanding of the revealed Mind of the one living and true God found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. I would suggest that the reader truly interested in understanding me make the effort to look up the Bible verses to which I refer and to think about them. No matter what he finally concludes, he cannot but be the richer for his labors

I would like to express my appreciation to Mr. Charles H. Craig, owner-publisher of the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, for his continuing interest over many years in providing Reformed literature to the Christian and non-Christian reading public. My appreciation also goes to Mrs. June Dare, a seminary secretary for her patience and helpful criticisms throughout the typing of this work. Finally, to the Christian apologists mentioned and analyzed herein I must express the tremendous debt I owe them. All of them have been my teachers in one sense or another, though none of them should be held responsible for what I write here.

One final word to readers new to the subject of Christian apologetics: I would urge you to read in addition to this book the following books (as do my students in the seminary): *Varieties of Apologetic Systems* by Bernard Ramm, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*

by E. J. Carnell, *Jerusalem and Athens*, edited by E. R. Geehan, *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, edited by R. H. Nash, and *The God Who Is There, Escape From Reason, and He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, all three by Francis Schaeffer. They are indispensable reading in the field of apologetics.

Chapter 1 Just What is Christian Apologetics?

Christian apologetics is the discipline wherein an intelligent effort is made to defend before an unbelieving world the truth claim of the Christian faith, specifically its claim of exclusive true knowledge of the living and true God, in a manner consistent with the teaching of Scripture.

Etymologically:

As a term, apologetics derives from the Greek root *ἀπολογία*, *apology*— meaning “defense” or “reply to a formal charge.” The Greek root occurs, either in verbal, nominal, or adjectival form, some twenty times in the Greek New Testament (Luke 12:11; Luke 21:14; Acts 19:33; Acts 22:1; Acts 24:10; Acts 25:8, 16; Acts 26:1–2, 24; Rom. 2:15; 1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 12:10; Phil. 1:7, 16; 2 Tim. 4:16; 1 Pet. 3:15; cf. also Rom. 1:20; Rom. 2:1). Through an evolution occasioned by usage, it has come to refer, informally, to any explanation attempting to defend or to justify one’s belief or position. Specifically, with regard to Christian apologetics, R. Allan Killen has correctly observed that, when conceived in its fullest sense, Christian apologetics will be evangelistic in character and thrust:

In its narrowest sense [apologetics] means the defense of the faith of the individual Christian. In a broader sense it is the answer of the Christian to attacks upon himself, his doctrine and faith, and all the revelation given in the Scriptures. In its fullest sense apologetics is the defense and justification of the Christian faith and of the revelation given in the Holy Scriptures against the attack of doubters and unbelievers, plus the development of a positive evangelical presentation of the facts given in the Bible, the reasonableness of God’s revelation to man in Scripture, and its ample sufficiency alone to meet the complete spiritual needs of man. Apologetics is then not only a negative and defensive but also a positive and offensive exercise. It is not only to be used in defense of the gospel but also in its propagation. (“Apologetics,” *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, I, 131)

Scripturally:

Some Christians are of the opinion that they are under no obligation to justify their faith before a hostile world. They are only to proclaim the specific content of the Christian message (e.g., the death and resurrection of Christ) to the world (which proclamation, it is alleged, is itself a fully adequate defense of the faith). This view cannot be sustained on biblical grounds. Besides the obvious fact that by example both Jesus and Paul constantly defended their claims respectively of Messiah (Matt. 22) and apostle (Gal. 1–2, 1 Cor. 9, Acts 22–26), there is also the classic Petrine admonition: “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, being ready always to make a defense (*ἀπολογία*) to every one who asks you to give the reason for the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear, having a good conscience...” (1 Pet. 3:15–16a).

1. The text assumes a heart stance of faith (“the hope that is in you”): on the one hand, a self-conscious commitment on the part of the Christian; on the other, the recognition of this commitment on the part of the unbeliever who is asking for the reason (*λόγον*) for the Christian’s hope.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

2. The command clearly implies that the Christian faith is fully capable of a reasonable defense.¹ The inspired apostle would not command the Christian to defend that which is indefensible.

3. The injunction expressly assumes the possibility of communication between believer and unbeliever; otherwise, the exhortation would be pointless. The precise basis of this possibility of communication constitutes the apologetic problem of the nature of “common ground” or “point of contact” (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) between believer and unbeliever.

4. The command expressly calls upon every believer to be ready upon every occasion to give to everyone who asks the reason for his faith commitment.

5. The text also points up the proper attitude with which the defense is to be made: not with intellectual pride but “with meekness and fears having a good conscience.” Accompanying any defense of the faith should be an awareness of the sovereignty of the grace of God on the one hand and a pure walk before God on the other, that the apologist may expect the fullest possible blessing of God upon his apologetic efforts.

Not Mere Excellence of Reasoning

Peter’s instruction should not be construed, however, as implying that the Christian is obliged to “reason men into the Kingdom.” A divinely initiated regenerating work of almighty grace is alone capable of enabling men to enter the kingdom (cf. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 31, on “effectual calling”). The context of Peter’s exhortation makes it clear that Christians who suffer persecution for their godly testimony will occasionally be questioned by pagan neighbors concerning their “unnatural behavior” under such adverse conditions. When, in the providence of God, this happens, they should be able to articulate the rational ground for their hope, which answer will include a clear statement of God’s redemptive activity in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

It is clear then that the task of giving an intelligent defense of the faith cannot be avoided on biblical grounds. So far from being inconsistent with the Christian faith, its cogent defense is in fact demanded by it. This does not justify, however, any and every method of apologetics. Obviously, we cannot defend our religious commitment and persuade men in anger or through use of violence. Neither should we think that we may devise an apologetic method inconsistent with the very content of the gospel we proclaim, specifically the teaching of Scripture concerning the noetic effects of sin in man and the need for the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men before they can believe the gospel. In short, this is only to say that if the Reformed faith, in very fact, is the faith taught in Scripture, it is incumbent upon the apologist to develop and be guided by a Reformed apologetic, that is, a Reformed method of defending the faith.

Aspects of the Apologetic Task

The basic intention of Christian apologetics is the vindication of the propriety of Christian commitment. How this is to be carried out specifically, however, varies from apologist to apologist and largely depends upon the relation the apologist sees apologetics sustaining to the disciplines of theological encyclopedia as a whole. The latter, it should be

¹ The Greek word translated “reason” is *λογον*, *logos* which root regardless of whether one would translate it “word,” “explanation,” “speech,” “sentence,” etc., includes implicitly the idea of rationality, reasonableness, or thought.

recalled, is normally divided into four disciplines: exegetical, historical, systematic, and practical, and in that order.

Should Apologetics Precede Systematic Theology...

Benjamin B. Warfield and Francis R. Beattie both urged that apologetics should precede all four as a separate discipline and do its work first and independently, simply because, as a discipline, it alone “presupposes nothing.” Before any of the other disciplines can achieve results, the existence of God, the religious nature of man, the fact of revelation, the divine origin of Christianity, and the trustworthiness of the Bible must be established by apologetics; otherwise, after explicating the Christian system, the systematician might discover that he has been dealing with fancies. Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Valentine Hepp, and Louis Berkhof, to the contrary, argued that apologetics should follow upon the work of the systematician; otherwise, if apologetics be allowed to establish both the possibility and the presuppositions of Christian theology, the Christian apologist has virtually attributed to the unaided man the ability to determine the truth of Christianity apart from revelation, thereby denying the Christian doctrine of God and man’s total depravity. Furthermore, these theologians insist that one must first determine what kind of God Christianity advances before he can really ask intelligently whether such a God exists. In other words, one must be concerned with the *what* of the Christian faith before he concerns himself with the question of *whether it is true*.

...Or Are The Two Interdependent?

Cornelius Van Til, while holding that of the two positions the latter is in principle correct, is willing to admit a mutual dependence of apologetics and systematic theology upon each other. In other words, for Van Til the apologist should be concerned with the *whatness* of Christianity at the same time that he is concerned with its *thatness*.

Systematic Theology First; Then Apologetics

Obviously, by defining Christian apologetics earlier as the effort to defend the Christian faith, I am in agreement with Kuyper *et al.* that apologetics should follow upon the disciplines determining the content of the Christian faith. This is not only in keeping with the basic meaning of the word “apologetics” itself and apparently the biblical procedure (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15; first implication above), but also it seems reasonable, inasmuch as one has to know what it is he is defending before he defends it. When apologetics occasionally does precede the other disciplines, I would argue, with Van Til, that it properly should presuppose the results of systematic theology.

The Tasks of Apologetics

As a *defense* of the faith then what are the several aspects of the task confronting Christian apologetics? The answer to this question may be subsumed under four headings.

1. To Answer Particular Objections

The Christian apologist will often find himself confronted with specific objections against the Christian faith, such as alleged contradictions between scriptural statements. He will try to answer such objections on the basis of scholarly research and accurate exegesis. This labor will strengthen and support the faithful, remove obstacles in the way of further inquiry by the doubter, and disarm opposition by laying to rest specious objections, misconceptions, and inaccuracies. This task, however, is not uniquely assignable to the discipline of apologetics (or perhaps, if one prefers, this is the task of apologetics, loosely

and broadly conceived). *Every* departmental discipline in theological encyclopedia should engage itself in carrying out this task. Old and New Testament experts will develop apologetic responses to destructive criticism of, and hostile theories concerning, the biblical text and teaching. J. Gresham Machen, for example, was a persuasive apologist for the Christian faith when he wrote his masterful monographs on the virgin birth of Christ and the origin of Paul's religion. The church historian will take care to assure that any false reading of history to the detriment of the truthfulness of the Christian faith is detected and corrected. More than likely however, such direct responses to specific objections and difficulties raised against the Christian faith are possible only at the beginning of the "conversation;" quite likely the issue will quickly shift to more basic in fact, to ultimate premises. Then something more is needed. The defense of the faith then will array itself at this deeper level *where Christian apologetics as a separate discipline truly comes into its own*.

2. *To Give an Account of the Foundations of the Christian Faith*

At the level of ultimate premises or foundational issues, the Christian apologist deals with such questions as the following: Does God exist? Has He revealed Himself? If so, how and where? Why do I believe? And most fundamental of all, how do I know that what I believe is true? When it is recognized that these questions are specifically and properly the domain of Christian apologetics it is obvious that *Christian apologetics as a discipline is actually an exercise in philosophical theology, and specifically, in epistemology, or the theory of knowledge* (cf. C. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith and A Christian Theory of Knowledge*; G. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things*, pp. 285ff., and *Three Types of Religious Philosophy*).

In the light of this second task of apologetics, it should be obvious as we have already observed, that apologetic dialogue will not be *simply* proclamation of the gospel content. Of course, the Christian apologist will assume throughout his labors the full truthfulness of "the whole counsel of God" in Scripture, and will unhesitatingly draw upon its insights all along the way. He will, no doubt, refer often to the facts of God, sin, Christ's work, and salvation. Consequently, it will doubtless appear at times to the non-Christian that the apologist is merely "witnessing to him." Of course, he will be. But a *biblical* defense of the faith, while it will include gospel content, will concern itself with the *deepest questions* of religion and will seek to demonstrate that the Christian faith alone gives rational answers to them.

3. *To Challenge Non-Christian Systems*

The earliest theologians of the Church after the age of the apostles were called apologists, as they gave themselves to answering such charges against Christians as cannibalism and immorality, but it gradually became apparent that any defense of the faith must be built upon the positive affirmation of the Christian faith and its implications for non-Christian systems (cf. Augustine's *The City of God*). In more recent times certain Christian apologists, more perceptive and more consistently Christian in their vision of the apologetic task than others, have not only attempted to expose the irrationality inherent within non-Christian systems of thought but have also challenged these systems to justify epistemologically their very existence, not to mention their unfounded dogmatic pronouncements. It is this evangelical offensive, spearheaded by such modern Reformed apologists as Cornelius Van Til and Gordon H. Clark, that has challenged many younger men to familiarize themselves thoroughly with the drift of modern thought and to expose the

inherent inadequacies of and the epistemological nihilism within any system that refuses to place at its base the Word of God coming to man *ab extra*.

4. *To Persuade Men of the Truth*

As the natural outcome of the preceding concerns, Christian apologetics has for its ultimate goal the persuasion of men of the *truth* of the Christian position. This points up the fact that Christian apologetics is not only concerned with correct epistemological theory but at bottom is also *evangelistic* and *kerygmatic*. Although he fully recognizes the depravity of man and the noetic effects of sin, and his own inability to persuade men apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, the Christian apologist nonetheless will seek persuasively to present the Christian faith in all of its wholeness as a self-consistent, coherent, significant body of truth which alone gives a rational basis for understanding man and his universe. In other words, just as gospel content will be incorporated in any properly conceived apologetic methodology, so also the Christian apologist will self-consciously regard his efforts as simply part of responsible evangelism! (Cf. Paul's activity in this regard as described in Acts 18:4, 28; Acts 19:8: "...he was dialoging [διαλεγομενος]..., and trying to persuade [καὶ πειθων].")

The Major Problem Confronting Christian Apologetics

The most crucial question facing Christian apologetics is one of *methodology*: should the apologist in his effort to defend the faith and to persuade the unbeliever of Christian truth claims reason *to* or *from* special revelation? *Evidential/historical apologetics* undertakes to demonstrate the foundations of faith without assuming special revelation; that is, it attempts by proffered reasons amenable to human reason, unaided by the light of special revelation,² to establish (1) the existence of God and/or (2) the fact of Christian revelation. In its attempt at such a demonstration, it assumes a form of natural theology. *Presuppositional apologetics*, in contrast, takes its stance unabashedly within the circle of special revelation and argues from it (1) the compelling sufficiency, epistemologically and pistically, of the Christian understanding of the world and man and (2) the impossibility of the contrary. One's response to this basic and crucial question will figure prominently in all of the other issues of particular concern for Christian apologetics, such as the following.

1. What is the nature and function of general and special revelation?
2. What significance do the noetic effects of sin carry for man's ability to know God?
3. What is the character of faith?
4. What is the test of truth?
5. What kind of certainty does Christianity offer?
6. What is the value of the theistic proofs?
7. What is the value of Christian evidence?

² By *special* revelation I have reference primarily to the Bible as God's inspired propositional self-revelation. Both the evidentialist and the presuppositionalist will use the Bible in their approach to the unbeliever, it is true, but the former represents the NT documents at first generally as only trustworthy human first-century writings.

8. What is the nature of the common ground between believer and unbeliever that affords a point of contact for intelligible conversation?

Major Apologetic Systems

Consistency with the choice the apologist makes respecting the prior and crucial methodological question will determine his response to practically every other issue with which he is concerned. In fact, so consistently has methodology dictated responses to the eight previous questions, once the decisive question was settled, that apologetic systems have tended to fall into three distinguishable groups.

1. **Presuppositionalism**, or *Credo at intelligam* (“I believe in order that I may understand”)—systems presupposing the primacy of special revelation as providing the ground for the total theological enterprise. Group characteristics here are convictions that (1) faith in God precedes understanding everything else (cf. Hebrews 11:3), (2) elucidation of the system follows faith, (3) the religious experience must be grounded in the objective Word of God and the objective work of Christ, (4) human depravity has rendered autonomous reason incapable of satisfactorily anchoring its truth claims to anything objectively certain, and (5) a special regenerating act of the Holy Spirit is indispensable for Christian faith and enlightenment. The Augustinian and consistent Reformed tradition is representative of this group.

2. **Evidentialism**, or *Intelligo et credo* (“I understand and I believe”)—systems stressing some form of natural theology as the point at which apologetics begins. Group characteristics here are the following: (1) a genuine belief in the ability and trustworthiness of human reason in its search for religious knowledge, (2) the effort ground faith upon empirical and/or historically verifiable facts, and (3) the conviction that religious propositions must be subjected to the same kind of verification—namely, demonstration—that scientific assertions must undergo. The Thomistic Roman Catholic tradition, the (inconsistent) Reformed evidentialist tradition, and the Arminian tradition are representative of this group.

3. **Experientialism**, or *Credo quia absurdum est* (“I believe because it is absurd”)—systems, neither presuppositional nor evidential, stressing the inward religious experience as the foundation of the theological structure (“theological positivism”—Cobb, “new modernism”—Van Til, “irrationalism”—Clark, “upper-story systems”—Schaeffer). Group characteristics here are the following: (1) insistence upon revelation as existential encounter, (2) great stress upon the subjective religious experience as the ground of truth, truth and meaning being defined in terms of inwardness and subjectivity, (3) insistence upon the paradoxical character of Christian teaching; that is to say, Christian truth is not capable of rational analysis, and (4) emphasis upon the “otherness,” the transcendence, and hiddenness of God. The Barthian tradition is representative of this group.³

These three groups, in addition to their attempts at persuading each other, are seeking to convince a fourth group (which makes no pretense of being Christian at all) of their claims. This fourth group may be characterized by the phrase *Intelligo ut credam* (“I understand in order that I may believe”). This is nothing more or less than autonomous humanism or rationalism. Here the family characteristics are the following: (1) a total denial

³ I have treated this group in my *Introductory Studies in Contemporary Theology*. Still available (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.), printed in separate monographs, are *Barth's Soteriology*, *Brunner's Dialectical Encounter*, and *Bultmann's Demythologized Kerygma*.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

of any need for divine revelation as essential to understanding the world and man, (2) complete confidence in the human rational process to discover all knowledge, (3) only that is to be believed as true which satisfies the demands of autonomous reason, and (4) the rejection of biblical or supernatural Christianity. Unfortunately, in their attempt to convince men, many Christian apologists unwittingly grant the legitimacy of much that characterizes and supports humanist man in his rebellion. These concessions this study hopes to expose as inimical and ultimately destructive of Christianity.

* * * * *

These remarks will suffice as an introduction to the subject of apologetics. In chapter 2, the faith which we as Christians are called upon to defend will be outlined. At that time certain implications of the faith for the apologetic task will be drawn. Then in chapter 3, growing out of a critique of the apologetic methodology of Benjamin B. Warfield, will be set forth the apologetic method which I conceive to be most consistent with the biblical faith. This method will receive further elucidation in chapter 4. At that time the apologetic methods of Cornelius Van Til and Gordon H. Clark will be analyzed. Finally, in chapter 5 still other apologetic methodologies will be surveyed, with indications along the way of the strengths and weaknesses of each. I believe such an arrangement of the material will give the reader adequate insight into all the basic issues involved in apologetics and will enable him to reach Christ-honoring conclusions.

Chapter 2 The Faith we Defend

Christian apologetics has been defined as basically the defense of the Christian faith, but a defense which assumes the initiative by challenging other systems of thought at the same time to justify their existence epistemologically as the Christian faith is willing to do. This definition, as we have seen, presupposes that systematic theology has done its work and the system of Christian truth has been carefully articulated. Apologetics then is called upon to do its work.¹ What is the content of the Christian faith then that we presuppose and which we have declared it our purpose to defend? It goes without saying that the *central* historical facts of the Christian faith are those concerning the person and work of Christ—those facts generally intended when the “gospel of Christ” is proclaimed, and which are summarized by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 in the words, “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and...was buried and...was raised the third day according to the Scriptures.” All Christians everywhere hold tenaciously to these truths as the very heart and core of the Christian proclamation (kerygma); consequently, the apologist will certainly regard it as his responsibility to defend the Christian kerygma.

The Reformed *pou–sto*: Scriptural Truth Embraces All of Life

The Reformed apologist, however, is not interested in defending *merely* what might be called the “central core” or “common faith” of Christianity. He is convinced that the Bible teaches a great deal more, indeed, a *total theism* which demands to be viewed and to be proclaimed as a *system of truth* touching upon all of life. He believes, too, that it is this system in its *unitary whole* that must be defended. He believes, furthermore, that in the long run it is only the total theism of Scripture that can be defended without compromising the faith itself. This is only to say that the historical events of the kerygma did not occur in isolation from an all encompassing purpose of God (Eph. 3:11) and that these events are surely to be misinterpreted unless they are viewed from the perspective of the “whole counsel” of God. Therefore; as a Reformed apologist, with Van Til, I believe that “if we would really defend Christianity as an historical religion we must at the same time defend the theism upon which Christianity is based...” (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 24).

Something else must be said. As a Reformed systematician, with Warfield, I am also convinced that the Reformed faith is the most consistent theological expression of Christianity. As a Reformed Presbyterian minister, at my ordination I was asked, “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the doctrinal standards of this church, the *Westminster Confession of Faith, and Catechisms, Larger and Shorter*, ...as embodying the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, to the maintenance of which this church is bound before God by solemn obligation?” I responded *ex animo* in the affirmative. Therefore, I regard it a solemn obligation to defend the Reformed faith in a manner consistent with what I believe that faith to be. In other words, I believe a *Reformed* theologian, pastor, or teacher should be a *Reformed* apologist. He should not become Arminian in his defense of the Reformed faith. In working out his entire world–and–life–view, he should seek to be both pistically and epistemologically self–conscious. In short, in determining both the content of the faith and the proper method of defending it, he should be *radically biblical*; he must guard against a method of defending the faith which would compromise the content of the

¹ The apologetics course at Covenant Theological Seminary as a senior course and following upon the “systematics” courses reflects this rationale.

faith. For this reason, as earlier suggested, I believe it is essential to our purpose to review the “what” of our faith before we consider its defense.

Reformed Systematic Theology

Now, of course, the Reformed faith possesses a vastness which makes it impossible to cover it adequately in a multitude of thick volumes. Nevertheless, the cardinal points can be touched upon sufficiently to meet our present purpose. To facilitate handling the material I will follow the format exhibited by Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology*, which distributes the material under six headings:

- (1) The doctrine of God (Theology Proper)
- (2) The doctrine of man (Biblical Anthropology)
- (3) The doctrine of Christ (Christology)
- (4) The doctrine of salvation (Soteriology)
- (5) The doctrine of the church (Ecclesiology)
- (6) The doctrine of last things (Eschatology)

Before we begin our review, however, a preliminary remark must be made. The Christian faith, if it is anything at all, is a “book religion,” that is, it is founded upon the inspired teaching of the biblical writers. If it is not this, then it is *not* Christianity. In the writings of those who reject the *biblical* foundation of the faith, Christianity, as has been demonstrated time and again, becomes simply a self–projection of the author. Recall, for example, the various “lives of Jesus” in the *Leben Jesu* movement of the last century in Europe. Hence, we would insist that we take seriously the fact that Christianity is a “book–religion.” It is not *exclusively* so, of course, for the Christian faith has always confessed that it has great interest in a host of historical events in this space–time world. Hence, it is a faith concerned with history. But it is a history *as understood and interpreted by the Bible* that concerns the Christian. Consequently, if one is desirous of knowing the content of the Christian faith on any and all matters which the Christian confesses, he must go to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Of course, it is this procedure which we are following now in determining the nature and content of the Christian faith.

The Doctrine of God

The only living and true God is a “Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth” (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Q. 4; John 4:24; Job 9:7–9; Ps. 90:2; Jon. 1:17; Ex. 3:14; Ps. 147:5; Rev. 4:8; 15:4; Ex. 34:6–7). This God is both personal and triune “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God; the same in substance, equal in power and glory” (*W.S.C.*, Q. 5; cf. Gen. 1:26; Isa. 48:16; Matt. 3:16–17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 2:18; 4:4–6; 5:18–20; 1 Pet. 1:2, plus several epistolary greetings). Scripture ascribes the creation of the universe *ex nihilo* to this triune God. God the Father was the originator of the creation (1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:2), and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were agents in bringing to reality the creation (John 1:3; Eph. 3.9, Heb. 1:2; Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; Job 26:13).

God's Creation and His Sovereignty

This triune God, the Bible teaches, did not create out of a sense of needing to complement Himself (Isa. 40:12–31; Acts 17:25), for He was ontically exactly the same after His creative activity as before (Ps. 90:2). Rather, He created all things simply because He willed to do so (Rev. 4:11) and for the purpose of glorifying Himself (Isa. 43:6–7). Furthermore, after creating the universe, unlike the god of Deism, the God of Scripture continues to maintain a “holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing of *all* His creatures and all their actions” (W.S.C., Q. 11; Ps. 145:17; 104:24; Heb. 1:3; Ps. 103:19; Matt. 10:29–30). These facts make it quite evident that (1) the God of Scripture is *self-contained* and *self-sufficient*, in no way ontologically correlative to His creation, and (2) He is a God of plan and purpose—indeed, *eternal purpose* (Eph. 3:11); *all* that He does and *all* that occurs in heaven and earth is *determined by* and *in accord with* His decree (W.S.C., Q. 7; Ps. 115:3; Prov. 16:4, 33; 21:1; Dan. 4:17, 25, 35; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28; Rom. 9:11–23; 11:2–36; Eph. 1:3–14; 1 Pet. 1:20). This means that *all facts are what they are only by virtue of the place they have in the plan of God*. It further means that nowhere may man turn and not be confronted by the “face” of God in the plan of God.

God's Revelation

According to Scripture, the triune God revealed Himself, generally by His creation (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20) and providential care, and *especially* through the Second Person of the ontological Trinity and His Word, even the Scriptures (Heb. 1:1–3; 1 Pet. 1:11). Furthermore, apart from this self-revelation it would be impossible to know God. Geerhardus Vos declares:

In scientifically dealing with impersonal objects we ourselves take the first step; they are passive, we are active; we handle them, examine them, experiment with them. But in regard to a spiritual, personal being this is different. Only in so far as such a being chooses to open up itself can we come to know it. All spiritual life is by its very nature a hidden life, a life shut up in itself. Such a life we can know only through revelation. If this is true as between man and man, how much more must it be so as between God and man. The principle involved has been strikingly formulated by Paul: “For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11). The inward hidden content of God’s mind can become the possession of man only through a voluntary disclosure on God’s part. God must come to us before we can go to Him. But God is not a personal spiritual being in general. He is a Being infinitely exalted above our highest conception. Suppose it were possible for one human spirit to penetrate directly into another human spirit: it would still be impossible for the spirit of man to penetrate into the Spirit of God. This emphasizes the necessity of God’s opening up to us the mystery of His nature before we can acquire any knowledge concerning Him. (*Biblical Theology*, pp. 11–12; cf. also Gordon H. Clark, *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, p. 60, and Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace*, p. 8)

Revelation is Self-Attesting

If, as certainly seems to be the case then, God, to be known, must be *self-revealing*, and if all knowledge of Him is dependent upon His own self-disclosure (Matt. 11:27; 1 Cor. 2:11), it follows that this revelation must be *self-authenticating* and *self-attesting*, that is it carries with it *its own validation* since only God is adequate witness to Himself. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* affirms as much when it states (1) that “the authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God” (I/iv), and (2) that the Holy Scripture “doth abundantly *evidence itself* to be the word of God” (I/v), that is, it

attests to its own divine origin by clear, incontrovertible “arguments” such as “the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope [purpose] of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery [disclosure] it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof.” John Murray admits that to affirm the fact of a self–attesting revelation *might* seem to be arguing in a circle, but in this one case he insists it is not. Rather, in the case of the reception by men of the Word of God, it is the one situation which requires the rational creature to bow before divine authority coming “linearly” to him and unquestioningly to acknowledge God’s Word as the standard by which he is to live, responses, we shall see, which are the result of the work of God’s Spirit alone. Murray writes:

It might seem analogous to the case of a judge who accepts the witness of the accused in his own defense, rather than the evidence derived from all the relevant facts in the case. We should, however, be little disturbed by this type of criticism. It contains an inherent fallacy. It is fully admitted that normally it would be absurd and a miscarriage of justice for a judge to accept the testimony of the accused, rather than the verdict required by all the relevant evidence. But the two cases are not analogous. There is one sphere where self–testimony must be accepted as absolute and final. This is the sphere of our relation to God. God alone is adequate witness to himself. (*The Infallible Word*, pp. 9–10)

For any man to claim that he may and must test whether God has or has not revealed Himself in the biblical revelation by applying some extra–biblical standard such as those of rationalism or empiricism implies that he *already* knows what God can and cannot reveal, and hence, what God *is* in Himself, apart from this revelation; and this contradicts what has already been established, namely, the *necessity* of a self–revelation for human knowledge of God.

It is this God who is the God of Christian theism. It is the existence of this God which every instructed Christian professes. Moreover, the instructed Christian is not interested in defending the existence of any other God, or even the existence of *a* God as such. Van Til writes:

To talk about the existence of God, the *fact* of God’s existence, without bringing in the whole of what God in Christ through the Holy Spirit has done and is doing for man, and to claim that this barren fact is the common ground between believers and unbelievers, is not only an abstraction, but complete distortion. To tell someone *that* God exists means nothing unless you tell him who God is and what he does. (*Jerusalem and Athens*, p. 427)

Gordon Clark, in a similar vein, writes:

...the question that needs to be asked about God is not whether he exists, but what he is. Of course God exists. Anything exists so far as the term has any faint meaning at all. But it makes a great difference whether God is a dream, a mirage, or the square root of minus one. (*Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, p. 39)

This exposition of the Christian doctrine of God, although brief, has indicated enough to establish the fact that in order to know *what* God is and what He might say, man needs a self–attesting self–revelation from God.

The Doctrine of Man

1. *Creation and Covenant*

The Christian faith, informed as it is by Scripture, teaches that God created man at some time in the distant past “male and female, after his own image, in knowledge,

righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures” (W.S.C., Q. 10; Gen. 1:26–28– Col. 3–10; Eph. 4:24). Man, then, is *like* God in that he is the image of God, but *unlike* God in that he is created and hence finite. To enlarge upon these relationships a little, Adam and Eve were *like* God in that they were persons with rationality and volition. Furthermore, revelation between an “I” and a “Thou” and a “He” is eternally present in the triune God (theologically, we speak of the *One* ἄλλος και ἄλλος και ἄλλος; philosophically, we speak of “the eternal one and the many”) found its (original) creaturely analogue in the I–Thou relationship of Adam and his wife. In other words, just as there is a *plurality* of *persons* in *orderly unity* within the Godhead, even so, as divinely created, man was a *plurality* of *persons* in *orderly unity*. Too, man was originally created with innate knowledge (of God), piety (toward God), and moral rectitude (toward his neighbor) (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24).

As a knowing creature, man is the finite point of “the two points between which the knowledge transaction takes place” (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 32). Although finite, he is still capable of comprehending a propositional revelation from the infinite God because (1) God created him with the capacity to understand such revelation, and (2) God’s self–revelation in content was adapted without distorting the truth as God knows it to man’s need and level of comprehension. His knowledge was not, is not, and will never be absolutely exhaustive as is God’s. Of course, originally his finitude was no burden to him; he freely accepted his creaturehood and gladly acknowledged his Creator. Fundamental then to the doctrine of man is this Creator–creature distinction.

With the first man God entered into a representative covenant, requiring of Adam for the duration of a probationary period personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, promising life for obedience and threatening death for disobedience (Hos. 6:7; Gen. 2:16–17; Rom. 5:12–19). In this covenant, Adam was the federal head of his race; it was determined that as he responded to God in the covenant, so God would regard his posterity descending from him by ordinary generation as similarly responding (Rom. 5:12–19). Equally fundamental to the doctrine of man then is his covenant relationship to God. *As soon as man was man he was homo religiosus*, created for covenant fellowship with God.²

It is clear from Genesis 1–2 that God never intended man to be independent of Him and His plan. Even in the perfect environment of Eden Adam was the recipient of revelation, the content of which clearly taught man his subordination to and dependence upon God. In all things man was responsible to discern the mind of God as his ultimate authority for determining the meaning of life and the rightness or wrongness of an act. For man God was always to be the final authority. Man was not a law unto himself.

2. Fall

A proper understanding of the Christian faith must include the fact of a space/time fall of man from the state of created holiness (*status integritatis*) into a condition of transgression and all attendant miseries (*status corruptionis*), that is, man descended in the fall from the position of *posse non peccare* (possible not to sin) to a position of *non posse non peccare* (not possible not to sin).

² It is under the influence of pagan Greek thought that man today is regarded primarily as *homo sapiens*. The Christian doctrine of creation indicates that man, before he is anything else, is *homo religiosus*, created for fellowship with God. Any rational gifts that man has received from God were intended to serve a covenantal or “koinonaic” end.

Genesis 3 is Holy Scripture and authentic history. Those views which deny to this portion of God's Word all significance in reference to the fall and depravity of mankind, preferring to see in it everything from aetiological legend to ancient Semitic mythology, in the words of J. Barton Payne, show "utter disregard of the analogy of Scripture" (*The Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 216; cf. Hos. 6:7; Job 31:33; Rom. 5:12ff.; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13, 14). Actually, this chapter lies at the heart of any truly biblical understanding of the nature of sin and the condition of fallen man.

Man's First Scientific Experiment

What precisely occurred in Genesis 3? In answer, our first parents permitted the serpent, through their embarrassment with God's authority over them, to challenge God's Word with an alternative interpretation of the tree. When the pair demonstrated their unwillingness to believe God on the basis of His bare claim of authority over them by remaining silent in the face of the serpent's lie, they, by that silence, permitted Satan to *reduce* the Word of God to a mere *hypothesis*—an hypothesis, it is true, of a "religious expert," but still and only an hypothesis, as seen by the fact that any and every position, unless it is received on sheer self-attesting authority, remains merely an hypothesis until its probability or improbability is tested by *experimentation*. This means, however, in a universe created by God that the centrum of authority, for man, shifted from another to himself. Man demanded that he become his own authority, that he determine for himself what is true and what is false. So our first parents, becoming the first "scientists," experimented, and we, their children, have wept ever since. Of course, their "experiment" demonstrated that already they had implicitly believed the serpent's false interpretation of the tree, for had they *really* believed that their experimentation would prove to be their death and their own undoing, they would not have persisted in their course of action, all of which shows, as says Paul, that men are never *truly* autonomous, but rather, if not walking in obedience to God, are walking according to (κατὰ) the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). But the point above all which must be noted is that, at least as far as they were concerned, it was *they* who determined the course they would follow. They became their own authority, and their descendants ever since that time have claimed a similar autonomy from God.

The Nature of the Offence

How shallow becomes then the oft-heard mockery of the whole situation in Genesis 3 that ascribes to God a "temper tantrum" merely because someone committed the picayunish act of "eating a piece of apple." The transgression of man was far more than that it was at its heart the act of willful *rebellion* by the creature against his Creator. It was man claiming the stance of autonomy and freedom from God his Creator. It was man heeding the first "call to worship" to worship and serve the creature rather than his Creator. *Authority* was the issue at stake and man decided in his own rather than in God's favor. That is what the Genesis fall would teach us.

The implications of all this for apologetic methodology is plain: one's *testing* of the truth claim of God's Word as over against other truth claims (in this case, the devil's) prior to acceptance of it is itself an immoral act indicative of self-acclaimed autonomy which can be assumed only upon apostate grounds. The Christian apologist should reject that methodology which at least in practice encourages the covenant-breaker to think and to speak from that autonomous stance by inviting him to test the validity of the truth claims of Scripture prior to faith commitment to them. What test of truth will be applied? It must be either the rationalist's or empiricist's test of truth, both of whom, assuming as they do simultaneously

“a universe of natural causes in a closed system” and “a world governed by Chance,” render the truth claims of Scripture “impossible.” Another methodology, whereby the unbeliever is challenged to forsake his apostasy from God at the very outset and to submit to the God speaking in Holy Scripture would be more consistent with the very character of what it means to “keep covenant” with God.

Van Til understands the fall similarly; his insights are deserving of our reflection:

When man fell it was... his attempt to do without God in every respect. Man sought his ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty [Gen. 3:6] somewhere beyond God, either directly within himself or in the universe about him. God had interpreted the universe for him, or we may say man had interpreted the universe under the direction of God, but now he sought to interpret the universe without reference to God...

The result for man was that he made for himself *a false ideal of knowledge* [Gen. 3:5]. Man made for himself the ideal of absolute comprehension in knowledge. This he could never have done if he had continued to recognize that he was a creature. It is totally inconsistent with the idea of creatureliness that man should strive for comprehensive knowledge; if it could be attained, it would wipe God out of existence; man would then be God. (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 31)

The essence of sin then must be seen in terms of transgression of “covenant.” To acknowledge God’s authority is to keep covenant with God; to deny God’s authority and to assume for oneself autonomy is to break covenant with God. *The Bible regards all men descending from Adam by ordinary generation since the fall as covenant-breakers by nature* (Hos. 6:7; Rom. 5:12–19).

Adam as Federal Head of the Human Race

To determine more precisely the effects of the fall upon mankind, I suggest the reader thoroughly familiarize himself with the teaching of the following Scripture passages. The accompanying comments are intended to assist the reader in his own study.

a. Romans 5: 12–19

In this passage Paul teaches the imputation of Adam’s sin to the entire race “descending from him by ordinary generation.” To understand the apostle’s thought here, it is necessary to grasp the complex syntax within the verses:

Verse 12: “Therefore, just as... all sinned”—

Verses 13–14: “for until... the coming one.” (These verses explain the phrase “all sinned.”)

Verses 15–17: “But not... Jesus Christ”—(These verse comment upon the last phrase of verse 14.)

Verses 18–19: “Now therefore, as..., so also... the man were appointed righteous.” (These verses repeat and continue the thought begun in verse 12.)

Paul begins a comparison between Adam and Christ as representative federal heads in verse 12 as indicated by ὡσπερ (“just as”), but contrary to the opinion of some expositors, he does not complete his thought in verse 12 (the καὶ οὕτως in 5:12b does not mean “so also” but rather “and so”; “so also” is indicated by καὶ οὕτως as is clear from verses 15, 18, 19, 21, 6:4, 11:30–31). Rather, he pauses to explain by his comments in verses 13–14 his intended meaning in the phrase “all sinned.” These two verses make it abundantly clear that he means that “in Adam’s fall we sinned all.” This is brought out by Paul’s insight that “death reigned

from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin like Adam,” that is, infants, indicating thereby that God accounted all of these descendants of Adam as sinners who had transgressed His law. But what law? Obviously, not the Mosaic law, for Paul specifies those who lived prior to Mosaic times. The only other law suggested or permitted by the context is God’s prohibition to Adam (Gen. 2:16–17). It is this law that men in Adam transgressed. That this is Paul’s intention is borne out by his remarks in verses 15, 17, 18, and 19 respectively, where he declares “by the trespass of the one [man], the many died,” “by the trespass of the one [man], death reigned through the one,” “through one trespass [judgment] came unto all men unto condemnation,” and finally, “through the disobedience of one man, the many were appointed sinners.” Verses 13–14 then explain the last phrase of verse 12— “all sinned (in Adam).”

Adam as a Type

Even now he does not complete his thought of verse 12, for he deems his last remark of verse 14 as also necessitating comment. When he describes Adam as “a type of him who is to come,” he does not want the parallel between Adam and Christ to be construed as precisely similar in *every* respect—it is only the principle of representation that Paul wants the parallel to display. Consequently, in verses 15–17 he delineates by his double usage of “not as” in verses 15 and 16 and his double usage of “how much more” in verses 15 and 17 the ways in which a precise parallel breaks down. It is not until he pens the words of verse 18 that he returns to his original thought begun in verse 12, repeats it briefly in different words, and completes it with the “so also” clause. There can be no doubt that Paul teaches that under the original covenant arrangement with Adam God reckoned or imputed Adam’s first transgression to his race on the basis of the principle of representation.

The point of doctrine for the present purpose is this: every son of Adam descending from him by ordinary generation is charged with Adam’s first representative transgression and hence stands, as sinner, justly condemned by God’s law. The Christian apologist must be aware that he seeks to persuade *condemned* men of their need of a new representative before God under the terms of the covenant of grace which was confirmed to the elect through their representative Jesus Christ.

Man’s Depravity

b. Romans 3:10–18

According to the general teaching of Scripture, all those to whom Adam’s first transgression was imputed—which is the race as a whole, excepting Christ—actually and individually acquire personal depravity and also transgress God’s holy laws as individuals. Precisely how depravity is contracted or transmitted to Adam’s descendants is nowhere specifically explicated in Scripture, but Romans 3:10–18 with its fourteen–point indictment of the race expressly affirms that all men are terrible sinners when it declares that *none* is righteous, that *none* understands God, that *none* seeks God, that *all* have turned away from God and His laws, that *together* men have become debased, that *all* men by nature are corrupt, deceitful, blasphemous, violent, restless, and haughty (cf. *W.S.C.*, Qs. 16, 17, 18).

c. Romans 8:7–8 and Ephesians 4:17–19

Romans 8:7–8 deals with the noetic effects of sin. Not only is man noetically hostile toward God, for his thoughts refuse to be subject to God’s laws (depravity), but also he is *not able* to subject his thoughts to God (inability). In Ephesians 4:17–19 Paul is willing to speak

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

of the nations as walking “in the futility of their *mind*, being darkened in their *understanding*, excluded from the life of God, because of the *ignorance* that is in them.”

d. 1 Corinthians 2:14

If it should appear too sweeping a judgment to assert that the unregenerate man, because of his darkened understanding, is incapable, left to himself, of believing or “savingly understanding” (*W.C.F.* I/vi) even the smallest modicum of religious truth, Paul’s insistence in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that “a natural [unregenerate] man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” clearly seems to affirm just such a judgment—the total inability of fallen man to judge spiritual things properly. Paul had earlier expressed disdain for depraved human wisdom’s inability to discover any spiritual truth: “Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” His own answer to these rhetorical questions is that “the world through its wisdom has not come to know God” (1:20–21). He goes on to assert, as we have already noted, that the unregenerate world *cannot* by its wisdom know, that is, discover, God (2:14), because “the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God” (2:11); therefore, divine illumination is necessary if men are to “know the things freely given to us by God” (2:12).

Paul’s teaching here should not be taken to mean that the unregenerate man cannot, by reading the Bible, *rationally* understand anything whatsoever of what the Bible says concerning God, himself, Christ, and salvation. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* with no hesitancy affirms that while “all things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all, yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them” (I/vii). But while all of this is true, because one’s understanding of the meaning of “facts” is always controlled by one’s religiously motivated “philosophy of fact,” the unregenerate man, so declares Paul, notwithstanding all of his natural insights, will not accept biblical supernaturalism as true, nor will he believe its message unless he is enlightened by the Spirit of God. We only echo here what all of the great Reformers held to be so. For example, in addition to the confessional statement already adduced, Martin Luther in his *Bondage of the Will* writes:

The perspicuity of Scripture is twofold... The first is external, and relates to the ministry of the Word, the second concerns the knowledge of the heart. If you speak of *internal* perspicuity, the truth is that nobody who has not the Spirit of God sees a jot of what is in the Scriptures. All men have their hearts darkened, so that, even when they discuss and quote all that is in Scripture they do not understand or really know any of it. They do not believe in God, nor do they believe that they are God’s creatures... The Spirit is needed for the understanding of all Scripture and every part of Scripture. If, on the other hand, you speak of *external* perspicuity, the position is that nothing whatsoever is left obscure or ambiguous, but all that is in the Scripture is through the Word brought forth into the clearest light and proclaimed the whole world.

While Luther doubtless overstates the *external* perspicuity of Scripture when he declares that “nothing whatsoever is left obscure or ambiguous,” he has certainly heard Scripture correctly when he distinguishes between the internal and external perspicuity of Scripture and affirms that the former is dependent upon the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

e. Romans 1:18–32

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Of all the Pauline passages treating the depravity of man, this section of Romans exceeds them all in analysis and descriptive detail of the ugliness of man's sin before God. It is also for Christian apologetics crucial to the question of common ground and the response the apologist may anticipate from the sinner to the Christian kerygma.

The passage is intricate, but several recurring themes are quite obvious:

1. The fact of God's existence and power is manifestly on display in the created universe: "His invisible attributes—even His everlasting³ power and divine nature—since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being discerned by the things made" (1:20).

2. All men are innately aware of this truth: "The knowledge of God's existence and power [lit., that which can be known of God], manifest in them, for God manifested [that knowledge] in them" (1:19), and "when [or although] they knew God, not as God they glorified him" (1:21).

3. Because of their depravity of mind, it is now the nature of men to perpetuate their apostasy from God as "men who suppress⁴ the truth through unrighteousness" (1:18), and as men who "did not like to retain God in their knowledge" (1:28). In other words, it is now man's nature to suppress his innate knowledge of God and to deny that the one living and true God exists or that he knows Him. Of course, because man is *homo religiosus* by virtue of his created nature, he must worship someone or something; therefore, he worships idols of every imaginable kind: "Because, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful, but became vain in their thoughts and their foolish heart was darkened, professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged⁵ the glory of the incorruptible God for an image like corruptible man and birds and four-footed creatures and creeping things" (1:21–23). Man attempts to satisfy his religious yearning for the eternal God by making the created thing rather than the Creator the object of his worship: "They exchanged the truth of God for the falsehood, and worshipped and served the created thing rather than the Creator" (1:25). With the exception of Christianity, all of the religions of the world, Paul asserts here, are the product of the religious reaction of a particular kind of man (Adamic) to a particular kind of revelation (general) from God.

The upshot of all this is that man's suppression of the truth which he possesses about God and his idolatrous preference for religious falsehood has provoked the Creator to wrath (1:18). Man's apostasy in the religious realm receives as its just punishment retribution in the moral realm. Idolatry, by inexorable divine rule, inevitably leads on to degrading acts of immorality. Three times Paul declares that God gave men up, first, to uncleanness, second, to dishonoring passions, and third, to a reprobate mind (1:24, 26, 28), which three abandonments have brought man, slave to his natural lusts, to utterly vile acts and passions, all the while "knowing the ordinance of God that those who practice such things are deserving of death" (1:32).

³ Note that Paul says "everlasting" power, not "*infinite* power," that is, *omnipotence*. Nothing, not even the universe in its totality, is a revelation of God's *omnipotence*, which is infinite. Cf. Job 26:14 KJV or NASB. "Everlasting" here connotes "divine."

⁴ The Greek word *κατεχόντων* means here "hold down," "suppress," "hinder," (not "hold in the sense of possessing") as in 2 Thess. 2:6–7; cf. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Romans*, on this verse, p. 36.

⁵ They "exchanged," not in the sense of "giving up," for this would contradict the earlier assertion that they "suppressed," but in the sense that they were satisfied to *substitute* as the immediate object of their worship the created thing for the Creator. The knowledge of the latter they suppressed.

Taken together, these passages teach that, although man hates God, he cannot ever be completely rid of Him either. He has, to use Calvin’s phrase, a *sensus deitatis*, or a *semen religionis*, within him; but because he refuses to bow before God’s true revelation of Himself in Christ and the Scriptures for his spiritual instruction, indeed, because in his spiritual blindness he cannot recognize Christ and the Scriptures for what in truth they are, his knowledge of God is thoroughly perverted and untrustworthy, and he has not the capability to find God either, were he even of the mind to seek Him. Any and every truth about God, coming to him by whatever means, apart from the Holy Spirit’s convicting, saving, and illuminating work, is immediately suppressed in the form in which it comes, and when his darkened understanding has completed its restructuring activity, the original truth which emerges in his consciousness is dressed in the manufactured clothing of falsehood, which points in turn to an idol which man then worships and which in turn (depending upon the idol) leads its devotee to run to all kinds of immoral excesses or to spiritual pride and sinful self-righteousness. Therefore, because men do not (and cannot) but because they *ought* to acknowledge and worship the one living and true God as their Creator, “they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).

f. Ephesians 1:19–2:6

Paul prays that Christians may come to know “the tremendous greatness of God’s power working in you who believe.” His own manner of expressing its extent is to compare it to “the working of the might of His strength which He ‘energized’ when (1) He raised Christ from the dead, and (2) seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, (3) not simply above but *far* above (4) not simply some but *all* rule and authority and power and dominion, and not simply some but *every* name that is named, (5) not only in this age but also in the one to come” (1:19–21). It is this *same* power which went forth in the Christian’s behalf to accomplish his salvation. But why does it take such power—let us say it, nothing less than God’s power—to save a sinner?⁶ The stated reason is this: “You were *dead* in your trespasses and sins, in which (sins) formerly you walked according to the culture of this world, according to the prince of ethereal authority and of the culture which now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all lived formerly in the desires of our flesh, doing the will of the flesh and thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the others” (2:1–3). Now in this condition, Paul affirms, “God, being rich in mercy, according to His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses (1) made us alive together with Christ... and (2) raised us up together and (3) seated us together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (2:4–6).

In addition to everything else that has been said, now we learn that men by nature are dead (not physically, of course, but spiritually dead as far as glorifying God and comprehending spiritual truth is concerned), slaves of Satan and slaves of the world’s customs, characterized by disobedience both in desire and will, and men by nature at whom God can look only with wrath and disfavor. How can any Christian reading Paul’s words and learning of the power that was necessary to save him and to give him “all things pertaining unto life and godliness” teach that men are somehow natively equipped, even in their

⁶ While for us spiritual regeneration demands such a metaphor as “resurrection from the dead” to describe it if we are to comprehend the utter impossibility of man’s saving himself, it should be recalled that for God the giving of life to the dead is no more difficult *in terms of power* than our waking a child from sleep (cf. John 11:11–14). Hence, spiritual regeneration does not require as its efficient cause the *omnipotence* of God, only the *power* of God.

apostasy, to judge accurately spiritual things! Such teaching is manifestly false! (Cf. J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism' and the Word of God*, pp. 38–49.)

g. Luke 1:1–4

Has Man a Right to Investigate Gospel Claims?

The final passage we will consider is Luke's prologue to his Gospel, which reads as follows:

Forasmuch as many have attempted to compile a narrative concerning the affairs that have taken place among us just as the ones who were the earliest eyewitnesses and ministers of the word passed them on to us, it seemed fitting to me also, having traced all things accurately from the first, to write to you a connected narrative, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the full certainty concerning the things you have heard.

Consideration of these verses is necessary inasmuch as this passage is cited by a good many apologists as a clear statement to the effect that men legitimately possess both the *right* to investigate the truth claims of the Christian revelation and the independent *tests* of verifying the truth of God's revelation in Christ in advance of faith. Actually, there is nothing in the passage to warrant such a conclusion Luke does not give the slightest hint who they were who before him were compiling biographical data on Jesus' life and ministry, but whoever they were (could Mark have been among them?), he makes it clear that they were simply recording what "the earliest eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, passed on" to them. Obviously, this reference is to the disciples of Jesus themselves, all of whom were inspired apostles. Moreover, Luke himself was an *inspired* writer (1 Tim. 5:18) and was as such "being borne along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21) when he wrote his Gospel. *Whatever research he conducted (and without question it was extensive) as a committed believer in Christ was still finally subject in its compilation and composition to the inspiring influence of the Spirit of God.* Hence, nothing in the Lucan prologue supports the basic contention that Luke's opening verses justify the granting to the non-Christian the right and the ability to investigate any and every claim to divine revelation before he is obligated to believe one. His prologue does show, however, that inspired men have verified the historical accuracy of Christ's redeeming activity for us, and that we may rest with "full certainty" in the things we have heard and believed.

Common Grace

None of the foregoing exegesis denies the doctrine of common grace. God continues to show forth His general goodness to fallen men in many ways. "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45). "He did good and gave [the nations] rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying [their] hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). Still further, He restrains men in their desire to run to immoral excesses and to wrongdoing (1) through "the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending themselves" (Rom. 2:15) and (2) by His gift of human government to men to protect the law-abiding citizenry from the criminal element in human society (Rom. 13:1–7). Of course, He continues to confront men with Himself in and by His gracious providence: "He made from one [original human pair] every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for by Him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:26–28). The above conclusions concerning human depravity only make it apparent that unregenerate men

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

are in no position to judge what God can and cannot say about Himself or what God can and cannot do with them with respect both to His saving works and to His issuances of wrath. They are at the mercy of a sovereign God who may or may not choose to reveal Himself savingly to individual men (Matt. 11:27). Until He does so, unregenerate men are spiritual “blind men” incapable of discerning a genuine truth of revelation when confronted by one. It is this total depravity and total inability of fallen men which the Christian apologist must consciously keep in mind when he presents the truth claims of Christianity to lost men. He must not grant them the authority to believe that they can do by right what the Scriptures declare that they are incapable of doing by nature, and what they attempt to do only in rebellion, namely, to sit as judges over the Word of God; he must forthrightly witness to men, always conscious of his own need for and dependence upon the Holy Spirit if his witness is to be effective.

A helpful article which can be read with great profit in conjunction with the exposition in this section is Hughes’ article, “Crucial Biblical Passages for Christian Apologetics,” in *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp. 131–140. Also, a profound treatment of the noetic effects of sin can be found in Abraham Kuyper’s *Principles of Sacred Theology*, pp. 104–114. Briefly, as men construct their sciences, according to Kuyper, they now, because of sin’s effects, must face the likelihood that any and all of these effects of sin can and do bring them in their search for knowledge to ignorance:

1. falsehood
2. unintentional mistakes
3. self-delusion and self-deception
4. the intrusion of phantasy into the imagination
5. intentional negative influences of other minds (e.g., in education) upon the mind of the scientist
6. physical weaknesses influencing the total human psychology
7. the disorganized relationships of life
8. the effect of misinformation and inaccuracies learned from one realm of life upon ideas from another domain
9. self-interest
10. the weakening of mental energies and the darkening of consciousness
11. internal disorganization of life-harmonies
12. the loss of the *pou sto*⁷ found only in the revealed knowledge of God, by which one may see the whole

Kuyper does not contend that men have lost the capacity of thinking logically; indeed by proper reason, men have been able to correct many of their mistakes. However, he does

⁷ Literally, “[a place] where I may stand.” Archimedes, a Greek mathematician and inventor (287.9–212 B.C.), once boasted, in conjunction with his experimentation with the lever, “Give me a place where I may stand, and I will move the earth.” He was, of course, asking for a place outside the cosmos by such a request. Similarly, as this study will show, men need an *epistemological* “Archimedean point of reference” to understand their cosmos and themselves; but only a revelation from One transcendentally outside of the cosmos can provide the *pou sto* essential to knowledge, since man can never break out of his finite cosmic perspective.

urge that man's chief dilemma is his loss of a true knowledge of God, which serves as the transcendental *pou sto* or reference point which, as we shall see, alone *justifies* knowledge and from which alone true human predication may be launched.

The Doctrine of Christ

Careful study of the pertinent Scripture passages listed above will disclose that man is in dire trouble. Man's present state is one of "sin and misery" (W.S.C., Q. 17). Men need help, and it will have to be powerful help, for they will hate and struggle against their benefactor. They will even deny that they need help. It is obvious that God must take the initiative in securing man's salvation, because man cannot save himself. God's answer to the human fall is *redemption through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit*. In this way only can God continue to be sovereign. At this time we will consider the person of Christ and His objective work of redemption. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Redeemer of God's elect, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever" (W.S.C., Q. 22). As the Second Person of the ontological Trinity, He is fully God and Lord. In the Incarnation by means of the virgin birth, the eternal Logos became fully man without ceasing to be God. In his estates, both of humiliation and of exaltation, Christ is the elect man's Prophet, Priest, and King.

As *Prophet*, Christ reveals to us "by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation" (W.S.C., Q. 24). He is uniquely equipped for this office, inasmuch as all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him (Col. 2:2–3). To refuse His epistemic lordship is to continue in epistemic futility. "His word" here is not only the word of His own teaching delivered during His earthly ministry (John 7:16; 12:40ff.; Mark 13:31; Matt. 7:24ff.) but also *all* of the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (1 Pet. 1:10–11; John 4:26–15:26; 16:13; Gal. 1:12; Col. 3:16). He many times over authenticated His Word in the Old Testament (Matt. 5:17–18; John 10:35) and preauthenticated His Word in the New Testament by assuring His apostles that His Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13; Gal. 1:1, 11–13). It should also be carefully noted that when the incarnate Son of God authenticated the Scriptures, He was not only authenticating His *own* word, but He was also doing it according to His own declared authority in keeping with the principle He affirmed in John 8:14: "Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true [valid]; for I know whence I came and whither I go." The point to observe here is that Jesus based the validity of testimony upon an appeal to *His own knowledge of Himself*, unintimidated by the charge of *petitio principii*. His appeal is in accord with the divine procedure enunciated in Hebrews 6:13: "...when God made a promise..., since he had no one greater by whom swear, he swore by himself."⁸ Hence, one must never separate in his doctrine of Scripture the Scriptures themselves from the Christ of Scripture. *It is the same self-attesting eternal Word revealing itself and speaking in and through both*. As our Prophet then Christ's Word in Scripture is essential to true knowledge; as the standard of truth (John 14:6), the Word of the Christ of Scripture ultimately is the test of truth (Luke 16:31). To doubt the truthfulness of Scripture is to doubt the Christ of Scripture; and to doubt the Christ of Scripture is to be immoral, it is to continue to operate with one's false ideal and test of knowledge. To fail to believe Christ and His word, the Bible, will result only in His refusal to acknowledge the

⁸ It is certainly true that our Lord appealed to His works to support His divine claims, but it must be noted that He did not leave it to His auditors to conclude from His works just any meaning that they might like to place upon them. To the contrary, He interpreted for His auditors the meaning of His works.

unbeliever as His own in the day of judgment (Luke 9:26). To refuse to receive His words as one's authority will result one day in one's being judged by those very words (John 12:48).

Authority of the Scriptures

Lest the impression be given that I believe the Bible descended from heaven, self-attestingly already bound and divided into chapters and verses, a short digression is in order here to say something about Scripture canonization. Certainly, I recognize that the Bible as we know it today is the product of a long and careful process of collecting and preserving ancient documents (but perhaps not nearly as complex a process as those words might imply). I contend, however, that the presuppositions of canonicity are (1) inspiration (*W.C.F.*, I/iii), and (2) providential illumination of the church to recognize inspired Scripture. The early church "inherited" an authenticated OT canon and was certainly guided in its determination of the canonicity of a given NT document by the criterion of inspiration. This criterion was even then already inextricably interwoven with the question of *apostolicity* (or literary proximity to an apostle, as with the cases of Mark, Luke–Acts, and Jude), which in turn was determined by scientific research, that is, by tests of apostolicity. This reference to scientific research should not be regarded as a concession to *human* authority, as if to say, when the last word has been said, that the book which we now know as the Bible is the end product of the scientific opinions of men, some of whom perhaps may have even been unregenerate men. It is simply to acknowledge what all who have made the effort to investigate the question recognize was in fact the case during the early centuries of the Church. Nor does such an admission take one outside the bounds of the best Reformed thinking. Calvin himself would have recognized this "research" factor. Warfield writes concerning Calvin here:

He would have said—he does say—that he in whose heart the Spirit bears His testimony will recognize the Scriptures whenever presented to his contemplation as divine, will depend on them with sound trust and will embrace with true faith all that they propound to him. *He would doubtless have said that this act of faith logically implicates the determination of the "canon."* But he would also have said—he does in effect say—that *this determination of the canon is a separable act and is to be prosecuted on its own appropriate grounds of scientific evidence.* It involves indeed a fundamental misapprehension of Calvin's whole attitude to attribute to him the view that the testimony of the Spirit determines immediately such scientific questions as those of the canon and text of Scripture. (*Calvin and Augustine*, p. 102, emphasis supplied)

This ready acknowledgment of scientific research, however, should not blind one to the second presupposition of canonicity—God's providential illumination of the church to recognize which documents were inspired and thus canonical. God, no doubt, providentially oversaw the church's labors and guided it to a universal consciousness regarding the documents to be accepted as apostolic and hence canonical. This suggestion is both reasonable, confessional, and scriptural: *reasonable* from the consideration that it is a reflection on the divine wisdom to suggest that after He inspired certain men to write Scripture, God would leave it solely up to fallible men to determine which books were inspired; *confessional* (cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I/v); and *scriptural* in the light of the fact that God providentially guides all His creatures and all their actions to bring about His own holy ends (Ps. 135:6; Acts 17:25–28; Rom. 11:36). God obviously oversaw this enterprise as He does everything else. Cf. Packer, '*Fundamentalism*' and the Word of God, pp. 90–91.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Lest someone now should suggest that the inclusion of providential illumination as a factor in the process of canonicity is inconsistent with the self-attesting character of Scripture, I would respond that it is nothing of the sort. It only supports the truth which earlier I labored, namely, man's inability as sinner to recognize apart from powerful (divine) aid "His master's voice." Man *ought* to see the evidence for his God everywhere, no less in His self-revelation in Scripture. The fact that man does not recognize this revelation does not mean that the revelation is not there or that it is not self-attestingly clear. It simply verifies Paul's assertion that men by their unrighteousness both suppress revelational material coming to them by whatever means and are incapable of comprehending spiritual things apart from the aid of the Spirit of God.

I believe that this appeal to inspiration and to providential illumination in this connection is consistent and in accord with the best of Reformed thinking. J. I. Packer writes:

...the principle of canonicity [is] objectively the fact, and subjectively the recognition of inspiration... What is suggested is not that all inspired writings are canonical, but that *all canonical writings are inspired*, and that *God causes his people to recognize them as such*. Not that the church created the New Testament canon by recognizing and isolating it, any more than Newton created the law of gravity by recognizing it and catching it in a formula; nor did the early church...ever suppose itself to be creating anything. What it understood itself to be doing, rather, was implementing its perpetual obligation to order its faith and life by the teaching of the Jewish Scriptures, as supplemented and interpreted by the further teaching that came from the first-century circle of inspiration which was part of the total Messianic fact, and which had the apostles at its center. Accounts of canonicity which distort, or discount, the reality of inspiration and rest the claims of Scripture on some other footing than the fact that God spoke and speaks through them, misrepresent...the true theological situation. ("Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics and Inerrancy," *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp. 141-43, emphasis supplied; cf. also his '*Fundamentalism*' and *the Word of God*, pp. 65-67)

Note that in this opinion canonicity ultimately depends upon the fact of inspiration, which fact the church is illumined to receive as such. Scientific research served the sovereignty of God within the historical process of canonization, but it was God's sovereign will that ultimately determined the outcome of the issue. The Bible's self-attesting character as the Word of the Prophet *par excellence*, when we recall that the Bible is ultimately the product of divine inspiration and providential oversight, is not violated then by the fact that human scientific research, to a greater or lesser extent, was pressed into the service of the Prophet by the Prophet in the history of canonization.

As Priest, Christ *once for all times* offered Himself up as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and to reconcile the elect to God, and *continually* lives to make intercession for them (W.S.C., Q. 25; Heb. 9:28; 2:17; 7:24-25). Here one reaches to *the heart of the atonement*. The Scriptures teach that Christ's death was a *substitutionary* sacrifice ("for us"), having primarily a Godward reference. Man's sin is an offense to God. He responds with a holy hostility toward the sinner, demanding that sin receive its just dues in the penal death of the sinner. But motivated by His own love and grace for the elect, the Father delivered up His own Son to the death of the cross to pay the penalty deserved by the sinner. Christ freely died for those whom the Father chose, thereby "satisfying divine justice" *for them* and reconciling them to God. On the third day of death, God raised Him from the dead, followed some days later by His ascension to the Father's right hand, where He intercedes for the saints, and rules the world as Sovereign (Ps. 2:6-9; 110:1; Acts 2:32-36; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:3,13; 10:12-13). This brings us to the next point.

As *King*, Christ subdues the elect to Himself, rules and defends them, and restrains and conquers all His and their enemies (W.S.C., Q. 26; 1 Cor. 15:25; Isa. 32:1). Hence, as King, Christ manifests His omnipotent prerogatives. Not to know the love of His sovereign kingship is to be still in bondage to sin and to one's own false and unsubstantial autonomy.

Enough has been said about Christ to point up the fact that the affirmations of the Christian faith concerning Him are *directly germane* to the apologetic questions of *authority, knowledge, and the standard for truth*. In working out his solutions to these issues the Christian apologist is destined to fail in both defending and proclaiming *the faith of Scripture* if he fails to put the sovereign, self-attesting Christ of Scripture and His Word at the heart of his methodology.

The Doctrine of Salvation

Nowhere does the sovereignty of God display itself more magnificently than in the salvation of men. Here the truth of election comes to the fore. The Scriptures teach that unless God has determined in His sovereign grace to save a man, that man will not be saved. "We preach Christ crucified," exclaims Paul, "to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the [effectually] called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23–24). Only to those whom the Father calls, only to those for whom Christ died, only to those does the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the ontological Trinity, apply the benefits of Christ's redemption, working faith in them in conjunction with the proclamation of a crucified Christ (1 Cor. 1:18–21). By this work of the Spirit of Christ, the believer accepts the authority of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture. The Christian apologist must never forget that men are translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, not by "persuasive words of wisdom," but through a message "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power in order that [their] faith might not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:4–5).⁹ It is right at this point, in my opinion, that some Christian apologists uncritically compromise the true glory of the Christian gospel and, by implication at least, deny the doctrine of human depravity when they assert that by logical argument or by empirical inducement they can confront men with the God of the Christian faith and thereby convince men of its truth claims (but cf. Luke 16:31). In attempting to present the gospel in this fashion, they, by their concessions to the natural man, deny, however unintentionally, the very gospel they seek to present.

The Doctrines of the Church and Last Things

We can be brief here. "The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (W.C.F., XXV/i; Eph. 1:10, 22; 5:23, 27, 32; Col. 1:18). Note here the continuing emphasis on the lordship of Christ and the gracious character of the church.

The doctrine of last things emphasizes in its own way the biblical teaching that the triune God controls history, directing it in its minutest detail to His own predetermined holy end. God is not frustrated, threatened, or intimidated by the unbelief of men. Everything is

⁹ Many more verses and passages could be mentioned at this point, but it would take us far afield from our present purpose. For one who is interested in pursuing this point further, the Scripture references footnoting the *Confession of Faith*, chap. III, vi; chap. VIII, viii; and chap. X, would be a good place to begin such research; also, Benjamin B. Warfield's *The Plan of Salvation* and John Murray's *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* are indispensable reading if one is earnest with regard to acquiring a scriptural understanding of soteriology.

running according to His schedule (Hab. 2:3, 14, 20). When the nations attempt to throw off the sovereign sway of the Lord and His Messiah, He who sits in the heavens laughs. He scoffs at then assuring the King at His right hand that He—the King—will break the nations with a rod of iron, shattering them like earthenware (Ps. 2:1–9). This will come to completion at the second advent. In conjunction with Christ’s return, all Christians confess, with some difference in detail, that the dead will rise and the living shall be changed to stand before the self–attesting Christ of Scripture in judgment (1 Thess. 4:13–17; 1 Cor. 15:51–52; Matt. 25:31–46). None will ask him in that day to produce His credentials or to show by what authority He so conducts Himself. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10–11). A division will be made among men; the Bible knows nothing of a universalistic soteriology in the sense that all men who ever lived will be finally saved (Matt. 25:31–46). The elect will know the full enjoying of God to all eternity in the new heaven and new earth, to the praise of the glory of the grace of God, while the non–elect shall suffer eternal woe in hell, to the praise of the glorious justice of God. At that time the redeemed will join together in a chorus extolling redemption’s grand consummation, singing *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Apologetic Activity in Acts

The question before us at this juncture is this: having drawn certain conclusions for apologetic methodology from exegesis and theology, do these conclusions square with the actual apologetic activity of the early church as we find it depicted in the first written “church history”—Luke’s Acts? Only a cursory reading of Acts will disclose that Peter, Stephen, Philip, and Paul, in their missionary sermons to the nations, never urge lost men to do anything other than to repent of sin and bow in faith before the God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ for men’s salvation. They never imply in their argumentation that their hearers may legitimately question the existence of the Christian God, the truth of Scripture, or the historicity of the death and resurrection of Christ prior to personal commitment. Never do and resurrection of Christ *prior* to personal commitment. Never do man (4:9–10), the rain and fruitful seasons (14:17), the altar of the Unknown God and pagan poets (17:23, 28)—imply that such evidence “probably” vindicates their message. An exhaustive study here is impossible, but I would suggest again that even a cursory reading of Acts will suffice to demonstrate that these “kerygmatics” regarded their message as an incontrovertible witness, the inherent authority of which renders the unbeliever and skeptic culpable of “making God a liar” (1 John 5:10) when they refuse to believe. These “kerygmatics” insist that repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ can be the sinner’s only proper response to the whole apostolic witness.

Occasionally one hears certain Christian apologists say that it is not proper in our day, so far removed in time and distance from the historical center of God’s redemptive activity as we are, to ask men to believe in Christ merely on the basis of scriptural authority before they consider all the evidence supportive of our claims. But this is wrong. Does the modern unbeliever possess some independent principle of verification which can determine the truth of God’s revelation in advance of faith? Furthermore, is the twentieth–century “modern” on any continent anywhere in any different situation from, say, Dionysius the Areopagite in Athens around A.D. 50? The latter was in no more advantageous a position to check out Paul’s proclamation as to its truthfulness than the former; if anything, it is easier today, for the simple reason that we have in the Bible the combined testimony of the apostolic witness. All are commanded to believe on the authority of apostolic testimony, the

only difference being that in the case of Dionysius he *heard* Paul in person while today we *read* the letters Paul wrote. All of us are *obligated* to believe the message issuing from the apostle simply by virtue of the fact that he was commissioned by the self-attesting Christ. If this is not maintained, one must rightly conclude that the most foolish man that day in A.D. 50 at Mars' Hill was Dionysius, who believed on Christ prior to any investigation, and that the most intelligent men were the scoffers and those who determined to hear Paul again on some subsequent occasion!

Our Witness Must Not Bring Reproach to the Gospel

None of this is intended to suggest that the apostles regarded their hearers as less or other than men made in the image of God with rational minds capable of comprehending the basic facts of the gospel message. Paul himself, even though he claims that he neither received the gospel from men nor was he taught it by men but, to the contrary, that he received it through revelation from Christ Himself, did not *first* hear of Christ on the Damascus road. He knew all too well the basic content of the Christian message but controlled as he was by an apostate "philosophy of fact," the data received *his* apostate interpretation. What he received on the Damascus road from Christ was the *Spirit's* interpretation of the data which was a corrective to his prior apostate one. Consequently, when the Christian witnesses to the truth claims of Christ, he should speak the truth in love, with great compassion and patience. I think it is highly significant that he, the same apostle who penned those terrible words of condemnation against the nations in Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 1, when addressing the Areopagus in Acts 17 was polite and cordial, studiously avoiding harshness lest he and not the cross be the offense to his audience. In other words, even though the Christian witness, on the basis of exegetical, theological, and historical considerations, recognizes man's depravity and inability and knows that he must speak authoritatively to him, he should never regard the man who gives him a hearing with arrogant disdain and undeserving of kindness and respect. He should seek to be as articulate and as cordial as he possibly can be, in order that his witness, regardless of the outcome, not bring reproach to Christ.

We have completed our survey of the Christian faith. From beginning to end, it is a supernatural faith, with every part integrally related to the whole. It should be clear by now that the Christian apologist must concern himself with a defense, not merely of some few facts abstracted from the rest (for to do so will surely result in a distortion of Christian theism as a whole system) but of Christian theism as a world-and-life-view. As an ambassador of the Lord Christ, he must not reduce his King's word by one iota. He is responsible to know, love, and defend uncompromisingly the whole. All his apologetic efforts for his King should be consistent with the entire message of his King to him.

* * * * *

In this chapter I have written as a Reformed and, I believe, as a biblical Christian. If I have properly interpreted the Scriptures, I have said enough to indicate that the Christian faith is more than adherence to a few "fundamentals." It is more than a creed recited on the Lord's day. It is more than a code of morality. It actually is a world-and-life-view, a *Weltanschauung*. Although he may not realize it, the Christian through his faith has been *given a theory of being or reality* (ontology) and *a theory of knowing* (epistemology). I want to elucidate these now more fully in order to bring out their implications for Christian apologetics.

A Christian Theory of Being

Metaphysics, or ontology, is concerned with the nature of being or reality. “Being” is commonly defined in philosophy as that which has actuality, either materially or ideally. A materialist then is one who regards matter (and its motions) as constituting the universe and all phenomena (including those of mind) and as due to material agencies. Lucretius (96–55 B.C.) and Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) would be examples. An idealist, metaphysically speaking, is one who views all of reality as of the essence of idea or spirit. Hegel (1770–1831) is perhaps the classic example of pure idealism, maintaining that “thought and being are one.” Now it may not seem at first glance that the materialist and idealist have anything metaphysically in common, but only a little reflection will disclose that *they are both monists*, that is, they both have by a reductionistic process concluded that there is only *one ultimate reality*.

No God or Creation in Classical Greek Thought

Although Greek philosophers certainly spoke of both corporeal and noncorporeal reality, there is a sense in which all Greek philosophical thought was both *reductionistic* and *monistic*, for *nowhere in Greek philosophical thought was there the remotest idea of creation as the Bible knows it*. Gordon Clark writes:

That the Ionians should have attempted an explanation of the universe in terms of bodies seems to be a natural way for philosophy to begin. It is so in accord with common sense that the very first thinkers cannot be expected to have thought of any other possibility. But in addition to this individual psychology there was a cultural isolation that hid from them a *radically different type of view*. This cultural isolation continued for many centuries and was not restricted to the early Ionian age. Even those of their successors who eventually came to the notion of an incorporeal reality never thought of reducing the multiplicity of the universe to *the creative act of an almighty, personal God. This Hebraic concept was first introduced into Greco–Roman civilization by the spread of Christianity*. Of course, the Greeks thought of gods, in fact, Thales is reported to have said that all things are full of gods; but these gods, sometimes scientifically but unhistorically interpreted as personifications of natural powers, were corporeal beings who like other hylozoistic persons had come into existence through natural processes. They were not eternal, but had been born; they could be overthrown and possibly destroyed. *The idea of Almighty God was entirely foreign to the Greeks. All the more so was the concept of creation*. That an Almighty God could call the world into being from nothing was not a thesis that they rejected; *it was something they had never thought of. Creation is an idea found only in Hebrew thought*. Even as late as Lucretius, when he denies that anything has arisen by divine power, there is no indication that anyone in the pagan world had heard of creation. Lucretius merely means that the gods of the Greeks and Romans produce no effects in this world. Of course, Lucretius would have repudiated the Hebrew idea of creation if he had known of it; the point is simply that *the pagans had never thought of such an idea*. (*Thales to Dewey*, pp. 14–15, emphasis supplied; cf. also Van Til, *Common Grace*, p. 6)¹⁰

Consequently, even when Greek philosophers postulated eternal ideas (Plato) as that which gave meaning (form to matter, or Pure Being or Actuality (Aristotle) as that toward which all Becoming “yearns” or moves, in keeping with the form–matter scheme which controlled Greek thought, it is apparent that both the “form” and the “matter” were correlative to each other, both being eternal, with the form dependent upon the matter in

¹⁰ The failure of Greek philosophical thought to entertain the concept of creation as an option among others to explain existence does not disprove Romans 1:19–20. To the contrary, it proves Romans 1:18—“men who suppress the truth”—and 1:21–23—“they became vain in their thinking, and their foolish heart was darkened, professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image like corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”

order to “be” just as much as the matter is dependent upon the form in order to “be.” Both form and matter, correlative to each other, were on the same continuum of “being”; hence emerged the monistic view of reality in Greek thought. Today, through Greek influence, it has become customary to speak of “being in general” prior to any differentiations within being itself.

The Christian Starts with God

The Christian, however, will not talk about being in general, as if somehow all reality is on the same scale of being, and only afterwards, make a distinction between God and the universe. The Christian denies the ontological correlativity between Creator and creation. This is because fundamental to the Christian theory of reality is the Creator–creature distinction. God is Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. His name is “I AM THAT I AM.” He is in no sense dependent for anything upon His created universe (Ps. 50:10–12; Acts 17:25). The universe and man, to the contrary, are created, finite, continually dependent upon God’s “upholding” powers (Heb. 1:3). Therefore, properly to conceive of reality, the Christian thinks in terms of God’s *uncreated being* and then the *created being* of all other things. Van Til explains this point this way:

Such then... is the Christian conception of being... We may speak of it as a two layer theory of reality. When men ask us, What is, according to your notion, the nature of reality or being?, we shall have to say that we cannot give an answer unless we are permitted to split the question. For us God’s being is ultimate, while created being is, in the nature of the case, derivative. (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 46)

A Christian Theory of Knowing

Just as there are two levels of being—God’s being as ultimate and absolute, and created being as derivative and dependent, so also there are two knowing subjects—God, whose knowledge is ultimate and absolute, and man, whose knowledge is derivative and dependent.

1. God’s Knowledge

God’s knowledge of Himself and of all other things is absolutely comprehensive, self-contained, and, if I may say it this way, eternally intuited. This means that God has never learned anything, simply because He has *always* known everything there is to know. God has never investigated any fact to learn about it, simply because there is no fact independent of Him. God has never learned anything as the result of investigation, the discursive process, or research. God has never had to recall anything, simply because He knows all things and has never forgotten anything.

God’s knowledge is co-extensive with all that is. All created things fall within the compass of God’s knowledge because nothing in this universe is outside of the plan and will of God. It is God’s plan, and God’s will that executes the plan, that makes all things what they are. This means that God knew all created things in all possible and actual relationships even prior to their creation, and that it is because of His plan that all things became finally and actually what they are (cf. 1 Sam. 2:3; 16:7; 23:10–13; 1 Chron. 28:9; Ps. 139:1–4; 147:4; Isa. 19:15; 40:27–28; 42:9; Jer. 17:10; Acts 2:23; 4:24–28; Rom. 9:16; 11:33; Eph. 1:11; Phil. 2:13).

As an epistemological axiom, unless there is comprehensive knowledge of all things somewhere there can be no knowledge anywhere. This is because all knowledge data are inextricably interrelated. For the finite knower to begin from himself alone with any datum

and seek to understand it comprehensively must inevitably lead him to other data, but being finite he cannot examine any datum comprehensively or all possible relationships of that one datum, not to mention all the other data in the universe. Furthermore, there is no way that he can be assured that the next datum he might have examined at the point at which he left off in his finiteness would have accorded with all that he had concluded to that point or would not have required him to reevaluate his entire enterprise to that point. Thus, beginning with himself, the finite knower is incapable of knowing anything for sure. *The only way men can escape the force of this fact is to avoid the entire question of epistemology.* The Christian, however, understands that because there is comprehensive knowledge with God, real and true knowledge is possible for man (of course, never exhaustively) since God, who does know all the data in all their infinite relationships and therefore possesses true knowledge, is in the position to impart any portion of that true knowledge He so desires univocally to man, and in fact He did so impart such univocal knowledge in Scripture. Of course, men must be humble enough to receive such assistance from God, which necessitates their willingness to admit to their own creatureliness and finiteness, and which necessitates fallen men to set new goals for themselves. Our exegesis earlier demonstrated, of course, that fallen men, apart from the gracious operation of God's Spirit in their hearts, are unable and unwilling to do this. They prefer either ignorance or admission of their inability to justify any knowledge datum over true but creaturely knowledge.

2. Man's Knowledge

As we have noted, God created the universe, and has continually governed it according to His plan. Every fact in the universe is what it is, therefore, by virtue of God's prior knowledge. Every fact in the universe has meaning (may I say an interpretation?) by virtue of its place in the unifying plan of God. No fact in the universe exists independently of God. *There is not one non-theistic fact in the universe.*¹¹ If one takes seriously the Christian theism of Scripture, for him there can be no such thing as a "brute," that is, uninterpreted fact anywhere in the universe. Even the most insignificant single fact reveals God as its Creator as truly as the most obvious one does Man himself, physically, rationally, reveals God. If one wonders *how* it is that the God of Christian theism has interpreted every fact of the universe, that is, how it is that He has placed a meaning on them, I would reply, first, by *the creative act itself*: He "interpreted" this fact a "star" by creative act; He "interpreted" that fact a "bird" by creative act; second, by *subsequent special revelation*: He created light and called it "day" (Gen. 1:5); He created an expanse and called it "heaven" (Gen. 1:8); He created a tree and called it "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9, 17). It would follow then that if a man learns a fact to any degree, his knowledge of that fact, to the degree he knows it at all, would have to be in accord with the prior divine interpretation of it. If his interpretation of that fact in no way agreed with God's interpretation, then his "knowledge" would be false. In other words, the word of the God of Scripture is the final and ultimate "court of appeal" in every area of human existence—epistemologically, metaphysically, axiologically.¹²

¹¹ I did not say, it should be carefully noted, "no anti-Christian fact." Certainly there are facts in the universe that stand in the will of God in opposition to Christ. But they have their being as "anti" only in relation to Christ. Cf. G. Berkouwer's discussion of the Antichrist in this same connection in his volume on *Sin*, pp. 72–74.

¹² It is on this basis that the Christian apologist can and should argue that *only* the Christian faith *alone* is capable of justifying knowledge.

Implications of God's Knowledge

God's knowledge then is prior and necessary as analytical knowledge to man's knowledge, which is secondary and derivative as synthetic knowledge. This means, as Van Til would say, that true human knowledge is never *creatively constructive*; that is, man never discovers and "rationalizes" a bit of God's universe for the first time. Rather, by God's enabling gifts, man is (not unseldom) permitted to discover a portion of God's prior knowledge in the created universe. Man's knowledge, if true, then is *receptively reconstructive*; that is, as man as a knowing creature learns, he is, to the degree he truly learns, "thinking God's thoughts univocally after Him."

Though I have only in broad outline sketched here the Christian theory of being and knowing, the implications are truly revolutionary for all human "sciences." In the search for meaning in his universe, the scientist, physical, behavioral, or otherwise, can only claim to know a fact if he knows that fact as God has interpreted that fact previously. And, among other things, God knows the facts with which the human sciences work to be created facts which in turn are part of a larger "plan." No fact, then, is *truly* known¹³ unless its createdness (as part of a divine plan) is owned by the scientist. Furthermore, to be truly scientific (i.e., willing to learn), the scientist will consult the Word of God in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to learn what are the limitations of possibility before he makes a final pronouncement in the area of the philosophy of science. He will assume no position which will rule out the occurrence of miracles. In brief, he, as a scientist, will worship and serve the Creator rather than the creature with his crafts and arts.

The Christian theory of being and knowing, drawn out by implication from the theism of Scripture and only outlined here, is "Copernican" in all its implications for traditional apologetic methodology. These implications will be set forth in the next two chapters, in the former (chapter 3) being illustrated from interaction with an actual apologetic situation, in the latter (chapter 4) being set forth more theoretically in the advocacy of a presuppositional methodology.

¹³ That is, as it ought to be known.

Chapter 3

Warfield: A Case Study

In Traditional Apologetic Methodology

In 1893 Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield, professor of didactic and polemic theology at Princeton Theological Seminary (1887 to 1921), published an article in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* under the title “The Real Problem of Inspiration.”¹ At that particular time many theologians and ministers were being so impressed by the “assured results” of biblical criticism that they were relinquishing or, what amounted to the same thing, reinterpreting the church doctrine of inspiration. Warfield, convinced that the Bible was inspired of God, felt it necessary to react in writing to this movement within the Church away from the Church’s earlier doctrine. He felt it necessary to point up all that was involved in such an attitude. He thought it imperative to emphasize what “the real problem of inspiration” is.

As he viewed “the exact state of the case” as it stood then in his day, Warfield saw “a special school of Old Testament criticism, which has, for some years, been gaining somewhat widespread acceptance of its results, [which] has begun to proclaim that these results having been accepted, a ‘changed view of the Bible’ follows which implies a reconstructed doctrine of inspiration, and, indeed, also a whole new theology” (p. 170). While not averse to “all legitimate criticism of the Church’s doctrine of inspiration, Warfield remained unconvinced by the “ever-enlarging mass of evidence” that one should forsake the Church’s doctrine. He saw implications in such a rejection of the Church’s doctrine that were far-reaching and dangerous in the extreme. In his article Warfield endeavors to articulate the implications in relinquishing the doctrine of inspiration as the Church historically had conceived it. This particular article affords us not only illustration of the apologetic method of Warfield, but also a place to begin in setting forth what I believe to be a more biblical apologetic method.

Warfield’s Argument for Inspiration

Warfield begins by precisely stating the church doctrine of inspiration: “The Church...has held from the beginning that the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed upon them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will...the Spirit’s superintendence extends to the choice of the words by the human authors (verbal inspiration), and preserves its product from everything inconsistent with a divine authorship—thus securing, among other things, that entire truthfulness which is everywhere presupposed in and asserted for Scripture by the Biblical writers (inerrancy)” (p. 173).²

Along with other means of commending this position, Warfield writes, “The primary ground on which it has been held by the church as the true doctrine is that it is the doctrine of

¹ His article was reprinted in 1948 by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, a collection of eight articles by Warfield on the Bible’s special place in and value for Christian theology; all quotations and pagination are from this volume.

² It should be noted here that Warfield is defining inspiration, not in the popular sense in which it is employed today to refer to the Bible as a body of revelation, but in the technical sense, that is, the teaching that the biblical writers as they wrote the Scriptures, were so influenced by the Holy Spirit that their completed literary pieces were *preserved from all error* in expressing God’s mind and will. This was the doctrine which biblical criticism was *then* assailing. In other words, biblical critics, at least many of them, were not denying the Bible as “divine revelation”; they did deny that the Bible was scientifically accurate—inerrant—in its every detail.

the Biblical writers themselves, and has therefore the whole mass of evidence for it which goes to show that the Biblical writers are trustworthy as doctrinal guides” (p. 173). (Note in this remark the word “primary.”) Warfield saw the evidence upon which the Church’s doctrine is based as twofold: “First, there is the exegetical evidence that the doctrine held and taught by the Church is the doctrine held and taught by the Biblical writers themselves. And secondly, there is the whole mass of evidence—internal and external, objective and subjective, historical and philosophical, human and divine—which goes to show that the Biblical writers are trustworthy as doctrinal guides. If they are trustworthy teachers of doctrine and if they held and taught this doctrine, then this doctrine is true [*sic*] and is to be accepted and acted upon as true by us all” (p. 174). If criticism is to overthrow the church doctrine, Warfield continues, “It must either show that this doctrine is not the doctrine of the Biblical writers, or else it must show that the Biblical writers are not trustworthy as doctrinal guides” (p. 174). From these two quotations it is clear that Warfield is thinking deductively here. The logic of his argument may be constructed as follows:

Major premise: “The doctrinal teaching of the Bible writers is trustworthy.” (Based on a great “mass of evidence”)

Minor premise: “The doctrinal teaching of the church on inspiration is the doctrinal teaching of the Bible writers.” (Based on exegetical evidence)

Conclusion: “The doctrinal teaching of the Church on inspiration is true.”

If this syllogistic construction is a fair and accurate portrayal of Warfield’s position, it would seem that his argument is built up inductively from exegetical and other kinds of “evidence” to the invalid³ deduction that the church doctrine that the Bible is and inspired body of literature is true. That it is a fair and accurate construction would appear to be verified by the fact that again and again Warfield affirms in almost identical words to the words quoted above that *the truth of the Church’s doctrine is based upon the evidence for the trustworthiness of the biblical writers as teachers of doctrine*. Consider the following quotations from this long article:

The doctrine of verbal inspiration is based on the broad foundation of the carefully ascertained *doctrine* of the Scripture writers on the subject. (p. 179; before one charges Warfield with what looks to be circular reasoning, one should observe the two words “carefully ascertained” and patiently hear him out.)

If criticism has made such discoveries as to necessitate the abandonment of the doctrine of plenary inspiration, it is not enough to say that we are compelled to abandon only a “particular theory of inspiration,” though that is true enough. We must go on to say that that “particular theory of inspiration” is the theory of the apostles and of the Lord, and that in abandoning *it* we are abandoning them as our doctrinal teachers and guides...This real issue is to be kept clearly before us, and faced courageously. Nothing is gained by closing our eyes to the seriousness of the problem which we are confronting. Stated plainly it is just this: Are the New Testament writers trustworthy guides in doctrine? Or are we at liberty to reject their authority and frame contrary doctrines for ourselves. (p. 180; in this quotation Warfield includes the phrase “and of the Lord.” Of course, the only basis upon which we know what Jesus taught about the Bible is the stated doctrine of the biblical writers. Hence

³ Warfield’s deduction is invalid because of the “fallacy of equivocation” in the term “trustworthy.” He assumes that “trustworthy” means “true. If he, by “trustworthy” means “true,” then he need go no further than the major premise as stated and simply argue for the truthfulness of all of Christianity on the basis of a great “mass of evidence.” He does appear to mean this, hence his argument may be regarded as a form of natural theology, as we shall demonstrate fully below.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Warfield is *consistent* when he sees the real issue as the trustworthiness of the biblical *writers* as guides in doctrine.)

...the evidence for the truth of the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of Scripture is just the whole body of evidence which goes to show that the apostles are trustworthy teachers of doctrine. (p. 208)

Language is sometimes made use of which would seem to imply that the amount or weight of the evidence offered for the truth of the doctrine that the Scriptures are the Word of God in such a sense that their words deliver the truth of God without error, is small. It is on the contrary just *the whole body of evidence which goes to prove the writers of the New Testament to be trustworthy as deliverers of doctrine*. It is just the same evidence in amount and weight which is adduced in favor of any other Biblical doctrine. It is the same weight and amount of evidence precisely which is adducible for the truth of the doctrines of the Incarnation, of the Trinity, of the Divinity of Christ, of Justification by Faith, of Regeneration by the Holy Spirit, of the Resurrection of the Body, of Life Everlasting...however explicitly or incidentally, however frequently or rarely, however emphatically or allusively, they may be taught, *when exegesis has once done its work and shown that they are taught by the Biblical writers, all these doctrines stand as supported by the same weight and amount of evidence—the evidence of the trustworthiness of the Biblical writers as teachers of doctrine*. (pp. 208–209, emphasis supplied)

The question is not *how* they teach a doctrine, but *do* they teach it, and when that question is once settled affirmatively, the weight of evidence that commends this doctrine to us as true is the same in every case; and that is *the whole body of evidence which goes to show that the Biblical writers are trustworthy as teachers of doctrine*. (p. 209, emphasis supplied)

The Biblical doctrine of inspiration... has in its favor just this whole weight and amount of evidence... it cannot rationally be rejected save on the ground of evidence which will outweigh *the whole body of evidence which goes to authenticate the Biblical writers as trustworthy witnesses to and teachers of doctrine*. (pp. 209–210, emphasis supplied)

Let it not be said... we found the whole Christian system upon the doctrine of plenary inspiration. We found the whole Christian system on the doctrine of plenary inspiration as little as we found it upon the doctrine of angelic existences. Were there no such thing as inspiration, Christianity would be true, and all its essents doctrines would be credibly witnessed to us in the generally trustworthy reports of the teaching of our Lord and of His authoritative agents in founding the Church, preserved in the writings of the apostles and their first followers, and in the historical witness of the living Church. Inspiration is not the most fundamental of the Church doctrines, nor even the first thing we prove about the Scriptures. It is the last and crowning fact as to the Scriptures. *These we first prove authentic, historically credible, generally trustworthy, before we prove them inspired*. (p. 210, emphasis supplied)

We are in entire sympathy in this matter... with the protest which Dr. Marcus Dods raised in his famous address at the meeting of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches at London, against representing that “the infallibility of the Bible is the ground of the whole Christian faith.” We judge with him that it is very important indeed that such a misapprehension, if it is anywhere current, should be corrected... We do not think that the doctrine of plenary inspiration is the ground of Christian faith, but if it was held and taught by the New Testament writers, we think it an element in the Christian faith... that appeals to our acceptance on precisely the same ground as every other element of the faith, viz., *on the ground of our recognition of the writers of the New Testament as trustworthy witnesses to doctrine*... (pp. 211–212)

...on the emergence of the exegetical fact that the Scriptures of the New Testament teach this doctrine [inspiration], *the amount and weight of evidence for its truth must be allowed to be the whole amount and weight of the evidence that the writers of the New Testament are trustworthy as teachers of doctrine*. It is not on some shadowy and doubtful evidence that the doctrine is based—...but first on the confidence which we have in the writers of the New

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

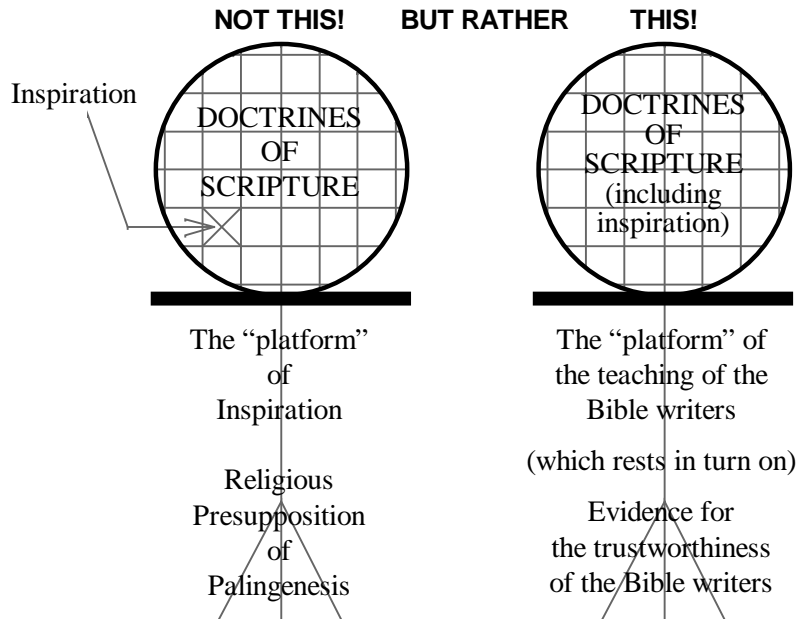
Testament as doctrinal guides, and ultimately [sic!] *on whatever evidence of whatever kind and force exists to justify that confidence.* (p. 214, emphasis supplied)

From these quotations it is transparently obvious that Warfield fervently working to avoid building up a view of inspiration that is open to the charge of committing the logical fallacy of “begging the question.” It is more than clear that Warfield is willing to build up support for the doctrine of inspiration inductively. As we previously indicated, it is clear that his faith in the truthfulness not only of inspiration but also of *all* of the doctrines of the Christian religion, he would have us believe, is grounded in the *evidence* for the trustworthiness of the biblical writers. His view may be illustrated in the diagram on the following page.

Warfield’s Larger View of Apologetics

Nowhere in this particular article does Warfield go into the specifics of the evidence for the trustworthiness of the biblical writers. In fact, he distinctly declares: “...our present purpose is not to draw out the full value of the testimony” (p. 214), But taking a cue from his reference to “the whole mass of evidence—internal and external, objective and subjective, philosophical and philosophical, human and divine—which goes to show that the Biblical writers are trustworthy as doctrinal guides” (p. 174), we—may safely conclude that it includes all the results of the sciences involved, as Warfield comprehends them, in the five subdivisions of apologetics set forth in his article, “Apologetics,” in *The New Schaff–Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. It would be helpful to note Warfield’s remarks on these subdivisions:

When apologetics has placed these great facts in our hands—God, religion, revelation,



Christianity, the Bible—and not till then [!!] are we prepared to go on and explicate the knowledge of God thus brought to us, trace the history of its workings in the world, systematize it, and propagate it in the world.

The primary subdivisions of apologetics are therefore five, unless for convenience of treatment it is preferred to sink the third into its most closely related fellow. 1. The first,

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

which may perhaps be called philosophical apologetics, undertakes the establishment of the being of God, as a personal spirit, the Creator, preserver, and governor of all things. To it belongs the great problem of theism, with the involved discussion of the antitheistic theories. 2. The second, which may perhaps be called psychological apologetics, undertakes the establishments of the religious nature of man and the validity of his religious sense. It involves the discussion alike of the psychology, the philosophy, and the phenomenology of religion, and therefore includes what is loosely called “comparative religion” or the “history of religions.” 3. To the third [Warfield does not give a title to this subdivision. I suggest from his description “theistical apologetics”] falls the establishment of the reality of the; supernatural factor in history, with the involved determination of the actual relations in which God stands to his world, and the method of his government of his rational creatures, and especially his mode of making himself known to them. It issues in the establishment of the fact of revelation as the condition of all knowledge of God, who as a personal Spirit can be known only so far as he expresses himself—so that theology differs from all other sciences in that its object is not at the disposal of the subject, but vice versa. 4. The fourth, which may be called historical apologetics, undertakes to establish the divine origin of Christianity as the religion of revelation in the special sense of that word. It discusses all the topics which naturally fall under the popular caption of the “evidences of Christianity.” 5. The fifth, which may be called bibliological apologetics, undertakes to establish the trustworthiness of the Christian Scriptures as the documentation of the revelation of God for the redemption of sinners. It is engaged especially with such topics as the divine origin of the Scriptures; the methods of the divine operation in their origination; their place in the series of redemptive acts of God, and in the process of revelation; the nature, mode, and effect of inspiration; and the like. (I, 236)

It might seem at first that only the fifth (perhaps too the fourth) subdivision relates to the specific question that we have before us, namely, the evidence for the trustworthiness of the New Testament (or biblical) writers as teachers of doctrine. But it must be noted that the biblical writers teach at *least something* about each of these five broad subdivisions, and consequently? evidence from each of these areas could call them into question as writers of true doctrine. Consequently, I submit that the evidence from all these areas must be brought to bear on the question of the writers’ trustworthiness as teachers of doctrine if one determines to follow Warfield in the method outlined in the original article under discussion. Warfield himself appears to affirm this when, in his “Introductory Note” to Beattie’s *Apologetics* in opposition to Kuyper’s apologetic method, he writes (pp. 21–24):

He [Dr. Kuyper] has written an *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, and in it he gives a place to Apologetics among the other disciplines. But how subordinate a place! And in what a curtailed form! Hidden away as a subdivision of a subdivision of what Dr. Kuyper calls the “Dogmatological Group” of disciplines (which corresponds roughly to what most encyclopaedists call “Systematic Theology”), one has to search for it before he finds it, and when he finds it, he discovers that its function is confined closely, we might almost say jealously, to the narrow task of defending developed Christianity against philosophy, falsely so called. After the contents of Christianity have been set forth thetically in Dogmatics and Ethics, it finds itself, it seems, in a three-fold conflict. This is waged with a pseudo-Christianity, a pseudo-religion, and a pseudo-philosophy. Three antithetic dogmatological disciplines are therefore requisite—Polemics, Elenctics and Apologetics, corresponding, respectively, to heterodoxy, paganism, philosophy. The least of these is Apologetics, which concerns itself only with the distinctively philosophical assault on Christianity. Meanwhile, as for Christianity itself, it has remained up to this point—let us say it frankly—the great Assumption. The work of the exegete, the historian, the systematist, has all hung, so to speak, in the air; not until all their labor is accomplished do they pause to wipe their streaming brows and ask whether they have been dealing with realities, or perchance with fancies only.

Naturally it is not thus that Kuyper represents it to himself. He supposes that all these workers have throughout wrought in faith. But he seems not quite able to conceal from

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

himself that they have not justified that faith, and that some may think their procedure itself, therefore unjustified, if not unjustifiable. He distributes the departments of theological science into four groups, corresponding roughly with the Exegetical, Historical, Systematic and Practical disciplines which the majority of encyclopaedists erect, although for reasons of his own, very interestingly set forth, he prefers to call them, respectively, the Bibliological, Ecclesiological, Dogmatological and Diaconiological groups of disciplines. Now, when he comes to discuss the contents of these groups of disciplines in detail, he betrays a feeling that something is lacking at the beginning. "Before dealing separately with the four groups of departments of study into which theology is divided," he says [vol. III, p. 4f.], "we must give a brief resumé from the second part of this *Encyclopaedia*, of how the subject arrives at the first group. Logical order demands that the first group bring you to the point where the second begins, that the second open the way for the third, and that the third introduce you to the fourth. But no other precedes the first group and it is accordingly in place here to indicate how we arrive at the first group." Just so, surely!

Dr. Kuyper proceeds to point out that the subject of theology is the human consciousness; that in this consciousness there is im planted a *sensus divinitatis*, a *semen religionis*, which impels it to seek after the knowledge of God; that in the sinner this action is renewed and quickened by the palingenesis, through which the subject is opened for the reception of the special revelation of God made first by deed, culminating in the Incarnation, and then by word, centering in the Scriptures. Thus, by the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*, the subject is put in possession of the revelation of God embodied in the Scriptures, and is able to proceed to explicate its content through the several disciplines of theological science. Now, what is it that Mr. Kuyper has done here except outline a very considerable—though certainly not a complete—Apologetics, which must precede and prepare the way for the "Bibliological Group" [i.e., the first] of theological departments? We must, it seems, vindicate the existence of a *sensus divinitatis* in man capable of producing a natural theology independently of special revelation [*sic!*]; and then the reality of a special revelation in deed and word; and as well, the reality of a super-natural preparation of the heart of man to receive it; before we can proceed to the study of theology at all, as Dr. Kuyper has outlined it. With these things at least we must, then, confessedly, reckon at the outset; and to reckon with these things is to enter deeply into Apologetics.

As the case really stands, we—must say more. Despite the attractiveness of Dr. Kuyper's distlibution of the departments of theological science, we cannot think it an improvement upon the ordinary schema. It appears to us a mistake to derive, as he does, the *principium divisionis* from the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures, after all, are not the object theology, but only its source; and the *principium divisionis* in this science, too, must be taken, as Dr. Kuyper himself argues from the object. Now, the object of theology, as Dr. Kuyper has often justly insisted, is the ectypal knowledge of God. This knowledge of God is deposited for us in the Scriptures, and must needs be drawn out of them—hence "Exegetical Theology." It has been derived from the Scriptures by divers portions and in divers manners, for the life of the Church through the ages, and its gradual assimilation must needs be traced in its effects on the life of the Christian world—hence "Historical Theology." It is capable of statement in a systematized thetical form—hence "Systematic Theology." And, so drawn out from Scripture, so assimilated in the Church's growth, so organized into a system, it is made available for life—hence "Practical Theology." But certainly, before we draw it from the Scriptures [*sic!*], we must assure ourselves that there is a God to know. Thus, we inevitably work back to first principles. And in working thus back to first principles, we exhibit the indispensability of an "Apologetic Theology," which, of necessity, holds the place of the first among the five essential theological disciplines.

This long quotation from Warfield fairly bristles with interesting items for discussion. For instance, it would be very interesting to ask Warfield how he intends, without assuming the truthfulness of all that the Holy Scriptures affirm about the nature of God, the nature of man, and the relationships which have existed between them, to prove God's existence, to prove that man can know God, to prove that God has revealed Himself in the world, and to

prove that the God who has revealed Himself in the world has done so at the point of the Hebrew–Christian Scriptures, and *to do all this “before we draw these from the Scriptures.”* If men could do all this before they draw these facts from Scripture, it may be legitimately asked, would they need revelation at all? Logical consistency requires from Warfield a negative response, but then, is such a response really Christian? And how does the logically necessary negative response here square with his view, noted earlier, that *revelation* is “the condition of all knowledge of God, who as a personal Spirit can be known only so far as he expresses himself” (“Apologetics,” *The New Schaff–Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, I, 236)? There certainly appear to be irreconcilable contradictions in Warfield’s thoughts on this matter. But our purpose in quoting Warfield’s discussion of Kuyper’s apologetic, we must remind ourselves, is not at this point to ask Warfield questions. It is to indicate (1) the place Warfield feels apologetics must assume *before* the four traditional “theological groups” have validity, and (2) the immense amount of data which must be sifted before one can be assured that the New Testament writers are trustworthy teachers of doctrine. All this too *before we can propagate our knowledge of God in the world!*

Warfield on Christian Certainty

Warfield holds that part of the data which validate the trustworthiness of the biblical writers is the teaching of Jesus Christ Himself:

...to say that the amount and weight of the evidence of the truth of the Biblical doctrine of inspiration is measured by the amount and weight of the evidence for the *general credibility and trustworthiness of the New Testament writers as witnesses to doctrine*, is an understatement rather than an overstatement the matter. For if we trust them at all we will trust them in the account they give of the person and in the report they give of the teaching of Christ; whereupon, as they report Him as teaching the same doctrine of Scripture that they teach, we are brought face to face with *divine testimony* to this doctrine of inspiration. (pp. 212–213, emphasis supplied)

But how do we know that we meet with divine testimony when we are confronted with Christ’s teaching? Certainly, as Warfield affirms, “in the account [the New Testament writers] give of the person and in the report they give of the teaching of Christ.” But the trustworthiness, according to Warfield, of their testimony concerning Christ must be established upon *other grounds* than the mere fact that they report His teachings on Scripture if one is to escape the charge of reasoning in a circle. Such evidential verification Warfield desperately wants to establish. But this he can never do! Gordon H. Clark declares that “secular assumptions forbid [the secularist] to take the veracity of apostles on faith. It must be proved independently for every verse. This secular process never arrives validly at the veracity of [apostles]: in fact, it never arrives validly at anything” (*Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, p. 118). Clark is correct, of course; at best, the inductive argument could only indicate probability.

Suppose, however, that Warfield established upon these “other grounds” that the testimony of the biblical writers is reliable with respect to the person and work of Christ and thus it cannot be denied that Christ is divine, and as deity He authenticates the Scriptures. *Why*, then, does Warfield, indeed, *how* can Warfield speak of the evidence, when finally all in and catalogued (and remember, this includes the testimony of the divine Son of God), as “probable” evidence:

We do not adopt the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of Scripture on sentimental grounds, nor even, as we have already had occasion to remark on a *priori* or general grounds of whatever kind. We adopt it specifically because it is taught us as truth by Christ and His

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

apostles, in the Scriptural record of their teaching, and the evidence for its truth is, therefore, as we have already pointed out, precisely that evidence in weight and amount, which vindicates for us the trustworthiness of Christ and His apostles as teachers of doctrine. Of course, this evidence is not in the strict logical sense “demonstrative”; it is “probable” evidence. It therefore leaves open the metaphysical possibility of its being mistaken... we have not attained through “probable” evidence apodeictic certainty of the Bible’s infallibility. But neither is the reality of the alleged phenomena inconsistent with the Bible’s doctrine, to be allowed without sufficient evidence. (pp. 218–219)

Two points are in order here. First, in this quotation, Warfield, it is true, is discussing primarily the evidence for the doctrine of *inspiration*. He affirms that though “it is about as great in amount and weight as ‘probable’ evidence can be made” (and recall that he includes in the whole mass of evidence that points to and validates inspiration the *divine* evidence), it is nonetheless “probable evidence,” yielding no apodeictic, incontestable certainty. He admits the evidence for inspiration then is not absolutely certain. But has Warfield not also declared (pp. 208–209, 212) that *all of the doctrines of Scripture* are supported by the same evidence as that which supports the doctrine of inspiration? Does it not follow then that none of the doctrines of Scripture are certain, at least absolutely, that at best the evidence for their truthfulness is only probable? Now, if Warfield, following Kuyper and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (I/v), should appeal to “the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts” for the final and full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Scriptures, I would point out that the doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* would be in his view, like all the other doctrines of Scripture, on the basis of the “evidence,” only *probable* and not certain!

Second, what does Warfield do with “alleged phenomena inconsistent with the Bible’s doctrine” to which he alludes? As one reads Warfield, one cannot help but feel that Warfield is operating, although inconsistently, on an unflinching presupposition that the Bible is self-attesting divine or at least divinely attested to on some grounds not open to doubt, and therefore infallible, for he will not admit that any single fact has ever been advanced to contradict the biblical doctrine, in spite of the fact that many scholars affirm otherwise:

If then we ask what we are to do with the numerous phenomena of Scripture inconsistent with verbal inspiration, which, so is alleged, “criticism” has brought to light, we must reply: Challenge them in the name of the New Testament doctrine, and ask for their credentials. They have no credentials that can stand before that challenge. No single error has as yet been demonstrated to occur in the Scriptures as given by God to His Church. (p. 225)

What precisely is the nature then of these allegedly contradictory phenomena? Warfield views them simply as difficulties:

...any objections brought against the doctrine [of inspiration] from other spheres of inquiry are inoperative; it being a settled logical principle that so long as the proper evidence by which a proposition is established remains unrefuted, all so-called objections brought against it pass out of the category of objections to its truth into the category of difficulties to be adjusted to it. (p. 174)

But why are they, for Warfield, only “difficulties” and not refuting objections? A moment ago I suggested that Warfield was operating with a presupposition throughout the writing of his article. Warfield unwittingly suggests as much, for try as he might to ground his view of inspiration in the “evidences,” try as he might to disguise or escape it, his insistence that no phenomenon can negate his view is due to a faith commitment to the “first principle” of our faith, namely, that God has revealed Himself inerrantly in Scripture. Apart

from such a presupposed “first principle,” Warfield is in no better position to distinguish between difficulties and proved errors than is the critic. He will not admit the presence of any proved errors, and of course as a Christian illumined by the Holy Spirit of God, he is correct in doing so; but apart from such a religious commitment (which Warfield does not want to admit, referring to the biblical doctrine simply as a “clue,” p. 225), on the grounds which he has assumed throughout his article he is, I feel, also unable to distinguish between difficulties and errors. For since he has provided no theory of inspiration which carries with it “apodeictic certainty,” on what grounds can he confidently affirm *a priori* that no phenomena are able to stand against his theory of inspiration (p. 225)? His critic, it seems to me may justifiably ask, “Dr. Warfield, how can you so confidently distinguish between ‘difficulties’ and ‘proven errors’ when I can’t?”

“Old Princeton”⁴ and Earlier Reformers

Our review of Warfield’s thought is completed. Warfield was a leading advocate for many years of what has come to be referred to as the “Old Princeton” apologetic. This method, as we have seen, seeks to build upon the basis of adequate evidence grounds for the validity of the Christian faith prior to personal commitment, making its appeal on terms acceptable to non-believers. Charles Hodge, the truly great Princeton theologian whose three-volume *Systematic Theology* still remains as a monument to American theological genius, espoused a similar view: “Reason must judge of the credibility of a revelation” (*Sys. Theol.*, I, 50); “Christians concede to reason the *judicium contradictionis*, that is, the prerogative of deciding whether a thing is possible or impossible” (*ibid.*, p. 51); “Reason must judge of the evidence of a revelation” as preparation for faith which is defined as “an intelligent reception of the truth on adequate grounds” (*ibid.*, p. 53); and finally, “the Scriptures recognize... the right of those to whom a revelation is addressed to judge [the] evidence” (*ibid.*, p. 54). We have noted the outcome of such a procedure: there is never anything more, at best, than *probable* evidence. Is this an adequate basis for faith? What will such faith be if not simply *the existential hope that one has made the right “leap”*? J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., may assert: “That the act of believing in any existing object or situation invokes an act of commitment over and above the purely cognitive processes, should be clear to one who is familiar with inductive logic. The data for inductive reasoning are never complete.” He may further declare that “there is no belief without some degree of commitment which goes beyond the sheer data on which the belief is thought to be based” (*Systematic Theology*, II, 173, 174). But this is a grave misrepresentation of the nature of biblical faith. Faith, when properly conceived, is Spirit-wrought whole-souled assent to Spirit-taught knowledge data (John 6:45) gained from self-attesting divine revelation. It contemns any degree of “commitment which goes beyond the sheer data.” It is not antithetical to knowledge; to the contrary, it *glories* in knowledge and insists that its basis be knowledge (Heb. 11:6). Biblical faith eschews a “leap” of any kind!

J. I. Packer, in his *‘Fundamentalism’ and the Word of God*, has correctly seen that “the nature of faith is to be certain. Any measure of doubt or uncertainty is not a degree of faith, but an assault upon it. Faith, therefore, must rest on something more sure than an inference of probability” (p. 117). Clark Pinnock may retort that “a probable argument is better than an improbable one” (“The Philosophy of Christian Evidences,” *Jerusalem and*

⁴ By “Old Princeton” I refer to Princeton Theological Seminary prior to 1929; in that year the Seminary was reorganized administratively to favor a religious syncretism and gradually ceased to be either orthodox or Reformed.

Athens, p. 423), but, as Van Til shows, apart from the truth of Christian theism, the world is a world in which Chance is ultimate and probability is meaningless. It is by and with this conception that the non-believer believes that he must live and move and have his being.

Clearly any view of probability which is based on the ultimacy of Chance cannot possibly contact reality in any way, for it can say nothing about the probability of any *particular* event, for all events proceed equally from the belly of Chance. Therefore, a “probable” argument for any particular event is of no more value than an improbable one, for both arguments are meaning less in terms of that one “event.” A probable argument is not better than an improbable one if the very idea of probability is without meaning. (*Jerusalem and Athens*, pp. 426–27)

Let no one conclude that I am not appreciative of Warfield’s unparalleled efforts to call men to commitment to the full inspiration and authority of Scripture, and in the sense that Warfield (and Hodge) reflects a faith that is not a blind faith but a faith that seeks to elucidate its grounds, a faith that militates against mysticism, all believers stand in his (and their) debt. Moreover, I deeply appreciate his powerful logic in demonstrating the rank inconsistency in those theologians who would speak in glowing terms of the “Master” and the “great Teacher” but who at the same time would pick and choose among His teachings and reject among other things His testimony to the inspiration, authority, historicity, and revelatory nature of the Old and New Testament Scriptures. On the other hand, as I have said, I feel no good is done—indeed, positive harm can only result—by developing a method of vindicating a theory of inspiration which, when done, has *reduced* all of the evidence, including Christ’s testimony, to only “probable” evidence and which by implication denies the depravity of the “natural man.” How much better to affirm the Christian Scriptures to be self-attesting, the Word of the self-attesting Christ, which comes to men with all the authority of the triune God behind it, and to elucidate an apologetic which is consistent with that first principle! Such an apologetic would be in line, it seems to me, with Scripture, with Calvin, the Reformed faith, and the Westminster Standards. Calvin writes:

It is necessary to attend to what I lately said, that our faith in doctrine is not established until we have a perfect conviction that God is its author. Hence, the highest proof of Scripture is uniformly taken from the character of him whose word it is. The prophets and apostles boast not their own acuteness, or any qualities which win credit to speakers, nor do they dwell on reasons; but they appeal to the sacred name of God, in order that the whole world may be compelled to submission. The next thing to be considered is, how it appears not probable merely, but certain, that the name of God is neither rashly nor cunningly pretended. If, then, we would consult most effectually for our consciences, and save them from being driven about in a whirl of uncertainty, from wavering, and even stumbling at the smallest obstacle, our conviction of the truth of Scripture must be derived from a higher source than human conjectures, judgments, or reasons; namely the secret testimony of the Spirit. It is true, indeed, that if we choose to proceed in the way of argument, it is easy to establish, by evidence of various kinds, that if there is a God in heaven, the Law, the Prophecies, and the Gospel, proceeded from him. Nay, although learned men, and men of the greatest talent, should take the opposite side, summoning and ostentatiously displaying all the powers of their genius in the discussion; if they are not possessed of shameless effrontery [But where does one find such men?], they will be compelled to confess that the Scripture exhibits clear evidence of its being spoken by God, and, consequently, of its containing his heavenly doctrine. We shall see a little farther on, that the volume of sacred Scripture very far surpasses all other writings. Nay, if we look at it with clear eyes and unbiased judgment [We cannot, of course, without divine aid.], it will forthwith present itself with a divine majesty which will subdue our presumptuous opposition, and force us to do it homage.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Still, however, it is preposterous to attempt, by discussion, to rear up a full faith in Scripture. True, were I called to contend with the craftiest despisers of God, I trust, though I am not possessed of the highest ability or eloquence, I should not find it difficult to stop their obstreperous mouths, I could, without much ado, put down the boastings which they mutter in corners, were anything to be gained by refuting their cavils. But, although we may maintain the sacred Word of God against gainsayers, it does not follow that we shall forthwith implant the certainty which faith requires in their hearts. Profane men think that religion rests only on opinion, and, therefore, that they may not believe foolishly, or on slight grounds desire and insist to have it proved by reason that Moses and the prophets were divinely inspired. But I answer, that the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely intrusted. This connection is most aptly expressed by Isaiah in these words, "My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from hence forth and forever" (Isa. lix. 21). Some worthy persons feel disconcerted, because, while the wicked murmur with impunity at the Word of God, they have not a clear proof at hand to silence them, forgetting that the Spirit is called an earnest and seal to confirm the faith of the godly, for this very reason, that, until he enlightens their minds, they are tossed to and fro in a sea of doubts.

Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture, that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit. Enlightened by him, we no longer believe, either on our own judgment or that of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but, in a way superior to human judgment, feel perfectly assured—as much so as if we beheld the divine image visibly impressed on it—that it came to us by the instrumentality of men, from the very mouth of God. We ask not for proofs or probabilities on which to rest our judgment, but we subject our intellect and judgment to it as too transcendent for us to estimate. This, however, we do, not in the manner in which some are wont to fasten on an unknown object, which, as soon as known, displeases, but because we have a thorough conviction that, in holding it, we hold unassailable truth; not like miserable men, whose minds are enslaved by superstition, but because we feel a divine energy living and breathing in it—an energy by which we are drawn and animated to obey it, willingly indeed, and knowingly, but more vividly and effectually than could be done by human will or knowledge. Hence, God most justly exclaims by the mouth of Isaiah, "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he" (Isa. xliii. 10).

Such, then, is a conviction which asks not for reasons; such a knowledge which accords with the highest reason, namely, knowledge in which the mind rests more firmly and securely than in any reasons; such in fine, the conviction which revelation from heaven alone can produce. I say nothing more than every believer experiences in himself, though my words fall far short of the reality I do not dwell on this subject at present, because we will return to it again: only let us now understand that the only true faith is that which the Spirit of God seals on our hearts. Nay, the modest and teachable reader will find a sufficient reason in the promise contained in Isaiah, that all the children of the renovated Church "shall be taught of the Lord" (Isaiah liv. 13). This singular privilege God bestows on his elect only, whom he separates from the rest of mankind. For what is the beginning of true doctrine but prompt alacrity to hear the Word of God? And God, by the mouth of Moses, thus demands to be heard: "It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart" (Deut. xxx. 12, 14). God having been pleased to reserve the treasure of intelligence for his children, no wonder that so much ignorance and stupidity is seen in the generality of mankind. In the generality, I include even those

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

specially chosen, until they are ingrafted into the body of the Church. Isaiah, moreover, while reminding us that the prophetic doctrine would prove incredible not only to strangers, but also to the Jews, who were desirous to be thought of the household of God, subjoins the reason, when he asks, "To whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Isaiah liii. 1.) If at any time, when we are troubled at the small number of those who believe, let us, on the other hand, call to mind, that none comprehend the mysteries of God save those to whom it is given. (Institutes, bk. I, chap. vii, para. 4–5; for Warfield's view of Calvin's doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*, cf. his work *Calvin and Augustine*, pp. 70–103; for Murray's view, cf. *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty*, pp. 43–51; for Berkouwer's view, cf. *Holy Scripture*, pp. 39–66)

In line with this affirmation, the Reformed churches have insisted with the *Westminster Confession of Faith*:

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts. (chap. I/iv–v)

Note that the church's testimony is (only) a *motivum credibilitatis* (i.e., a motivation for accepting biblical authority) *as it gives its witness to Scripture*. Note as well that the Scripture is said to carry with it its own divine *indicia* ("arguments") (cf. here to *Institutes*, bk. I, chap. viii). But note too that it is only by the work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness *by and with the indicia of the Word* in our hearts that full persuasion and assurance of its truth and authority are ever acknowledged. Alan Richardson states in his *Christian Apologetics* (S.C.M., 1947, pp. 212ff.) that the teaching that the Christian's recognition of the truth and authority of the Bible is due to the working of the Holy Spirit in his heart "gives classical expression to a doctrine which has been believed by Christians in every century... It is a doctrine of the whole Church... one for which support could be found in the writings of practically every leading theologian of the Church in every age" (cited by Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God*, p. 122). Again we confess:

The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.

By this faith, a *Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein*; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace. (XIV/i–ii, emphasis supplied)

The Reformed confessional standards clearly affirm the self-attesting divine character of Scripture. It is this affirmation in our standards that Warfield believed as a Christian. He himself had no doubts about either the revelatory nature or the divine

inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. One can only wish that he had been truer to the faith that he loved and confessed as a theologian, drawing out of that faith an apologetic method consistent with it, rather than conceding to fallen man in his apologetic methodology the right to decide the terms by which truth and authority are to be determined.

Probability versus Presupposition

Not only does Warfield represent by his apologetic method “Old Princeton,” but he also is representative of the larger and traditional “evidentialist” school of apologetics, which stands in the tradition historically on its Protestant side of Butler’s *Analogy of Religion*. This method, as we have seen, in seeking to build upon the basis of evidence of whatever kind grounds for the unbeliever’s faith response, makes its appeal to the autonomous man as “capable man.” One adherent of this approach may, with Warfield, compile a “mass of evidence” for the trustworthiness of the *biblical writers* and then apply their teachings to the unbeliever. Another may compile a “mass of evidence” for the trustworthiness of *Christ’s teachings vis a vis* the evidence for His deity, for example, the evidence for his resurrection from the dead. But evidence, at best, is *only probable* and, at worst, *meaningless* in the natural man’s world where Chance is ultimate. Furthermore, the evidentialist method concedes to the natural man by implication the autonomous right to judge the value of the evidence. Hence when the unbeliever concludes that the evidence is uncertain (and if he is not stupid, he must), his response to that effect cannot be refuted on such grounds, nor can he be charged with dishonesty on such grounds when he refuses to respond to the evidence. The evidentialist himself admits his case is *at best* a probable one. This approach leaves the man who refuses to regard the evidence as compelling with the delusion that the *best* basis the Christian can claim for his faith is a probable one. How tragic, as if every fact in the universe did not *scream* out a testimony to the truthfulness of the Christian religion! Yet the “evidentialist” approach, it seems to me, operating *in isolation* from the presuppositionalist approach, has no available means of preventing the unbeliever from pushing the data aside, actually believing, as he does so, that there could be some facts somewhere which might cast doubt upon, if not totally refute, the Christian claim.

What I would advocate is an apologetic approach to the unbeliever which presents all of its “evidence” to the unbeliever consciously and unashamedly from within the framework of a presuppositionalist apologetic, one which takes seriously the “first principle” of the Christian faith, namely, that God has revealed Himself self-attesting in and by the creation of the universe through the agencies of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and in the history of His world through deeds and words, and, most magnificently, through His Son (Heb. 1:1–3).

This means that there are no such-things as “brute,” that is, uninterpreted, facts anywhere in the universe. Every fact that enjoys its existence by virtue of some activity of God and thus carries with it its “interpretation,” placed upon it by God Himself by virtue of His creative activity, His providential care, and subsequent special revelation. For a man truly to know a fact would mean then that his interpretation of a given fact, discerned by whatever methods are available to him, would of necessity have to agree with God’s prior interpretation, and we learn something about God’s prior interpretation of everything from the Scripture. True knowledge would then be “receptive reconstruction,” that is, thinking God’s thoughts after Him, rather than “creative construction,” that is, interpreting for the first time by man’s “sciences” the “brute” facts of the universe. Evidences of any and all kinds could then be presented to the unbeliever by the believer, but for the unbeliever under those circumstances to thrust aside the evidence presented to him by the believer would constitute

not just an “honest blunder” but *intellectual immorality* and *rebellion*, the sinful refusal of the covenant-breaker to acknowledge the only possible interpretation of the data. The evidence, since within the Christian–theistic framework it carries apodeictic certainty, would bear now, in addition to its value as evidence, also a kerygmatic, that is, a proclamatory value (cf. our earlier assertion that apologetics should be proclamatory and evangelistic). Only when “evidences” are brought consciously within a Christian presuppositionalist framework can we escape the tragic results of building up a message upon only probable (or meaningless) data. Only when this is done can the apologist really challenge the unbeliever to forsake his unbelief.

What about the charge of circular reasoning? Is not the presuppositional methodology, when it appeals to a *self-attesting* Scripture as its authority, vulnerable at this point? Is not the appeal to Scripture to advance the Scripture’s claims an obvious *petitio principii*? As we saw earlier (p. 15), the presuppositional method is not really circular; to the contrary, this method alone recognizes that in the one case of God’s revelation of Himself, from the very nature of the case, His revelation must be self-authenticating, addressing itself linearly to man. All that the creature can do in proper response is to receive His revelation with thanksgiving. This is hardly “reasoning in a circle.” It is simply recognizing one’s own creaturehood and salvation by grace. The Christian becomes one by the grace of God. His faith is not the result of a blind “leap,” but rather the inevitable response to the sovereign regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. He thinks within and speaks from the Christian circle. He can avoid this only by being untrue to Christ and by rejecting some part of the gift which He has given him. Let it be clearly understood that presuppositional reasoning does not mean mysticism; it does not mean that no effort is put forth to explicate the grounds of the first principle of the faith which the Christian receives by grace. It means that he believes in order to understand (cf. Heb. 11:3—“by faith we understand...”). But it also means that he has a real basis for justifying knowledge claims.

In the same manner, I suggest, the first-century witnesses to Christ appealed to the “evidences.” They were not endeavoring to advance a “probability construct.” They were forthrightly and authoritatively calling men to face *incontrovertible* data which became either a savor of death unto death or a savor of life unto life. Believing that God knew them that were His, they went forth not as professional logicians and philosophers, but as preachers and witnesses, confident that, though some would think Christ to be a cause of stumbling and others would regard Him as foolishness, yet to the “effectually called” he would be both the power and wisdom of God. Right here in his doctrine of election, is the ground of assurance for the Reformed Christian that his witness to God’s Word will not return to Him void. We must be as loving and as learned as possible as we approach the unbeliever, but we can witness with the assurance that His elect, sometimes in spite of our feeble efforts, will come to Him and that never, because of our feeble efforts, will He lose any.

Chapter 4 Presuppositional Apologetics

FURTHER ELUCIDATION OF A BIBLICAL METHODOLOGY

When the believer and the unbeliever disagree regarding biblical truth, this disagreement is not simply over isolated “facts,” inasmuch as what any man regards as “factual” is inevitably governed by a more basic “philosophy of fact,” that is, by value-governing, possibility-determining, religiously motivated presuppositions. Greg Bahnsen is entirely correct when he writes:

All argumentation about ultimate issues eventually *comes to rest* at the level of the disputants’ presuppositions. If a man has come to the conclusion and is committed to the truth of a certain view, P, when he is challenged as to P, he will offer supporting argumentation for it, Q and R. But of course, as his opponent will be quick to point out, this simply shifts the argument to Q and R. Why accept them? The proponent of P is now called upon to offer S, T, U and V as arguments for Q and R...But all argument chains must come to an *end* somewhere. One’s conclusions could never be demonstrated if they were dependent upon an infinite regress of argumentative justifications, for under those circumstances the demonstration could never be completed. And an incomplete demonstration demonstrates nothing at all.

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 *pre*-suppositions. In the nature of the case, these presuppositions are held to be *self-evidencing*; they are the ultimate authority in one’s viewpoint, an authority for which no greater authorization can be given. (*A Biblical Introduction to Apologetics*, pp. 33–34)

Recognizing this, presuppositional apologetics places at the base of its affirmation and defense of the Christian faith the following epistemological “first principle:” “The one living and true God has self-attestingly revealed Himself in the Christian Scriptures.” So seriously does it take this basic presupposition that it seeks to keep this commitment before it throughout its entire task. This is so, not only because as a Christian the apologist committed to this methodology stands by grace within the circle of faith already, but also because he is convinced that this “first principle” provides the only *pou sto* from which any progress can be made toward understanding the meaning of life, establishing ethical norms, and justifying human knowledge claims. Any other epistemological perspective, he is convinced, will destroy meaning, relativize at best ethical norms, and place the very possibility of justifying knowledge beyond human reach (cf. 1 Cor. 1:20). In order to demonstrate this, I must say something about the way people know and, indeed, must know in order to know that they know. This will necessitate our taking a short excursion into the history of philosophy

Epistemology: The Crucial Issue

Rationalism

Modern philosophy is generally said to have originated in Descartes’ *Cogito ergo sum*—“I think, therefore I am.” This seventeenth century philosopher, by this approach to the acquisition of truth and certification, placed a premium upon the ability of human reason alone to acquire knowledge. Descartes’ view, known as rationalism and formally defined as the epistemological position which asserts that knowledge can be obtained by respecting the internal demands or compulsions of reason, was more persistently developed in the writings of the great European rationalists—Spinoza and Leibniz. Spinoza (1632–1677) writes in his unfinished *Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding* in answer to the question of

the method to be employed in the acquisition of knowledge: "...the intellect, by its native strength, makes for itself intellectual instruments, whereby it acquires strength for performing other intellectual operations, and from these operations gets again fresh instruments or the power of pushing its investigation further, and thus gradually proceeds till it reaches the summit of wisdom." Believing that reason or intelligence is the distinguishing characteristic of man, he further taught that the highest form of religion is the rational contemplation of God and that the *summum bonum* or highest good of life—the goal of ethics—is to live according to reason. Leibniz (1646–1716) in his metaphysical treatise *Monadology* (Propositions 31–32) declares that our reasonings are founded on two great principles: (1) the law of contradiction, which asserts that contradictories cannot both be true, and (2) sufficient reason, "in virtue of which we hold that no fact can be real or existent, no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason why it is so and not otherwise." Viewing the world as the expression of perfect Reason, he constructed an idealistic metaphysics based upon his novel doctrine of a divinely (rationally) pre-established harmony in man and the world of nature.

Empiricism's Answer to Rationalism

Reacting against European rationalism were the noted British empiricists—Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. Simply stated, empiricism is the epistemological theory which attributes the origin of all knowledge to experience. We could do no better here in our representation of Locke (1632–1704), who conceived of the human mind at birth as a blank paper (*tabula rasa*), than to quote from his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (II, I, 2.): "Whence comes [the mind] by that vast store, which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience. In that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observations, employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring." Berkeley (1685–1753), denying at the outset Locke's material substance as a source of our ideas though still affirming that knowledge was gained through sensation, suggested God as the cause of the individual's perceiving external objects. God creatively posits finite spirits into existence, but He thinks external objects into existence through the minds of these spirits. Hume (1711–1766) agreed with Berkeley against Locke that matter as something beyond sensation is an unverifiable inference, but carrying sense of empiricism to an extreme, he drew the same conclusion about spirit. For him there is no mind, there is no cause-and-effect relationship in the traditional sense. Only psychologically conditioned habit remains. All experience is simply impressions of sensation that are innate.

Kant, the Unifier

It was this apparent deadlock between rationalism and empiricism that confronted Kant (1724–1804). Avey states that Kant came to the conclusion that the Leibnizian tradition placed too much confidence in human reason and led to dogmatism, whereas the Human tradition represented too little confidence and led to skepticism. Metaphorically speaking, it might be said that rationalism, on the one hand, had the "string" of reason (logic), and empiricism, on the other, had the "beads" of sensation and experience; but to Kant, as long as the two are isolated from each other, the "necklace" of knowledge seemed illusory. How

could the two be brought into fruitful conjunction? Kant proceeded to give his answer in his distinguished criticism of human reason.

Can Reality Be Known?

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant agrees with Hume that this world consists of the movement of experienced qualities that cannot in themselves explain or justify our ideas of substance and causality. But he charges Hume with trying to reduce to sensory appearance what can never be so reduced, namely, the presuppositional frameworks which determine for sensory appearances the form they have. Therefore, making a distinction between *reality* and *appearance*, Kant, deferring to the empiricists, granted that knowledge arises from sensations and posited an objective world of reality (*noumenal*) as the wellspring of sensations. On the other hand, deferring to the rationalists, Kant affirmed that space and time are a priori forms of experience and that the mind, in contradiction to Locke's *tabula rasa*, is structured to think along the lines of twelve categories—unity, plurality, totality, and causality, to name a few. This latter affirmation means that the mind itself structures or creates according to its own categories of thought the particular “form” (*phenomenon*) of sensation which comes to it from the world of reality. In other words, the human mind can never attain any knowledge of the thing-in-itself (*das Ding an sich*) of the real world; the mind can only gain an apparitional knowledge of the thing-in-itself because of the mind's predisposition to impinge upon the thing-in-itself its own structuring categories. In other words, the noumenal realm is always separated from knowledge by the reasoning process itself. In this manner Kant sought to synthesize the rationalistic and empiricistic methods of arriving at knowledge by affirming that each needs the other. On the one hand, because knowledge includes judgment and only thought combines sensations into judgments, without the categories of thought, sensations alone produce no knowledge. On the other hand, were no sensations to enter into the categories of thought, the categories would be empty abstractions and in themselves would not constitute knowledge. In short, “thoughts without content are empty; percepts without concepts are blind.”

Kant was on the right track, in my opinion, when he ascribed a role in the human acquisition of knowledge to both sensation and innate ideas. His position, however, is unacceptable to the Christian because God and the real world, in his epistemology, are unknown and unknowable. One can never know “the thing-in-itself.” This is a radical form of skepticism. Furthermore, Kant cannot explain why all men seem to reason the same way and seem to talk about the same world. Another solution then must be sought to the problems of knowing.

A Christian Epistemology

There is, I readily admit, much that is mysterious about the learning process and the human acquisition of knowledge. Certain things, however, are clear. In order for the human knowing subject to know, and to know that he knows, two prerequisites are obviously necessary: (1) the necessary learning apparatus (sensory experience and rationality, both under God's control and tutelage), and (2) a *pou sto* sufficiently comprehensive to serve as the ground for the universal conceptions which in turn are necessary in order to give all the particulars their meanings. To assert that these factors are essential to knowledge acquisition is to assert no more, it seems to me, than what the Scriptures teach. I will now attempt to elaborate.

1. The Learning Apparatus

The Christian faith affirms, as we have seen, that man is the crowning creation of God. As such, all of man's senses are of divine origination (Ps. 94:9; Prov. 20: 12; Ex. 4: 11) and are represented in Scripture as playing a regular and vital role in the acquisition of knowledge (cf., e.g., Matt. 5: 16; 6:26, 28; 9:36; 15: 10; Luke 1:2; 24:36–43; John 20:27; Rom. 10:14–17; 2 Pet. 1:16–18; 1 John 1:1–3; 4:14). I do not intend to imply, of course, that the physical organs of sensation, for example, the eye or the ear, actually do the seeing or the hearing. It is common knowledge that the eye and the ear are in themselves amazingly complex organic arrangements of sensitive nerve cells which are stimulated by light and sound waves reflected to them by external stimuli and which then relay these responses “electrically” by nerve systems to specific parts of the brain, where these responses are “translated” into knowledge propositions. It is the brain, in short, which actually “sees” and “hears.” So it is with all the other senses as well.

Tabula Non Rasa

But how and why does the human brain translate these impressions into knowledge propositions? And how and why do all men seem to translate these impressions similarly? If, in any given moment of time, only totally isolated and unrelated sensory impressions were present in the brain, only to be followed staccato-like by the next moment's impressions, knowledge would be impossible. A “blank mind” simply could not learn. Some form of apriorism, with innate “knowledge,” seems necessary. But does Scripture support an apriorism? Do men possess by nature any innate “self-evident truths,” theirs quite apart from a learning process employing sensory experience? The Scriptures clearly indicate that men, by virtue of the fact that they are created in the image of God, are so constituted as to possess an innate “sense of deity” or “idea of the holy.” It is this that makes man *religious* man even in his fallenness, spinning off his religious vagaries as he, a particular kind of man (fallen religious man), is confronted by a particular kind of divine revelation (general) found both in the world at large and within himself (Rom. 1:18–32). Furthermore, the work of the divine law is indelibly imprinted in his mind, serving, however much it may be perverted now by sin, as his standard of right and wrong (Rom. 2:15). Still further, his conscience as an innate awareness of moral “oughtness” justifies or condemns his thoughts and actions (Rom. 2:15). This verse strongly asserts the capacity of man's mind to *distinguish*, which is just to say that present within man's mind is reason itself as a prerequisite to morality; morality worthy of the name and not mere instinct demands rationality. That the laws of reason (i.e., rationality) are innate is apparent, not only from the fact that to learn them would require the prior presence and operation of them (to learn anything at all in fact necessitates the laws of reason), but also from Scripture: the Son of God, the divine Logos, is “the true light, which enlightens [rationally endows] every man coming into the world” (John 1:9).

Christ the Enlightener and Imparter of Reason

Before anything else is said about this verse, the variant translation in the NASB *et al.* should be noted, namely, “the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.” The main point of the statement is in no way affected if one should opt for this latter translation. By either translation, the Son of God is said to enlighten every man. In favor of the former is the word order in the original; in favor of the latter is the truth in the context of the Incarnation. Of course, if the former translation is followed, the light shed upon all men would be the light of *reason* rather than *redemptive* illumination; if the latter, the light would be redemptive rather than rational. Two additional points in favor of the former translation,

in addition to the support of the word order, are (1) the difficulty in explaining how Christ redemptively illumines *every* man by coming into the world—John is certainly no soteric universalist; and (2) the fact, which must not be overlooked, that John’s entire Prologue is descriptive of Him who is introduced, prior to any other *nomen*, as the *Logos*. Now, no matter how one prefers to translate *logos* in this passage (word, account, esteem, ratio, reason, formula, debate, speech, deliberation, discussion, oracle, sentence), I agree with Clark when he writes: “Any translation of John 1:1 that obscures ... emphasis on mind or reason is a bad translation. And if anyone complains that the idea of *ratio* ... obscures the personality of the second person of the Trinity, he should alter his concept of personality” (*The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, p. 67). Therefore, I prefer to follow the natural word order of the original and the KJV rendering as first suggested. Hence, to affirm again, when John declares that the eternal personal Logos (Reason) of God is the light of every man coming into the world (John 1:5, 9) the enlightening process referred to is the *reasoning process itself, or rationality*. In other words, just as in the sphere of being, all things subsist or hold together by the power of the Second Person (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3), so in the sphere of knowing, the divine Logos, as an absolutely rational Person himself, is the source of whatever rationality any and every man possesses.

God Controls All Thought

This truth explains, furthermore, why *all* men reason and perceive essentially the same way: the divine Logos enlightens them. And because the divine Logos enlightens every man, man’s reasoning process is also *harmonious with* the real world rather than *standing between* the knower and the real world as in Kant’s epistemology. (Clark calls this the Preformation Theory and advocates it himself.) Furthermore, not only does the Bible teach that the Son of God rationally endows all men, but it also teaches that Christ is both the *Wisdom* of God who makes all knowledge and communication possible (cf. Job 28; Prov. 8:12–36; 1 Cor. 1:24,30; 2:16; Phil. 2:5; Col. 2:3) and the *Revealer* of God to men through both the Scriptures and His Spirit, who works by and with the word of Scripture in the minds of men (Matt. 11:27; John 17:6,8,14,26). For that matter, the Bible represents God as the ultimate cause and controller of all the philosophic, religious, and moral thoughts of all men. He has foreordained whatever comes to pass, including all thoughts. Consider the following passages:

1. After Peter had made his great confession of faith in Christ as Messiah, Son of the living God, Christ responded: “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, because flesh and blood revealed it not to you but My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 16:17).

2. In His warning to His disciples not to follow the hypocritical example of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus urged them: “Do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher [even God]... and do not call anyone on earth your father, for One is your Father, He who is in heaven, and do not be called guides, for One is your guide, the Christ” (Matt. 23: 8–10).

3. Jesus explained the fact that the Jewish leaders did not believe on Him by declaring that they had not been *taught* to do so by the Father: “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught of God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” (John 6:45).

How then do men learn? According to the testimony of Scripture, the Logos of God is the creator of man’s senses and the endower of man with rationality. Also, God, as the sole ultimate cause of everything, is the *ultimate* cause and controller of *all* man’s thoughts, his

evil ones¹ no less than his good ones, in order to bring about His own holy, predetermined ends.

2. A Transcendent *Pou Sto*

Corollary to God's being the ultimate cause and controller of all man's thoughts is His knowledge being the only *pou sto* sufficiently capable by its "omni" nature of grounding or justifying human claims to knowledge or truth. This brings us to a discussion of the second prerequisite for human knowledge—a transcendent *pou sto*. Why does man need such a *pou sto* in order to justify his knowledge claims? To understand this, one needs to be reminded of a characteristic of the universe.

The Need for Universals

The universe is composed of an overwhelming number of particulars (everything in the universe is viewed by the philosopher as a "particular"). If every particular a man encountered (and remember the man himself is a particular composed of particulars) remained for him unique and completely unclassified and unclassifiable, again, just as would be the case if man had no reasoning ability, knowledge and communication would be impossible, for nothing would have meaning. This is so because it is the sole province of universals (all-encompassing concepts) to give to particulars their meaning. No one states the reason for the necessity of universals for knowledge more plainly than Francis Schaeffer:

The Greek philosophers spent much time grappling with this problem of knowledge, and the one who wrestled with it most...was Plato. He understood that in the area of knowledge, as in the area of morals, there must be more than particulars if there is to be meaning. In the area of knowledge you have *particulars*, by which we mean the individual "things" which we see in the world. At any given moment, I am faced with thousands, indeed literally millions of particulars, just in what I see with a glance of my eyes. What are the universals which give these particulars meaning? This is the heart of the problem of epistemology and the problem of knowing.

This is not only a linguistic thing, it is the *way we know*. It is not just an abstract theory, or some kind of scholasticism, but the matter of actually knowing, and knowing that we know. The Greek philosophers, and especially Plato, were seeking for universals which would make the particulars meaningful.

...How can we find universals which are large enough to cover the particulars so that we can know we know? Plato, for example, put forward the concept of ideals which would provide the needed universal.

...This is Plato's solution: an "ideal" somewhere that would cover all the possible particulars...

...The Greeks thought of two ways to try to come to this. One was the sense of the *polis*. The word *polis* had meaning beyond merely the geographic city. It had to do with the structure of society. Some Greeks had an idea that the *polis*, the society, could supply the universal. But the Greeks were wise enough soon to see that this was unsatisfactory because then one is right back to the 51% vote or the concept of a small elite. So one would end with Plato's philosopher kings, for example. But this, too, was limited. Even if one

¹ Because I realize that to say God is the ultimate cause of man's evil thoughts is troublesome to some readers, I would request that they consider the following verses: Genesis 45:3–8; 50:20; Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17; Deuteronomy 2:30; Joshua 11:20; Judges 9:23; 14:1–4; Samuel 2:25; 16:4; 18:10–11; 19:9–10; 2 Samuel 16:20–23; 17:1–4; 24:1; 1 Kings 22:23; 2 Chronicles 10:12–15, 18:20–22; 25:17–20; Psalms 105:25 135:6; Proverbs 16:4, 33; 21:1– Isaiah 6:9–10; 45:7; Jeremiah 13:13–14; Daniel 4:35; Amos 3:6; Matthew 11:25–26; Mark 4:11–12; John 6:44–45, 65; 12:37–41; Acts 2:23; 4–27–28; 13:48; 16:14; 18:27; Romans 9:10–21; 1 Corinthians 1:23–31; Ephesians 1:3–14.

only chose the philosopher kings in the polis, eventually they were not going to be able to give a universal which would cover all the particulars.

So the next step was to move back to the gods, on the grounds that the gods can give something more than the *polis* can give. But the difficulty is that the Greek gods (and this includes Plato's gods) simply were inadequate. They were personal gods—in contrast to the Eastern gods, who include everything and are impersonal—but they were not big enough. Consequently, because their gods were not big enough, the problem remained unsolved for the Greeks.

Just as society did not solve the problem because it was not big enough, so also the gods did not settle it because they were not big enough. The gods fought among themselves and had differences over all kinds of petty things. All the classical gods put together were not really enough, which is why ... in the concept of Fate, in Greek literature, one never knows for sure whether the Fates are controlled by the gods, or whether the Fates control the gods. Are the Fates simply the vehicle of the action of the gods or are the Fates the universal behind the gods and do they manipulate the gods? There is this constant confusion between the Fates and the gods as the final control. This expresses the Greeks' deep comprehension that their gods simply were not adequate. They were not big enough with regard to the Fates and they were not big enough with regard to *knowledge*. So though Plato and the Greeks understood the necessity of finding a universal, and saw that unless there was a universal, nothing was going to turn out right, they never found a place from which the universal could come either for the *polis* or for the gods. (*He Is There and He is Not Silent*, pp. 37–41; for a similar opinion by Clark, cf. *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, p. 28)

How the Greeks' Gods Failed

Nowhere, in my opinion, is this failure of Greek thought to find a universal illustrated more concisely and pointedly than in the Platonic dialogue entitled *Euthyphro*. In this exchange, circumstances find both Socrates and Euthyphro in the Porch of the King Archon—Socrates to be prosecuted by Meletus for corrupting the Athenian youth by his denials of the existence of Athens' gods, and Euthyphro there to prosecute his own father for murder. It seems that a field worker who worked for Euthyphro in a drunken fit had killed another servant. Euthyphro's father bound him hand and foot and threw him into a ditch, and then went to Athens to ask of a diviner what he should do with him. Before he returned, the murderer had himself died from exposure. "My father and family," continues Euthyphro, "flare angry with me for taking the part of the murderer and prosecuting my father"...which shows, Socrates, how little they know what the gods think about piety and impiety."

"Good heavens, Euthyphro, and is your knowledge of religion and of things pious and impious so very exact that...you are not afraid lest you too may be doing an impious thing in bringing action against your father!" Euthyphro responds, "The best of Euthyphro...Socrates, is his exact knowledge of all such matters," to which in mock (?) admiration Socrates replies, "Rare friend! I think that I cannot do better than be your disciple!" Continuing, Socrates implores, "I adjure you to tell me the nature of piety and impiety, which you said that you know so well...What is piety, and what is impiety?" *Note at this juncture that what Socrates is asking of Euthyphro is an exhibition of absolutely comprehensive understanding of a universal—in this case, piety.*

Without hesitation, Euthyphro replies, "Piety is doing as I am doing; that is to say, prosecuting anyone who is guilty of murder, sacrilege, or of any similar crime...; and not to prosecute...is impiety." After a brief interchange regarding Euthyphro's unquestioned commitment to belief in the Greek gods, and Socrates' acknowledgment of his inability to do so, the latter returns to the original question: "I would... hear from you a more

precise answer... to the question, ‘What is piety?’ When asked, you only replied, ‘Doing as you do, charging your father with murder...’ But I did not ask you to give me two or three examples of piety, but to explain the general idea which makes all pious things to be pious.” *Note here that Socrates clearly indicates that if the particular examples of piety are to be such, there must first be a comprehensive universal which gives such a character to them; otherwise, such acts are open to any interpretation. But if an action can mean anything, it means nothing.*

With some impatience, perhaps, Euthyphro replies, “Piety, then, is that which is dear to the gods, and impiety is that which is not dear to them.”

After some discussion in which Socrates points out that the gods themselves differed over the nature of piety and impiety (recall Schaeffer’s remark that the gods of the Greeks were “too small”), Euthyphro is willing to sharpen his definition (proposed by Socrates) to the following: “What *all* the gods hate is impious, and what they love pious or holy, and what *some* of them love and *others* hate is both or neither.” Socrates then asks, “Ought we to enquire into the truth of this, Euthyphro, or simply to accept the mere statement on our own authority...? What do you say?” Reluctantly, Euthyphro replies, “We should enquire...” Whereupon Socrates probes, “The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the... holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods.” Now the Christian has a ready answer to this question. Not only is the God of Christian theism the Governor of the world; He is also the final Legislator. It is His will that establishes the rightness or wrongness of all human deportment. His will determines the norms of morality. *Nothing is right or wrong in and of itself.* An act is right if God says it is right, wrong if God says it is wrong. There is no law outside of or above God which distinguishes between piety and impiety. Hence, for the Christian the answer is obvious—a thing is holy because God loves (decrees) it as such. Then, and only then, would the alternative be true. Now the a interesting thing to observe as we proceed is that this understanding of the matter neither Socrates nor Euthyphro (nor Plato) debate at all, due to the fact that, because they were not operating with the biblical Creator–creature distinction, *they just could not imagine anyone entertaining such an opinion.* This, of course, would have given them their answer. As it is, uncritically, they both opt for the non-Christian answer and fail to arrive at their desired universal. Let us follow the conversation.

Socrates: “And what do you say of piety, Euthyphro: is not piety according to your definition, loved by all the gods?”

Euthyphro: “Yes.”

Socrates: “Because it is pious, or for some other reason?”

Euthyphro: “No, that is the reason.” (Note: It does not even enter his head that it could be otherwise.)

Socrates: “It is loved because it is pious, not pious because it is loved?”

Euthyphro: “Yes.”

Socrates: “Then that which is dear to the gods, Euthyphro, is not the definition of piety... The pious has been acknowledged by us to be loved of God because it is pious, not to be pious because it is loved... Thus you appear to me, Euthyphro, when I ask you what is the essence of piety, to offer an attribute [another example] only, and not the essence—the

attribute of being loved by all the gods. But you still refuse to explain to me the nature of holiness... I will ask you... to tell me once more what piety really is..."

Euthyphro: "I really do not know, Socrates, how to express what I mean. For somehow or other our arguments, *on whatever ground we rest them*, seem to turn round and walk away from us."

We have seen enough. The dialogue concludes with Euthyphro dejected, asserting, "I am in a hurry and must go now," and Socrates crying, "Alas, my companion, and will you leave me in despair?" All this points up the fact that for the Greeks piety is something independent of their "too-small" gods, something above the gods which they themselves do not determine, and which remains beyond the grasp of human justification. What does this all mean then—the failure to discover the universal? For one thing, in the area of morality it makes it impossible to give an intelligent answer to the question, "Why is murder wrong?" What is "wrong"? More generally, it shows that with no universal, no particular has any meaning. Of course, as Carnell says, the reason that Euthyphro continued to prosecute his father, even though he had to admit that he did not have a sure notion of what piety is, was because, possessed with "an innate knowledge of right and wrong (Rom. 2:14–15), he knew murder was wrong, though he was unable to translate that knowledge into compelling propositions" (*An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, p. 318).

The Greeks never found an infinite reference point from which they could launch their effort to justify knowledge and meaning. (Cf. Rushdoony, "The One and Many Problem," *Jerusalem and Athens*, pp. 339–348.) But why, by inference, pick only on the Greeks? No one else, without aid from divine revelation, since the Academy or the Lyceum ever discovered the Universal either! Although they have (generally with great optimism until Kierkegaard) sought it, men have never found it. Schaeffer writes:

How Modern Philosophy Fails

[There is] a titanic shift at this present time within the unity of rationalism... men were rationalistic optimists. They believed they could begin with themselves and draw a circle which would encompass all thoughts of life, and life itself, without having to depart from the logic of antithesis. They thought that on their own, rationalistically, finite men could find a unity in the total diversity. This is where philosophy stood, prior to our own day. The only real argument between these rationalistic optimists was over the circle that should be drawn. One man would draw a circle and say, "You can live within this circle. The next man would cross it out and would draw a different circle. The next man would come along and, crossing out the previous circle, draw his own—ad infinitum. So if you start to study philosophy by pursuing the history of philosophy, by the time you are through with all these circles, each one of which has been destroyed by the next, you may feel like jumping off London Bridge. (*The God Who Is There*, p. 17)²

Scriptural Truth Is the Solution

The Christian theist then has a truly profound solution to this latter problem concerning man's need for an infinite reference point (the universal) if knowledge and meaning are to become possible. It has been given to him by grace. It is this: the infinite

² Should the Christian have neither the time nor the ability to check each circle out for himself and yet still have some lingering doubt that Schaeffer is right, he should recall that Paul, before Schaeffer taught that no man would, beginning with himself, find the universal: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." (1 Cor. 1:19–21).

God, possessing comprehensive knowledge, has created a universe within which all the facts are integrated according to His plan. He, or more specifically, His plan, is the universal which gives meaning to every particular. Everything there is to know is eventually involved in the plan of God and therefore cannot be fully known as a fact until tied in with the plan of God. Van Til asserts: “The knowledge of anything is by way of understanding the connection that it has with the plan of God” (“Introduction,” Warfield’s *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 47). There is by this construction genuine meaning and compatibility between the knowing mind and the facts to be known and between all the knowable facts themselves.

Along such lines the presuppositionalist will work out his theory of knowledge. Taking all of his directions from the transcendent *pou sto* of the divine mind revealed in Scripture, he will affirm with the Scripture the legitimacy of both sensory experience and reason in the learning process. He will further affirm the divine mind as it is revealed in Scripture as his *pou sto* for universals in order to justify meaning and truth claims. He will make the word of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture the epistemic basis for all reasoning—even when reasoning about reason or about God’s revelation.

The Noetic Effects of Sin

Nothing has been said so far beyond the fact itself about the way the entrance of sin into the race has affected man’s capacity to know not only God but also everything else. Perhaps the easiest way to see this is to begin with Adam’s knowledge prior to the fall. At that time, Adam was a covenant-keeper. He gladly acknowledged the fact of God’s sovereignty over him and the fact of his own creaturehood. God was his *pou sto* for knowledge, his final reference point for every human predication. It was God who determined for him right and wrong, and he willingly thought God’s thoughts after Him. He was, according to a familiar phrase now, at that time *receptively reconstructive* epistemologically. In this situation, Adam was aware that his knowledge was not exhaustive, but his finitude and partial knowledge were not a burden to him, for partial knowledge was at least a reality for him. He was willing to employ his reason in *God’s service* and to fulfill the cultural mandate given to him. *As a scientist Adam studied nature to the glory of God.* His study of the animals, for example (Gen. 2:19–20), led him to the *same* understanding respecting a “helper corresponding to him” that God had. Here is a perfect example of science being carried out under the lordship of God and discovering truth. Never, for one moment, prior to the temptation, would he have thought of himself as his own *pou sto* or as a mere accident of nature, as did Sir James Jeans of man in *The Mysterious Universe*, or as a gruesome result of nature’s failure to take antiseptic precautions, as did Sir Arthur Eddington in *New Pathways in Science*. In a word, he gloried in the Creator-creature distinction.

How Man Fell

By his fall, as we have seen, man shifted ultimate epistemological authority in the universe from God to himself. He did not cease to be man, but he claimed for himself the right to be *creatively constructive* in his knowledge acquisition. He continued to employ his reason (the fact that he could continue to reason, as we have seen, is due to Christ’s continuing endowment of reason upon him), but now man became his own *pou sto*. It became his nature to suppress God’s revelation to him, both general and special. He found the most successful means of doing this to be a preoccupation with his own ideals and purposes on the one hand, and increasing sin and immorality on the other. He did not cease to be either a religious man or a scientific man. However, sin produced significant effects in him.

As religious man, because of his *new religious posture*, he “exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling things” (Rom. 1:23). He “exchanged the *truth* of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25).

As *scientific* man, he continued to think, to classify, and to search for meaning in the universe. But now, equally because of his new *religious posture*, all such meaning would come from himself and not from God. Operating epistemologically with depraved mind (Rom. 1:28) and with darkened understanding (Eph. 4:18), man became “the measure of all things.” He determined to find *for himself* the “highest good” in his ethics, the “meaning of the universes in his science, and the “beautiful” in his arts. This has been, in a word, the history of man’s arts and science. But to do this, he has had to reject God’s original interpretation and to assume that he lives in a universe *where Chance is ultimate*, and where, until he rationalizes a portion of it, pure contingency prevails.

Science After the Fall

To illustrate this, one has only to consider two philosophic principles that control modern science in its labors. (One could read here the first three chapters of Schaeffer’s *Escape from Reason* with real benefit.)

1. *The Scientific Ideal*

Think first of the scientific ideal in the philosophy of science. “The supreme goal of Science has been the unification of all knowledge within a single all-embracing system, and the uniform interpretation of all reality through a single all-sufficient principle of explanation...” (Henry P. Van Dusen, *The Vindication of Liberal Theology*, p. 62). Again, “A completed rational system having nothing outside of it nor any possible alternative to it, is presupposed and beyond the actual attainment of any one moment” (Morris R. Cohen, *Reason and Nature*). or again, “The goal of science is clear—it is nothing short of the complete interpretation of the universe” (Karl Pearson, *Grammar of Science*, p. 14). When modern science acknowledges that it seeks a single all-sufficient principle of interpretation by which meaning may be given to all reality while denying to the living God of Scripture His role in providing that principle by His plan, it simply evidences the apostate nature of the epistemology which controls modern science.

2. *Scientific Neutrality*

Modern science, furthermore, insists that it must always “remain open” in its quest for truth. The “scientific” mind must entertain no prejudices or presuppositions at the outset of its experimentation. The simple truth of the matter, of course, is that no human mind is *a tabula rasa* without assumptions. The scientist has to presuppose the reality of his universe, the reality and rationality of his mind, the compatibility between the physical universe and the abstract mind processes (otherwise he would be extracting no true meaning from the universe nor would he be able to make that meaning coherent to other minds), and the uniformity of nature. Of course, there are two “hypotheses” modern science, interestingly, *does* rule out at the outset of its experimentation: (1) the “createdness” of the facts with which it works, and (2) any determination in the universe by anything outside of it. Science, of course, urges that it works with the “facts” of the universe, but these facts are “brute” (uninterpreted) facts, “bits of irrationality” strewn in the universe promiscuously by the cosmic litterbug of Chance until given order and meaning by scientific man. The facts of the universe are irrational and undetermined, with *absolute contingency prevailing everywhere*

beyond the realm of the “successes” of human science. Cohen represents this position of modern science quite adequately: “...certain types of explanation cannot be admitted within the body of scientific knowledge. Any attempt, for instance, to explain physical phenomena as directly due to providence... is incompatible with the principle of rational determination.” Again, “...the absolute collective who [of the universe] is—at least from the point of view of the scientific method—undetermined by anything outside of it, nor can the absolutely total universe be said to have any definite character such that from it we can infer that some particular entity has one rather than another determinate trait.” For modern science universal contingency is a “must” if it is not to be restricted at the outset of its task. It should be clear that “neutral” science in order to assert its right to unrestricted research, must (not—so—neutrally) first deny the operation of the supernatural in the universe. Here is apostasy in the human sciences on full display.

What Has Sin Not Affected?

This postulation both of an imminent *pou sto* and of the ultimacy of metaphysical Chance puts unregenerate man in terrible straits, however, epistemologically. It means that *he knows nothing as he ought to know it*, for he rejects the only sufficient ground which can justify any knowledge claim and he admits neither the “createdness” nor the “pre-determined character” of the facts, which is so for *every* fact in the universe.

Fallen Man Still Able to Reason

Now it may be justly pointed out that scientific man, although creatively constructive in his apostate autonomy, gives ample evidence of being able nonetheless to accomplish great achievements. Has he not made the hydrogen bomb, put himself on the moon, and solved many other problems confronting him? How does the Christian account for this? In reply, it is certainly true that man has accomplished great feats which have demanded genius. God Himself acknowledged the genius even of His sinful creature at Babel: “...and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them” (Gen. 11:6). All this only means that man’s ability to reason for is still functionally operative and intact. We indicated the reason for this earlier in our exegesis of John 1:5 and John 1:9. Of course, as he goes about his scientific work, man can and does make mistakes, deceive himself, and come to wrong conclusions due to lack of pertinent facts, etc. But he is still, even in his fallenness, a thinking, reasoning creature; and right reason detects and corrects many false starts. This is only to say that the so-called Aristotelian laws of logic, distilled in his Fourth Book of the *Metaphysics*, have validity for man, not because Aristotle said so, but because they are the laws of the Logos Himself!³ Therefore, even fallen men have become great technologists by “using their heads.” But, as Van Til teaches, this simply means that, though men might declare their independence from Christian theism as they pursue scholarly tasks (and by them still arrive at many correct conclusions), in reality they work with tools provided by the God of Christian theism: “Non-Christian Science has worked with the borrowed capital of Christian-theism and for that reason alone has been able to bring to light much truth” (*Christian Theistic Evidence*, p. 71). In other words, it is only because Christianity is true

³ The law of identity (A is A), the law of contradiction (A is not non-A), and the law of the excluded middle (A is either B or non-B; it cannot be something else) are as true for God as they are for man. Clark, I believe, is correct when he writes: “The law of contradiction is not to be taken as an axiom prior to or independent of God. The law is God thinking” (*The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, p. 67). When God affirms that His word is truth (John 17:17) and that He cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2), He indicates that He, the original Source of rationality, determines what is true and false for Himself and the creature by what is consistent with His own eternal character or attributes.

that men can discover truth and meaning in any sphere. But it has meant, too, that men, in order to avoid Christian–theistic conclusions, have increasingly had to become mere technicians,” ignoring the epistemological problem and performing their science in isolation from the ultimate questions of “Why are things as they are?” and ‘How does one know, and know that he knows, anything?’”

Wherein precisely then has sin affected man noetically? Let me first indicate wherein sin is *not* the responsible factor *per se* I have reference first, of course, to the mere fact of human *ignorance* of myriad facts in the universe. Even if Adam had *never* fallen, he would still have had to say many times over, “I don’t know the answer to that intriguing question.” But this very ignorance of much in his universe would have inspired the human sciences. I have reference secondly to the human inability to prove, on the basis of empirical evidence, the existence or veracity of the God of Christian theism. Clark concurs:

Those who stress human depravity in [the] argument [against evidential apologetics] give the impression that Adam before the fall was and the elect in heaven will be able to construct valid arguments, based on sensations, to prove the veracity of God. But the crushing and basic reply to [this] position is that all inductive arguments are formal fallacies... The method is impossible, and it is as impossible for an innocent Adam as for guilty Barabbas. Sin cannot make a valid argument fallacious nor can perfect righteousness make a fallacy valid (*Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, p. 116)

How then has sin affected man? Sin, as Kuyper taught, through its debilitating effects on man, both physically and mentally, has opened man up to the constant possibility of falsehood, unintentional mistakes, self–delusion, faulty education, the influences of life’s disorganized relations, selfish personal interests, and so on, but, as I have already suggested, these effects can be minimized by constant cross–referencing and comparing scientific results to remove contradictions. But even if man could escape all these effects, sin has worked such serious injury in man’s nature, by *blinding* man to his creaturehood, that he still studiously works to suppress God’s revelation to him, thereby repudiating his sole *pou sto* for the justification of any and every human predication, and thereby destroying theoretically even the possibility of knowledge. Kuyper states this injury in the following words: “...the chief harm is the ruin, worked by sin, in those data, which were at our command, for obtaining the knowledge of God, and thus forming the conception of the whole” (*Principles of Sacred Theology*, p. 112). It is true that man cannot completely obliterate God’s revelation of Himself to him, try as he might. Paul assures us in Romans 1:32 that even the most profane sinners “know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things [the catalogue of vices in 1:28–31] are worthy of death” (“the pains of Hell”—John Murray; cf. his entire discussion in his commentary on *Romans*, pp. 50–53). Paul further declares that “when the Gentiles who do not have the Law [the benefit of special revelation] do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, confront themselves with the Law of God, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or defending themselves” (Rom. 2: 14–15). With Calvin we affirm that men have an ineradicable *sensus deitatis*, however faint, which they carry with them always. Men have an awareness of God and therefore *ought* to see God’s handiwork everywhere, but it is now their nature to suppress this available knowledge in unrighteousness though they never totally succeed. In their hatred of God’s authority, they suppress God’s voice in nature and Scripture; to do otherwise would necessitate the acknowledgment of their creaturehood, and to become “creature–conscious” is to become covenant–conscious, and to become covenant–conscious is to become sin–

conscious. Therefore, men suppress the truth of God which streams every moment into their consciousness, and instead build up their own “scientific reproduction” of God. But in so doing, as Kuyper says so clearly:

It follows at the same time that the knowledge of the cosmos as a whole, or, if you please, philosophy in a restricted sense, is equally bound to founder upon this obstruction wrought by sin...because of the entirely new questions which the combination of the whole presents: questions as to the origin and end of the whole; questions as to the categories which govern the object in its reflection in your consciousness; questions as to absolute being, and as to what *non-cosmos* is. In order to answer these questions, you must subject the whole cosmos to yourself, your own self included; in order to do this in your consciousness you must step out from the cosmos, and you must have a starting point (*dos moi pou sto*) in the *non-cosmos*; and this is altogether impossible as long as sin confines you with your consciousness to the cosmos.” (*Principles of Sacred Theology*, p. 113)

Sin has blinded man then to the epistemological “Archimedean point of reference” to be gained only in the glad acknowledgment of God— or covenant—consciousness; and therein have the noetic effects of sin most centrally and most tragically displayed themselves, resulting in man’s ever-increasing theoretical Isolationism from the epistemological truth confronting him, namely, that if Christian theism were not true, he could discover no meaning anywhere, no less in his sciences and arts than in his religious commitments.

The Noetic Effects of Palingenesis (Regeneration)

Paul writes that “a natural man *does not* accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he *cannot understand* them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor. 2:14). Man then is helpless to regain a truly transcendent *pou sto*. He needs powerful aid, which comes to him only in regeneration. Nothing less than the power of God in the regenerating work of Christ’s Spirit can save man, not only for heaven, but also for himself and for his sciences. In regeneration man is restored noetically to the position of covenant-keeper. *In principle* he becomes “receptively reconstructive,” thinking God’s thoughts after Him.⁴ Palingenesis then is the sovereign activity of God, whereby the “special principle” of grace is introduced into certain individuals of the human race, the outcome of which is “two kinds of people” and “two kinds of science” (Kuyper, *ibid.*, pp. 150–176). *By the former* is meant that in actuality there are in the world now covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers, men who are “receptively reconstructively in heart commitment (though they do not live in a totally consistent fashion with this commitment, 1 John 1:8) and men who are “creatively constructive” in heart commitment (though they cannot live in a totally consistent fashion with this commitment, Rom. 1:21–25, Rom 1:32; Rom. 2:14–15). *By the latter*, and due to the two heart commitments, is meant that in actuality there are men in the world who, while they have everything in common metaphysically they have *in principle* nothing in common epistemologically. There are essentially two ways of regarding all the data in the universe, and if the Christian and non-Christian were both totally self-conscious, epistemologically speaking, and worked through their sciences with total consistency from their respective *pou stos*, the results on the one hand, for the Christian, would be science performed to the glory of God, with meaning and purpose everywhere evident to him on the level of finite comprehension; and on the other, for the non-Christian, the destruction of

⁴ The student of apologetics would be well-advised at this point to study probably in this order, John 3:1–8; John 1:12–13; John 6:44, John 6: 45, John 6: 65; Ephesians 2:1–10; and 1 Corinthians 12:3 for the teaching of Scripture on palingenesis; and Ezekiel 36:25–27; Colossians 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; Luke 24:45; Acts 16:14; 2 Corinthians 4:3–6; 1 John 5:20, *et al.*, for the noetic effects palingenesis.

meaning and purpose, with absolute contingency prevailing everywhere in a universe where pure Chance is ultimate. In fact, there would be no *universe*. Of course, the non-Christian, because of God's common (non-redemptive) grace upon him, is spared this awful nihilism; and the Christian, because of the effects of sin still with him as long as he lives in this world, is prevented from attaining his goal of giving all glory to God. Consequently, the Christian and the non-Christian live together in the world, and even *cooperate in subduing nature* by means of their respective sciences, which outwardly in method and results will often resemble each other. But when the revelational pressure of God upon them forces them to ask the ultimate questions, such as, "What is the ultimate origin of...?" and "Why are things the way they are?" and "How can we be sure that we know?" then the sciences appear in their true nature as mutually exclusive systems.

Approaching Men on God's Terms

The foregoing material makes it clear that the Christian apologist must not assume that there is "human consciousness in general," just as he must not speak of "being in general" or knowledge in general." He takes with utter seriousness the biblical description of unregenerate man as one so controlled by a hostile *pou sto* that, if invited to examine the special principle of grace on *his* principle, he will explain it away as a threat to and denial of his autonomy. He cannot help himself (Rom. 8:7). Consequently, the instructed Christian apologist will never invite, by suggestion or implication, the non-believer to examine the biblical revelation and the evidence for the truth of the Christian faith (which is manifestly present everywhere) *from the latter's viewpoint*. To do so is by implication to deny what Scripture declares about him and to imply that he is not a covenant-breaker. It is to suggest that he has already been able to bring meaning, reasoning from his apostate *pou sto*, to much of the universe already without assistance from a transcendent *pou sto*. Such an invitation, it seems to me, permits the unbeliever simply to extend his authority into the domain of Christian theism and to determine even there what is and is not true. Furthermore, it is to imply that he, as "normal," as "neutral," and as "capable man," is able to judge the evidence for the veracity of the God of Christian-theism, indeed, that he has the right to demand the Creator to present sufficient credentials, before he must permit Him a place in His universe. The results, at best, will be the apostate conclusion that what in actuality is revelational data is only possibly true. He may very well conclude that some propositions in the Bible are *certainly* true, but even such a conclusion by the very nature of such an invitation will be reached on *his own authority* and not because of the inherent authority of God's Word. Furthermore, the God permitted to "enter" the cosmos on such terms will be granted entrance, at best, only as an "expert" in religion (even "experts," you see, may be wrong) but not as the true God and a genuine challenge to human autonomy. Man himself would remain the ultimate authority for determining truth, and his apostate autonomy would remain intact.

Evangelizing Man As He Is

Rather than appealing to the apostate reason of autonomous man, the instructed Christian apologist will appeal to the man who is really standing before him—the man made in the image of God, the man who really "knows God" but who suppresses his innate awareness of Him, the man whose very nature requires that he *worship*, and whose need for worship will never be fulfilled until he worships the one living and true God—and he will present to him the reasons why he must forsake his autonomy in repentance and why he must trust the only Redeemer of men. In short, he will tell the "image of God" before him the facts of the good news of the gospel and pray that God's Spirit will open his blind eyes. When he

appeals to the natural man's consciousness, he will do so only to show him where it would carry him if he would be consistent with his starting point of human autonomy. When he includes in his conversation an appeal to the "evidence," he does so by presenting them *not* as the superstructure in a "probability-construct," but as the presuppositionally certain proof that the only living and true God is the God of Christian theism. All the while, I say again, he will pray that God, if He be pleased, will grant to his fallen creature grace to believe and to receive a new *pou sto*—that of the self-attesting Christ who speaks throughout the Scriptures.

The Bible is the light in which we see light (Ps. 36:9). Why should we close our eyes, as it were, to this light when we talk to others? In the words of my colleague, David Jones, paraphrasing Van Til, "It is ludicrous to take the flashlight of human reason to try to find the sun of divine wisdom."

I would like to close this section by quoting with approval three Christian writers: G. Clark, C. Van Til, and J. C. Whitcomb, Jr. These three quotations reflect what I conceive to be the proper attitude and approach on the part of the believer in his witness lost men.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

1. The question...urged by atheist, evangelical Christian, and evangelical Moslem is, Why does anyone choose the Bible rather than the Koran. The answer to this question will also explain how a Christian can present the gospel to a non-Christian without depending on any logically common proposition in their two systems.

Since all possible knowledge must be contained within the system and deduced from the first principles, the dogmatic answer must be found in the Bible itself. The answer is that faith is the gift of God. As Psalm 65:4 says, God chooses a man and causes him to accept Christian dogmatism. Conversely, the Apostle John informs us that the Pharisees could not believe because God had blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts [John 12:36b–40].

The initiation of spiritual life, called regeneration, is the immediate work of the Holy Spirit. It is not produced by Abrahamic blood, nor by natural desire, nor by any act of human will. In particular, it is not produced by arguments based on secular empirical presuppositions. Even if there were a common truth in secularism and Christianity, arguments based on it would not produce faith...

Even the preaching of the gospel does not produce faith. However, the preaching of the gospel does one thing that a fallacious argument from a non-existent common ground cannot do: it provides the propositions that must be believed. But the belief comes from God. God causes a man to believe; faith is a divine gift. In evangelistic work there can be no appeal to secular, non-Christian material. There is an appeal, it is the appeal of prayer to the Holy Spirit to cause the sinner to accept the truths of the gospel. Any other appeal is useless.

If now a person wants the basic answer to the question, Why does one man have faith and another not, or, Why does one man accept the Koran and another the Bible, this is it. God causes the one to believe... (Gordon H. Clark, *Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, pp. 122–23)

2. It is... the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts that alone effects the required Copernican revolution and makes us both Christians and theists... it is only when the Holy Spirit gives a man a new heart that he will accept the evidence of Scripture about itself and about nature for what it really is. The Holy Spirit's regenerating power enables man to place all things in true perspective. (Cornelius Van Til, *The Infallible Word*, pp. 272–73)

It is true further that for the acceptance of that revelation it is again upon the testimony of the Spirit that we must depend. And this testimony brings no direct personal information to

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

the individual. It works within the mind and heart of the individual the conviction that the Scriptures are the objective Word... Still further it is of the utmost importance to stress that this testimony of the Spirit is in the heart of the believer as supernatural as is the work of inspiration of Scripture itself. If this were not the case, the main point of our argument to the effect that in Christianity God is the final reference point of man would not be true. (Van Til, in the introductory essay to Warfield's *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 34–35)

3.it is utterly *impossible* to present true Christianity to the unbeliever in such a way as to make it appear *logical* and *pleasing* to him... A man who “accepts Christianity” only because it has been made to fit into his presuppositions and his self-made frame of reference, will pervert... Christianity... But... how can a man be sure that the Bible and Christianity are true? Is it not his right, and even his responsibility, to investigate carefully the validity of Christianity in comparison with other possible alternatives before making a final decision? Again, the answer is *NO*... Man is not a neutral, unbiased observer in spiritual matters, capable of sitting in judgment as one religion after another passes before him in review, waiting to find one that is logically coherent, historically and scientifically factual, and personally satisfying, before adopting it as his own! Quite to the contrary,... from the Biblical standpoint, sinful men have no right to demand “proper credentials” when the Creator says to them: repent, believe the Gospel, and obey me—NOW! ...to give an unbeliever the impression that he has a right to investigate all the problems before he repents of his sin and turns to Christ for forgiveness is to set him up on a pedestal of intellectual and spiritual pride.... The so-called intellectual excuses of sinners will vanish in the day “when God shall judge the secrets of men... by Jesus Christ” (Romans 2:10). ...Consequently, the Christian who will be most effectively used by God in winning others is not the one who knows most about philosophy, history, archaeology, and science, but the one who knows most about God’s Word and who humbly seeks God’s help in obeying it. (John C. Whitcomb, Jr., *The Value and Limitations of Evidences and Apologetics*, pp. 3–6)

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Similarities Between Clark and Van Til

It will be obvious from the immediately preceding sections of this chapter to those familiar with apologetic writing at all that Van Til and Clark have been read with deep appreciation. I happily acknowledge their influence upon me and count it a gracious Providence that has permitted me to study under both. Both are staunch Calvinists. Both men are self-professed presuppositionalists. (Clark refers to himself as a dogmatist). Both affirm that the self-attesting Word of God in Scripture is their ultimate authority from which they seek to derive the controlling principles in their respective efforts to confront men with the Christ of Scripture who alone saves men from sin and death. These basic similarities between Van Til and Clark, however, should not blind the student to several major differences between them. One difference between them, for example, in the area of apologetics, is that Van Til is much more willing to acknowledge the proclamatory or evangelistic character of Christian apologetics than Clark, with the latter contending that, due to “the very limited concerns” of apologetics, it follows proclamation in the temporal order and only then in response to an auditor’s question concerning the reason for our Christian commitment. Van Til, it seems to me, is much more concerned than Clark, in the light of this observation, to challenge human autonomy at the very outset of any confrontation between believer and unbeliever, while the latter urges that it is the apologetic task, following upon proclamation, only to demonstrate that Christianity is the most viable, rational option confronting man and is therefore deserving of man’s choice. Having drawn this one contrast here between them, I intend now to criticize them, primarily in those areas where I feel they have not listened as

carefully as they might to that self-attesting Scripture which together they confess is their Master's voice. In the process, other serious differences between them will emerge.

Van Til and Man's Analogical Knowledge

Cornelius Van Til has contended vigorously and insistently through, the last forty-five years or so for an apologetic method truly consistent with the Reformed faith. The argument for a presuppositional defense of Christian-theism in the previous pages of this chapter has drawn upon Van Til's thought for its broad outline. His insistent preachments (1) that there is not one single non-theistic datum in the universe, (2) that all facts are what they are because of the place they occupy in the all-encompassing plan of God, (3) that man's knowledge is possible only because of God's prior exhaustive knowledge, (4) that man's knowledge, if true, is actually a "thinking of God's thoughts after Him," (5) that unless Christian theism is true, the unbeliever could find no meaning in any fact, and (6) that the illegitimacy of human autonomy must be challenged in the name of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, are themes that are not only biblical and Reformed but also "Copernican" in their revolutionary impact upon traditional apologetic methodology.

Van Til's apologetic system must be appreciated as a grand—indeed, the best and only—"theistic proof." Gilbert Weaver correctly observes:

...Van Til's theistic argument goes something like this: There are only two alternatives: either the Sovereign God of Scripture is ultimate, whose will determines whatsoever comes to pass, or Chance is ultimate... If there is no such God, then Chance is ultimate and there is no meaning in anything: thoughts, words, events or what have you follow each other in a random, meaningless order. Speech fails, and one cannot even *discuss* God, let alone which view solves the most problems, or any other subject. (*The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, p. 301)

Van Til himself writes:

...the argument for Christianity must... be that of presupposition. With Augustine it must be maintained that God's revelation is the sun from which all other light derives. The best, the only, the absolutely certain proof of the truth of Christianity is that unless its truth be presupposed there is no proof of anything. Christianity is proved as being the very foundation of the idea of proof itself. (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 396; cf. pp. 196–197; cf. also *Jerusalem and Athens*, p. 21)

It seems to me that here is a "theistic proof" that must be reckoned with. With such an argument, the unbeliever is truly challenged to forsake his autonomy and to submit to Christian-theistic revelation.

In his effort, however, to maintain consistently the Creator-creature distinction throughout and all along the line of his defense of the faith, Van Til has insisted that man's knowledge is only analogical to God's knowledge (cf. *The Defense of the Faith*, pp. 56, 65; *Common Grace*, p. 28), that is to say, that man knows nothing as God knows a thing: "...all human predication is analogical reinterpretation of God's pre-interpretation. Thus the incomprehensibility of God must be taught with respect to any revelational proposition" (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 171, emphasis his). In *The Text of a Complaint*, a charge filed against the presbytery which voted to ordain Clark to which Van Til affixed his name as a signatory, the *Complaint* declares it to be a "tragic fact" that Clark's epistemology "has led him to obliterate the qualitative distinction between the contents of the divine mind and the knowledge which is possible to the creature" (Minutes of the Twelfth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1945, p. 15). It also affirms: "We dare not

maintain that [God's] knowledge and our knowledge coincide *at any single point*" (*ibid.*, p. 14). It is important to note here that it is not the *way* (the mode) that God and man know a fact that the *Complaint* declares is different. Both Van Til and Clark insist that God knows that two and two are four by eternal intuition while the equation is obtained by man discursively. Both Van Til and Clark affirm that God knows the fact that two and two are four in *all* its relationships and implications while man's knowledge of the equation can never be exhaustive, indeed, can view that equation in only some of its relationships and implications. Again, both Van Til and Clark believe that this proposition is *eternally* before God while, at least theoretically, man *could* forget it. Rather it is the content of man's knowledge that is different from God's. Van Til explains:

Dr. Clark seeks not only for an identity of reference point between the divine and the human mind, but an identity of content between them. It is natural that he should do this. It is involved in any non-Christian methodology... But asserting a qualitative difference between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man, the *Complaint* was merely asserting the Creator-creature relationship... That two times two are [*sic*] four is a well-known fact. God knows it. Man knows it. On Dr. Clark's principles there must be identity of content between the divine and the human minds on such a proposition. It is this view of things that is substituted for that of the *Complaint*. The *Complaint* is said to teach that the first proposition itself, viz., two times two are [*sic*] four in its narrowest and minimal significance, is qualitatively different for God (*The Answer*, p. 21). To this it is added: But if they cannot state clearly what this qualitative difference is, how can such an unknown quality be made a test of orthodoxy (*ibid.*)?

Suppose now that the complainants should try to "state clearly" in Dr. Clark's sense the qualitative difference between the divine and the human knowledge of the proposition that two times two are [*sic*] four. They would have to first deny their basic contention with respect to the Christian concept of revelation... It is precisely because they are concerned to defend the Christian doctrine of revelation as basic to all intelligible human predication that they refuse to make any attempt at "stating clearly" any Christian doctrine... (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, pp. 171 -72)

This is an incredible statement! Not only does Van Til deny that God's knowledge and man's knowledge ever coincide as to content at any one point, but he also refuses to make an effort to explain what the qualitative difference between them is. He refuses to "state clearly" how "two times two is four" is different for God; and he does this, he says, because of "the Christian doctrine of revelation." Is it not clear from this quotation that, for Van Til, God's revelation of Himself to man does not really reveal to man anything of what God is *essentially*; that, for Van Til, any knowledge of God gained through His revelation to man is never univocal but always only "analogical" knowledge; that, for Van Til, God "with respect to any revelational proposition" still is as incomprehensible as He was prior to the revelation? Is it any wonder that Clark contends that Van Til's position inevitably leads to skepticism and total human ignorance?

Clark writes:

...if God knows all truths and knows the correct meaning of every proposition, and if no proposition means to man what it means to God, so that God's knowledge and man's knowledge do not coincide at any single point, it follows by rigorous necessity that man can have no truth at all. This conclusion is quite opposite to the views of Calvin (*Institutes* II, ii, 12-15), and undermines all Christianity. ("Apologetics," *Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, p. 159)

While it is true, as we have already noted, that God and man know the proposition, two times two is four, in distinguishable ways, they at least know, both God and man, the

fact itself that two times two is four! The *fact* is *precisely* the same for man as it is for God, not because the fact is independent of God, but precisely because all human knowledge is dependent upon God’s knowledge. Precisely *because* God knows exhaustively all the facts in all their relationships, He knows all things truly. Hence, when He reveals a fact to man, it may legitimately be said that man knows *that fact truly though not exhaustively*. When a man *learns* a fact that coincides on the creaturely level with God’s knowledge of the “thatness” of the fact itself, it may legitimately be said that man knows *that fact truly though not exhaustively*. Of course, when unbelievers learn anything *truly*, it is because God in His common grace to unbelieving mankind permits them to “borrow capital” from His “knowledge bank” through their retention by His grace of the divine image even after the fall, and by virtue of God’s continued bestowment of rationality upon them. Fallen man possesses many truths of nature and morality, although he possesses no epistemological *pou sto* which can *justify* them; but he holds them nonetheless, because of God’s common grace upon him (recall Euthyphro’s continued pursuit of justice in spite of this epistemological dilemma). For similar reasons, plus the additional benefits of special revelation and the paligenetic *pou sto*, the believer can be said to know certain facts truly. However, for the believer there does not exist the frustration which arises from the inability to justify one’s predication epistemologically. The Christian theist affirms that the knowledge of God revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the infinite reference point which serves as the ground for his finite predications, which makes human knowledge possible, and which guarantees the validity and truthfulness of true, though finite, human knowledge. Van Til’s insistence on the analogical relationship between divine and human knowledge—even human knowledge derived from revelation—is the greatest single weakness, in my opinion, in his apologetic system, which, if held consistently, is destructive of his system.

Scripture Doesn’t Support “Analogical Knowledge”

Van Til cites, however, as do many “analogists,” a catena of biblical references at the appropriate places throughout his writings to support his contention that God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge are always and at every point qualitatively distinct, and that God will always be the incomprehensible God. The most explicit passages called into service here are Deuteronomy 29:29; Job 11:7–8; Psalm 145:3; Isaiah 40:28; 55:8–9; Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 1:18; 6:46; Romans 11:33; and 1 Timothy 6:16 (cf., for example, Minutes of the Twelfth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1945, p. 12). In other words, these verses, the “analogists” maintain, are concerned with an *epistemological* issue, that is, they indicate the analogical nature and limits of human knowledge of the incomprehensible God. I suggest, however, that these verses, while not denying the incomprehensibility of God, are primarily concerned with the *soteriological* issue, that is, they point up man’s need of revelation in order to know God, which is to be gained only in the soteric relationship between God and man. Job 11:7–8; Psalm 145:3; Isaiah 40:28; Romans 11:33; and 1 Timothy 6:16, while certainly affirming the immensity of God, need mean for epistemology simply that men, beginning from themselves and refusing the benefits of revelation, cannot, as Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 1:21, by their own wisdom find God; or conversely, that men are dependent upon divine revelation for a true and proper knowledge of God (cf. Delitzsch’s remarks on Psalm 145:3 in his commentary on that Psalm, III, 389). Deuteronomy 29:29; Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22; and John 1:18; 6:46 (cf. vs. 45) actually teach that men by revelation can *know* God and His thoughts truly to the degree that He reveals Himself in Christ and His words. Finally, Isaiah 55:8–9, far from setting forth

“the gulf which separates the divine knowledge from human knowledge” (Minutes, p. 12), actually holds out the real possibility that men may know God’s thoughts and encourages them to turn away from their own thoughts and to learn God’s thoughts. Consider the immediate context. In 55:7 God calls upon the wicked man, the man of iniquity, to forsake his way and thoughts. Where is he to turn? Of course, to the Lord (vss. 6, 7)! Why must he forsake his way and thoughts in turning to the Lord? “Because,” says the Lord, “my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” (vs. 8). The entire context then, far from affirming that God’s ways and thoughts are beyond the reach of man, to the contrary, expressly calls upon the wicked man to turn away from his ways and thoughts in order to learn God’s ways and thoughts. In so doing, the wicked man gains divine thoughts and ways, which are so much better and so much more enduring than his own. Indeed, as the heavens transcend the earth, by such an extent are the divine thoughts and ways gained better and more enduring than his own. These verses teach, then, the complete opposite of what generally they are made to teach. They encourage the wicked man to learn and to think God’s thoughts after Him. Delitzsch, in my opinion, rightly interprets these verses:

The appeal, to leave their own way and their own thoughts, and yield themselves to God the Redeemer, and to His word, is... urged on the ground of the heaven-wide difference between the ways and thoughts of this God and the despairing thoughts of men (Ch. x1.27, xlix.24), and their aimless labyrinthine ways... On what side the heaven-wide elevation is to be seen, is shown by what follows. They [God’s thoughts] are not so fickle, so unreliable, or so powerless. (*Commentary on Isaiah*, II, 358)

The analysis of these verses of necessity has been brief, but the student of apologetics may be assured that none of these verses teaches that man’s knowledge is only analogical to God’s knowledge. To the contrary, some of them expressly declare that in dependence upon God’s propositional self-revelation in Scripture, man can know some of God’s thoughts truly, though, of course, not exhaustively, that is, they can know the revealed proposition, at least in the form in which it is revealed, in the same sense that God knows it, that is, univocally.

There is some debate in current apologetic circles concerning whether Van Til in fact does teach a doctrine of “analogy” between God and man. Gilbert Weaver, both in Jerusalem and Athens (pp. 323–71) and in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark* (pp. 303–305), contends that Van Til does not mean by “analogy” what Thomas meant by it. Rather, he urges that Van Til means only to refer the “process of reasoning” in man and not to knowledge itself. I am not certain what Weaver means here by “process of reasoning.” If he means “the reasoning process itself,” I would *not* agree with him. But I would agree with him that Van Til does not mean by “analogy” what Thomas meant by it. Van Til does not believe that Thomism takes analogy “seriously enough,” by which I take him to mean that a proper view of analogy will deny all coincidence between the content of God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge. This is a radical view of analogy; indeed, one may wonder whether it is analogy at all. Rather, it is pure equivocism.

Analogy, Equivocism and Paradox

That Van Til does affirm an equivocal character for analogy is discoverable in his willingness to acknowledge that, because our knowledge is analogical, truth will properly appear as *paradoxical* (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 61), which acknowledgment in turn can only be the result of one’s willingness to conceive of human knowledge as qualitatively different from God’s knowledge. Now while I readily concede that it is possible for the erring exegete so to interpret two scriptural statements that upon completion of his exegesis

he possesses contradictory statements, I totally reject the notion that he will have interpreted the two statements correctly. He will have either completely missed the intent of one (or both) of the statements or he will have brought together two statements that in no way pertain directly to each other. He will have failed to distinguish in this latter case between “apples” and “oranges.” To affirm otherwise, that is, to affirm that two scriptural statements that relate to the same theological question, when *properly* interpreted, can be paradoxical, that is, contradictory to the human existent, and yet true for human reason is to make Christianity and the Bible upon which it is based irrational and strikes at the nature of the eternal Logos who speaks throughout its content. God is Truth itself, Christ is rational, neither can lie, and what they say is self-consistently noncontradictory.

Furthermore, if truth may *appear* to be contradictory, the detection of *real* falsehood is impossible! Consequently, better would it be to resolve the contradiction through further study, admitting until such resolution is achieved that one has not properly understood one (maybe both) of the scriptural statements, that is, admitting that the contradiction is due to human ignorance of some clarifying datum, than to imply that God, when revealing Himself to men in Scripture, actually teaches in the name of truth what, when properly understood, will appear to the rational mind as contradictory.

Exceedingly strange it is that as ardent a foe of Barthian irrationalism as is Van Til, he comes nevertheless to the same conclusion concerning the nature of truth for man as does Barth. The only difference in this connection between Van Til and Barth is that Van Til insists that truth is objectively present in biblical propositions while for Barth truth is essentially existential. But for both religious truth can appear, at least at times, paradoxical.

The solution to all of Van Til’s difficulties is to affirm, as Scripture teaches, that both God and man share the same concept of truth and the same theory of language.

Clark and “Dogmatic” Apologetics

For Gordon Clark the central theme of apologetics is the existence of God (*Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, p. 143). As a Reformed philosopher committed to the articulation of a presuppositional apologetic, Clark is deeply interested in the question of the validity of one major argument (as illustrative of and germane to the methodology of natural theology) in the evidentialist’s arsenal—namely, the cosmological argument for God’s existence (*ibid.*, pp. 143–149; cf. *Religion, Reason and Revelation*, pp. 35–43). The logical fallacies in this argument will be pointed out in the next chapter in connection with a discussion of Thomas and need not be reproduced here; suffice it to say that Clark denies the validity of this argument (and all natural theology illustrated by it) on the basis of these logical fallacies. What amazes him is that many fine theologians who recognize the logical inadequacies in the argument will still insist that the argument has persuasive value:

If one wishes to use the cosmological argument without asserting its formal validity, there is a difficulty that requires explanation. The expression that the natural evidence for God’s existence is convincing for all practical purposes must be understood as simply a form of enthusiastic speech, for obviously it cannot be taken literally. There are many people, both Christian and unbelievers, to whom this argument is by no means convincing; nevertheless, the conversion of the unbelievers and even the enlightenment of the Christians would have to fall within the class of all practical purposes. If then it is not satisfactory for all practical purposes, can it be defended as satisfactory for some practical purposes? After all, it is convincing to those who use it. But this explanation is no better. People are frequently convinced by the flimsiest of evidence and the most glaring of fallacies. If it is justifiable to use an argument merely because it serves some practical purpose, would not evangelism

be reduced to utter *sophistry*? Any evidence or any fallacy could be used, if only it were convincing to the person addressed. And this would remain the case even when the evangelist himself knew that his arguments were inherently unsound. *The confusion arises from the unwillingness to see that an argument is either valid or fallacious. There is no third possibility.* And in choosing arguments there is no substitute for valid logic. (*Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, pp. 149–50, emphasis supplied; cf. also *Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, pp. 52–69)

Inductive Arguments vs. First Principles

Clark takes this position because he is convinced that no inductive argument proves anything, and, of course, he is right. Copi, in his *Introduction to Logic*, affirms, for example, that inductive arguments do not pretend to demonstrate the truth of their conclusions as following necessarily from their premises, but merely to establish them as probable, or probably true” (p. 305). Because an argument that is only “probably true” can be “possibly false” and hence *proves* nothing, Clark believes that evangelical scholars should have nothing to do with them as arguments for Christianity. *Only arguments whose conclusions follow necessarily from correct premises and therefore which give formally valid demonstrations, in Clark’s opinion, are proper for the Christian apologist.* Therefore, all arguments which proceed inductively from the “evidences,” Clark rejects as worthless as proofs of anything; he opts rather for deduction from an assumed “first principle.”⁵ Clark is keenly aware that every argument must begin somewhere with the choice of a “first principle” which is of the nature of an axiom in mathematics, that is, a “first principle” which must be assumed without proof. Should one, as the rationalist, assume as his “first principle” the validity of logic itself and seek thereby to deduce all knowledge from his axiom, Clark is ready to argue (and in fact does) that it is impossible to deduce historical particularities from universal premises: “Logic alone cannot demonstrate that there was a Moses, a David, or a Napoleon” (*Three Types of Religion Philosophy*, p. 21). Should one, as the empiricist, assume the self-authenticating nature of sensation and attempt to argue inductively to knowledge, Clark insists that he “never arrives validly at anything” (*ibid.*, p. 118). In fact, Clark insists that any epistemology that grants to sensory experience a necessary role in human knowledge acquisition never arrives at knowledge or truth, and so accordingly he rejects sensory experience as necessary for truth or knowledge in his own epistemology. Therefore, Clark “chooses” as his axiom the proposition, “The Bible is the Word of God.” Here he displays his dogmatism or presuppositionalism. He insists, as we have noted, that every system contains its presuppositions; only he insists, still further, that to choose any other presupposition than a revelational one is to destroy all possibility of knowledge: “...instead of beginning with facts and later discovering God, unless a thinker begins with God, he can never end with God, or get the facts either” (*A Christian Philosophy of Education*, p. 38). Clark would not want to be understood here as teaching that *he* “chose” revelation, more specifically, a biblical “first principle,” simply because it makes the

⁵ Clark, of course, is aware that an argument may be *formally* valid in that its conclusion follows necessarily from its premises and still not be materially true to fact. Consider, for example, the following syllogism:

All women are males.	(All B is C.)
All Americans are women.	(All A is B.)
Therefore, all Americans are males.	(∴ All A is C.)

Here the conclusion is the formally necessary deduction from the premises, but it is not true to fact because the premises are fallacious, the major premise, for instance, exhibiting a violation of the law of contradiction because “woman” is by definition a non-male. Consequently, Clark is convinced that unless one begins with true premises, the conclusion will never yield knowledge or truth.

justification of knowledge possible; rather, drawing every proposition, as a dogmatist, from his “first principle,” he insists that he actually had no other choice: “Psalm 65:4 says, God chooses a man and causes him to accept Christian dogmatism” (*Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, p. 123).

It must further be noted that whereas Clark is willing to find the statements of biblical revelation to be true from his axiom, he is unwilling to admit that any proposition other than the “first principle” itself or a proposition deduced from that “first principle” is ‘true.’ Knudsen writes:

Clark has...taken the position that the predicates “true” and “knowledge” can be ascribed only to what is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the infallible Word of God, and what may be deduced therefrom by good and necessary inference. Whatever is derived from other sources—e.g., from experience—may indeed be helpful and convenient; but it cannot lay claim to being truth and knowledge.

...Clark always discovered the source of... fundamental axioms in the Christian faith. Their origin is in the intellect of the sovereign God, who knows all things and is therefore able to know all things correctly. It would follow that it is only by divine revelation that these propositions would be available. Since the Scriptures are the revelation of God, the repository of the divine truths, they easily become the exclusive source for what, in Clark’s eyes, has the only claim to being truth and knowledge. So it becomes understandable that he accepts as his central axiom, “The Bible is the Word of God.” By this means he establishes the truth and knowledge status of all the statements in the Scriptures. These then serve as subsidiary axioms, universal propositions from which one can deduce additional knowledge. Clark’s position is that of a metaphysical theism in which truth and knowledge are restricted to theoretically founded statements. The source of knowledge is the complete theoretical intuition in the divine mind and whatever portion of that knowledge God has chosen to reveal. Knowledge is possible only because of God’s theoretical intuition and only because he has revealed part of that truth in an infallible book. (*Jerusalem and Athens*, pp. 285–86)

Clark is a brilliant Reformed philosopher–theologian. I deeply appreciate the reflection of the Reformed view of Scripture in his assumption, on *dogmatic* grounds, of the self–authenticating Word of God as his axiom for knowing God or anything else as it ought to be known. I concur with him that unless one begins with God he will not arrive at a knowledge of God, nor will he be able to justify any knowledge claim.

Furthermore, when, as we noted in our discussion of Van Til, Clark insists, in opposition to a view of human knowledge as only analogical to God’s knowledge, that

...if God and man know, there must with the differences be at least one point of similarity; for if there were no point of similarity, it would be inappropriate to use the one term knowledge in both cases... If God has the truth and if man has only an analogy, it follows that he (man) does not have the truth. (“The Bible as Truth,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April, 1957, pp. 163ff.)—

when he argues,

...if we know anything at all, what we know must be identical with what God knows. God knows all truth, and unless we know something God knows, our ideas are untrue. It is absolutely essential therefore to insist that there is an area of coincidence between God’s mind and our mind. One example, as good as any is..., David was King of Israel. (*The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, pp. 76–77)—

when he urges this (*ibid.*, p. 78), I say, *I am persuaded that he is correct*. It is right at this point that he has been a wholesome corrective, in my opinion, to Van Til.

Two Shortcomings of Clark's Thought

There are two related areas, however, where I am in disagreement with Clark: first, his limitation of “knowledge” only to his basic axiom and to what by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from it; and second, his rejection of the role of sensory experience in the human acquisition of knowledge.

Must All Knowledge Be Deducible from Scripture?

With regard to the first, Clark claims (in private conversation with me) that he is only being consistent with the subordinate Standards of his church (cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I/vi). It is by no means self-evident, however, that the Westminster divines intended to restrict “truth” or “knowledge” to the Scriptures and what could be deduced therefrom when they wrote, “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing at any time is to be added...” It seems clear to me that they are simply restricting *religious authority* (the rule for faith and practice) for man to Scripture (inherent authority in this case) and good and necessary deductions from Scripture (derived authority in this case). That is one thing. To say that they are restricting *knowledge* to Scripture and deductions therefrom is to affirm what the Westminster divines did not say. It is to say something entirely different from that which the Confession affirms. Furthermore, it is virtually a denial that men possess at least some knowledge from their *natural* awareness of divine law and from their conscience (Rom. 2:15).

Where would such an epistemology lead if taken seriously? I suggest that it would lead to skepticism, if not total ignorance. By Clark’s own admission he understands a person to be a series, no doubt, a complex one, of propositions (or meanings) such as, I suppose, (a) “Robert L. Reymond has such-and-such a color eyes,” (b) “Robert L. Reymond teaches at Covenant Theological Seminary,” etc. Furthermore, *the person is the sum total of all such propositions that make up the total life history of the person* (cf. Clark *Festschrift*, p. 412, quoting Leibniz); that is to say, a forty-year-old man, who in the providence of God is going to live to the age of eighty years, is not yet a knowable person except to God. In fact, the life history of a person includes his state in a future world as well. Consequently, since all the “returns” (propositions) are not in, it follows that Robert L. Reymond is unknowable to himself and to everyone else except God. In other words, since the color of Robert L. Reymond’s eyes are not deducible from Scripture, it follows, according to Clark’s understanding of knowledge, that neither I know nor does anyone else know who or what I am. If I do not know who or what I am, I do not know *for sure* whether I am a man or not. But if I do not know whether I am a man or not, I do not know whether the biblical injunctions to men to repent of sins and to believe in Christ are injunctions intended for *me*. In fact, since everything and everyone else is in the same process of “becoming” the sum total of the propositions which define them, I *know* nothing. Should Clark maintain that I, at least, still know the basic axiom and subsidiary axioms of his system, I would respond that this statement is meaningless because the “I” here is simply a pronoun standing in for an unknown entity in the sentence. Clark affirms that God, of course, knows me because He has determined all things (*Festschrift*, p. 412), but that does not help me very much for He did not mention *me* in Scripture. So where am I left? It would appear with no certain knowledge of anything! The fault he finds with the rationalist may be found with only slight

modification in him: he cannot deduce from his axiom any *extra-biblical* historical particularities; they, therefore, remain unknown and unknowable by men!

Validity of Sense Experience

Concerning my second disagreement, that concerning Clark's denial to sensory experience any validity in the "knowing process," Clark's critics have often pointed out to him that his basic "axiom" (with its subsidiary propositional axioms) is found in a book. Nash urges: "Since Clark repudiates all sensory experience as a source of knowledge, it follows that we cannot even know what God's revelation says. In order to know what the Bible says, I must be able to read it with my eyes or hear it with my ears or touch the Braille with my fingers. But this is sense perception" (*Festschrift*, p. 174). What is Clark's response? To Nash and Mavrodes, both of whom raise this issue (*ibid.*, p. 174 and pp. 245–47), Clark simply refuses to answer until they answer his criticism of empiricism (cf. p. 415 and pp. 446–47). I believe that Clark's problems with empiricism that lead him to reject senses as untrustworthy can be answered by many of the subsidiary axioms of biblical revelation. How does he justify the validity of the law of contradiction? It is implicit in propositional revelation, he claims. For "David" to mean anything, it must also not mean "non-David." He also goes to some length in replying to Nash, who asks him to demonstrate the legitimacy of deducing the mathematical equation, two plus two is four, from Scripture:

...Scripture does indeed teach a bit of arithmetic. Numbers, additions, and subtractions occur: after Judas hanged himself, there remained eleven disciples. Multiplication occurs and there are divisions by five, seven, and ten. If now, mathematics can be logically developed out of its principles, then mathematics can by "good and necessary consequence" be deduced from Scripture. (*Festschrift*, p. 468)

How willing and ready he is to employ Scripture to justify the legitimacy of logic! He is, however, as slow to hear the clear scriptural testimony regarding the validity and necessity of sense experience for knowledge as he is quick to use Scripture to justify deduction. This is too bad, for *everywhere Scripture presupposes and assumes without question the significant and essential contribution that sensory experience makes in the acquisition of knowledge*. It should not be necessary to point out that the very fact that God's revelation comes to men propositionally in Scripture *presupposes* the validity and necessity of God-created (Ex. 4:11; Ps. 94:9; Prov. 20:12) sense experience. How otherwise, as we have noted, would anyone be aware of the mere fact of Scripture? Further—more, it should not be necessary to expound in detail such passages as Matthew 11:4–6; Luke 24:39; John 20:27; 2 Peter 1:16–18; and 1 John 1:1–3; 4:14, et al., to determine that the self-attesting Christ speaking throughout Scripture assumes the propriety of the role of sensory experience in knowledge acquisition. I am quite ready to admit that Clark knows the philosophers. He has felt the force of the arguments of the Greek skeptics. He has, in fact, asserted that their arguments demolish empiricism. I would agree that they signalize the deficiencies of a strict empiricism which would postulate a *tabula rasa* epistemology, and which would claim that, beginning with sensations alone, the knowledge of "facts" may be acquired. I would agree that, without innate self-evident truths and without a revelational *pou sto* as a given," the justification of knowledge is impossible. But precisely because I accept the *pou sto* of Christ's Word to me in Holy Scripture and what that Scripture teaches regarding how men come to knowledge, I affirm that sensory experience does perform a God-designed task in the human acquisition of knowledge. It seems to me that not so to affirm is to set aside many passages of Scripture, indeed the *fact* of an objective propositional *word* revelation itself.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Where Clark goes astray in this connection, in my opinion, is his refusal simply to face the teaching, indeed, the self-evident teaching, of many of the subsidiary propositional axioms of his central (or basic) axiom.

Inasmuch as epistemology, for Clark, is the discipline where *all* the controlling decisions are made, I would recommend to the student of apologetics the articles by Nash and Mavrodes and Clark's replies to them in the Clark *Festschrift*. The issues are made clear in these philosophical pieces. For my part, I am not convinced by Clark's replies that he really faced scripturally the following objection by Nash to his epistemology:

Argument I: Clark contends:

P 1. Any position that leads to skepticism is false.

P 2. Empiricism leads to skepticism.

C 1. Empiricism is false.

Argument II: Furthermore, Clark argues:

P 3. Man cannot know anything through his senses (from C 1).

P 4. Human knowledge is limited to the contents of divine revelation (The Bible).

P 5. But man cannot know the contents of the Bible save through his senses. [Nash's contention]

C 2. Therefore, man cannot know the truths God has revealed in the Bible.

Argument III:

P 6. The only knowledge available to man is contained in the Bible (from P 4).

P 7. But, for Clark, man cannot attain this knowledge (from C 2).

C 3. It follows that Clark's view reduces to skepticism.

C 4. It follows further that Clark's view is false (from P 1).

(cf. *Festschrift*, pp. 174–75)

Veering Towards Idealism

As far as I can discern, Clark counters Nash's argument with a twofold response. First, he challenges Nash (and his other critics) to "define sensation and justify the assertion of universal propositions on that basis" (*ibid.*, p. 415). He declares that all such efforts depend upon "a view of epistemology that I reject" (*ibid.*). Quite obviously then, *no* objection could persuade him to the contrary. In short, he rejects Nash's P 5 in Argument II and declares that "an objection is satisfactorily answered if it can be shown to have no definite meaning" (*ibid.*). And, of course, no argument which depends on an epistemology which grants any role to sensory experience in the acquisition of knowledge *to Clark* has any meaning. Clark's retort, I grant, is theoretically impregnable, but then does not his stance virtually become a "theoretical egoism"? But it should be recalled that earlier I declared that Clark gives a twofold response. Perhaps after all Clark does venture out of his citadel with a view that speaks directly to Nash's difficulty. In his reply to Nash in one place he does attempt to explain how men can learn God's thoughts apart from sensory experience. Quoting Acts 17:28, "In him we live, and move, and have our being," Clark affirms that "the New Testament is clear: we live and move and have our being in God's mind," and he then draws the conclusion that "our existence in the mind of God puts us in contact with the ideas in the mind of God." Quoting 1 Corinthians 2:16 and Philippians 2:5, Clark asserts that these verses mean that "our mind and Christ's mind overlap or have a common area or coincide in certain propositions" (*ibid.*, p. 406–407). This obviously means for Clark that *our thoughts, indeed, our very existence, are real only in the sense that God is thinking us and our thoughts*. But this is a form of absolute idealism. Aside from the fact that the above interpretations are based on faulty exegesis, such a view hardly takes the Scripture writers seriously who always represent the objective creation as something other than God's mere thoughts about it, that is, as a space-occupying entity standing off over against God and as something other than God but not free from God).

All this arises from Clark's particular kind of rationalistic idealism. But there are scores of biblical passages which teach by inference, if not directly, that sensory experience plays a role in knowledge acquisition (e.g., Matt. 12:3; 19:4; 21:16; 22:32; Mark 12:10; Rom. 10:14). It seems to me, before he will convince many Christians of his position, that Clark must explain satisfactorily (in another way than is virtually universally taken) literally hundreds of passages of Scripture which employ the words "see," "hear," "read," "listen," etc. At this time, I for one am not convinced that he is in accord with Scripture when he denies to the senses a role in knowledge acquisition and would hope that he would take the Greek skeptics less seriously and the implications in many of the "subsidiary axioms" of Scripture more seriously than he does.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

To conclude this section, in Van Til's thought I have difficulty with both his insistence upon the analogical relation of human knowledge to God's knowledge and his willingness to affirm the possibility of truth as paradox (seeming contradiction) for human understanding. In Clark's thought I take exception to both his reduction of knowledge to his "axiom" and deducible propositions from it and his refusal to grant any epistemological legitimacy to the role that sense experience plays in knowledge acquisition.

* * * * *

The Reformed faith is the most consistent expression of biblical Christianity so far confessed by sinful men. The need of the hour is both a methodology of communicating that faith and a methodology of defending that faith in a manner consistent with that faith. In the foregoing chapters, admittedly, little distinction has been made between kerygma as communication, and apologetics as defense, for I happen to believe that when the Reformed faith is properly communicated, it will be by the same process properly defended, and when it is properly defended, it will be by the same process properly communicated. This is due to the fact that, the Reformed faith conceived as it is in the foregoing pages, both proclamation and defense take seriously all that the self-attesting Christ of Scripture declares concerning the nature of fallen man. If man cannot believe the gospel prior to a gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in his heart because, as natural man, he is dead in trespasses and sins and hence cannot respond in his own strength to the gospel call, then the Christian has no right to imply that he can by granting him permission to test the Scriptures as to their truthfulness prior to faith. With respect to natural man, the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are properly appraised only by the man of the Spirit. In other words, he simply does not possess the only valid test of truth, namely, the truth of Christ itself. Tillich accused those who apparently only "preach" to men of "throwing rocks at people's heads." So be it. If this is what we are doing, we gladly acknowledge our guilt as charged. Paul, before us, declared that it has pleased God through the foolishness of *preaching* to save those who believe. Therefore we study and therefore we preach, to show ourselves approved, not unto men, but unto God. Therefore we study, and therefore we preach, not to please men, but to please God.

When our message is challenged, we muster all the knowledge we have acquired to its defense. But in that defense we do not water down the message which is the real offense to the mind of natural men. When men perceive that our message will not be reduced in its assertion concerning their apostasy and depravity before God and even in disgust turn away from it, even then we remain confident that in His sovereignty God can remove the spiritual scales from their eyes that they may see both the error of their autonomy and the beauty of the Savior King. When in repentance and faith they bow before Him, confessing His name as exalted above every name, we praise the sovereign God and give all glory to Him, praising Him that our witness was not in persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that their faith should not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God.

The Christian's life should be one grand doxology to God. His intellectual life should be lived under the lordship of Christ. Such an apologetic methodology as outlined in the foregoing chapter seems to me to be most in accord with the doxological character of the life which Scripture demands one live before the God of all grace. It calls upon the apologist to take seriously the self-attesting character of deed/word revelation of the Christ of Scripture and to challenge the self-acclaimed autonomy of the so-called "rational man" in terms of

that revelation. It demands that the “rational man,” in order to save his own rationality, both recognize Christ’s epistemic lordship over him as the ground for the very possibility of knowing anything and acknowledge the sinful autonomous motive controlling him and the full and certain revelatory character of every “evidential” datum in this theistic universe.

Chapter 5 Empirical Apologetics

Over against presuppositional apologetics, which takes seriously its commitment to the “first principles” of Christian theism throughout the entire apologetic task, stand the evidential/historical methods of apologetics, which I designate “empirical apologetics.” Empiricism by definition, is the epistemological theory that knowledge is based ultimately upon sense data. *Empirical apologetics then seeks to ground the truth claims of Christianity, as did Warfield, upon scientifically demonstrable or sensory foundations.* In so doing, empirical apologetics, to a greater or lesser degree (depending upon the apologist), is a form of natural theology. Not to be confused with *natural religion*, which seeks no other authority or source of religious knowledge than nature and human reason, or *natural revelation*, which is the term employed by orthodox theologians to designate God’s non-saving revelation of Himself in the created universe, *natural theology* is the theological construction wherein a philosophical prolegomenon is brought into relationship with other beliefs derived from revelation. In this relationship, the Christian revelation, not intended to displace or to function as the ground of the philosophical prolegomenon, presupposes the philosophical prolegomenon, and presumably confirms and supplements it. Empirical apologetics as a natural theology attempts then to ground the unbeliever’s initial assent to certain Christian truths on an induction from an empirical “given,” this assent to be followed by a call to a more specific commitment to the Christian faith on the ground of special revelation. But, as this chapter will show, empirical apologetics does not accomplish what it sets out to do. Furthermore, it implies that men, apart from Christ, have by their own autonomous *pou sto* justified their claimed privilege to judge any and all other truth claims.

From the earliest days of the church a form of natural theology existed in formal theological expression. Justin Martyr, for example, in his first *Apology* affirms many analogies of Christian doctrine in Greek philosophy. In much early Christian teaching, a natural theology was evident in the assertion that the convert to Christianity could assume that the God about whom he had learned in Greek philosophy was the same God who had revealed Himself in Jesus Christ: The writings of Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian are replete with explicit statements to this effect. The great Augustine, in his early writings, under the influence still of Neo-platonism, sought to validate not only Christian doctrine but also all truth by grounding knowledge as such in logic. Here, of course, is a *rationalistic* prolegomenon as the foundation for Christian truth. To the extent that Augustine remained committed to his structure, his theology, though rationalistically based, was a natural theology. Anselm, both in *Cur Deus Homo* and the *Proslogium*, also gives explicit indication of a commitment to a rationalistic natural theology.

Thomas Aquinas

In the thirteenth century the first normative *empirical* natural theology in the Church was framed. In the preceding century, in the teaching of Averroes, the Arabian philosopher and interpreter of Aristotle and more fully later through his followers and Siger of Brabant, the view was crystallized that the conclusions of philosophy and of faith contradict each

other. This teaching, known as the doctrine of “twofold truth”—what is true in philosophy may be false in theology and yet still be believed, and vice versa, Thomas Aquinas could not accept. For him truth is one. The truths derived from the two sources supplement each other. Thus he distinguished between truths which, though consistent with the truths of nature, are discerned only from revelation, such as the truth of the Trinity, and truths of nature derived by philosophy but which are also revealed for the sake of those who do not have the capacity for such mental exercise, such as the existence of God. For Aquinas the last and highest truth arrived at by philosophy and the first and lowest truth disclosed by revelation is the existence of God. But to understand Thomas’ thought, it must be clearly borne in mind that Thomas, though not always consistent (his theistic arguments contain apriorisms, is committed to an empirical epistemology. Again and again, Thomas issues his dictum: *Nihil est in intellectu nisi prius fuerit in sensu* (*Summa* I, 84, 6; 85, 1; *De Veritate* 10, 6). Hence, he held that prior to impression of sense, the mind is a *tabula rasa*: “There are no ‘inborn ideas’; nor are there any notions, within the natural range of experience, infused into the mind by a Divine influence” (*Essays in Thomism*, edited by R. E. Brennan, p. 41). But working with the data from the world of sensation, Thomas was convinced the mind can demonstrate even the existence of God.

1. His “Five Ways”

Because the question of the existence of God is so crucial to theism, and because he regards so highly the demonstration of God’s existence from sense experience, the exposition of Thomas’ celebrated five *a posteriori* proofs for the existence of God is of great significance for Christian apologetics. His famous “Five Ways” are found in his *Summa Theologica*, I, 2, 3, and in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, XIII.

The first way is the argument from motion. Understanding motion in the Aristotelian sense of the actualization of potentiality, Thomas argues that every motion requires an explanatory cause that is inherent in neither the potentiality nor that which is actualized. Of course, a proximate cause can also be the effect of a more remote cause; but since it is impossible to conceive of infinite causal regress, for in that case there would be no first mover and consequently no motion at all, Thomas concludes “it is necessary to arrive at a first mover which itself is not moved by anything; and everyone understands this to be God.”

The second way is the argument from efficient causation. The very being of an effect requires an efficient cause outside itself, but again, since it is impossible to conceive of infinite causal regress, there must be a first efficient cause, itself uncaused, and to this “everyone gives the name of God.”

The third way is the argument for the necessity of a first cause from contingency. Everything about us is capable of not existing. Now if there were ever a time when nothing existed, nothing ever could have existed. But because something does exist, a prior cause is necessary. Again, to escape infinite regress, Thomas argues for the necessity of a first necessary being; and this, Aquinas writes, “all men speak of as God.”

The fourth way is the argument from degrees of perfection in things. The degree of perfection observable in a thing can be understood only against the backdrop of an absolute norm. The fact that beings exist with limited perfections implies their immediate dependence upon a being that is perfect in itself. Moreover, if a thing possesses only limited perfection, it must receive it from a thing which possesses it unconditionally and without limitation, and this being, Thomas affirms, “we call God.”

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The fifth way is the argument from purpose. The final end or purpose of entities demands a supreme intelligence which directs all things to their natural and purposive end. The final end or goal toward which all purposes tend “we call God.”

The five proofs for God’s existence then depend on three ideas: the reliability of sense perception, the cause–and–effect relationship, and the repugnance of infinite regress to the intellect.

On the five proofs taken together, Carnell makes seven excellent general observations (*An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, pp. 129–134).

1. Empiricism ends in skepticism: “If all the mind has to work with are sense–perceptions as reports to the mind of what is going on in the external world, knowledge can never rise to the universal and the necessary, for from flux only flux can come.” A *tabula rasa* epistemology is freighted with insurmountable obstacles to the build–up of knowledge. In other words, the denial of the innate idea of God or of innate ideas as such renders Thomas’ arguments forever useless as arguments capable of proving anything at all.
2. The principle of economy eliminates the Christian God! Hume pointed out long ago that it is a logical fallacy to ascribe to a cause any properties beyond those necessary to account for the effect. All one needs in order to explain a *finite* universe is a *finite* god. (Cf. Hume, *Inquiry*, section XI)
3. Did God *exhaust* His attributes or merely *impart* some of them in giving being to the world? Thomas (and Thomists) would, no doubt, insist that God did not exhaust His powers when He created the universe. To escape the principle of economy by appealing to the principle of impartation is, however, equally fallacious. Though we grant that a cause may have many more perfections than are seen in the effect, there is no *empirical* way to determine the actuality of this further perfection, for the cause, from the empirical point of view, *may* have exhausted itself on this effect.
4. To affirm that the God to whom each of the five proofs “leads” is the *same* God is an assumption not capable of empirical demonstration.
5. Thomas anticipated the God of Scripture as the God toward which his “proofs” pointed because of his prior heart commitment to Him. Employing similar argumentation, Aristotle never demonstrated the existence of such a God. How then did Thomas arrive at his conclusion if not *under the influence of revelation*?
6. Commitment to the empirical demonstration of the existence of God leads, at best, to the finite unmoved Mover of Aristotle, not to the God of Christian theism. If the theistic proofs were valid, they would be strong arguments in favor of the *non–existence* of the God of Christian theism. (Cf. also Clark, *Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, p. 56)
7. Only by beginning with concepts which are non–empirical (presuppositionalism) can the proofs be rendered successful, but this of course “begs the question” from the empirical point of view.

More specifically, Carnell sees each of the five ways as possessing its own inherent difficulty:

1. The argument from motion depends upon the impressions of potentiality and actuality, but sensations alone can provide *no* connection between impressions; thus there is no potentiality or actuality.
2. The argument from efficient cause *assumes* a relationship between cause and effect, but sense perception cannot demonstrate that this “connection” is anything other than habit or a convention of the intellect. Besides, “if no reason need be given for God’s uncaused state, why not shift that prerogative to the universe?”

3. The argument from contingency asserts the contingency of the entire universe, but where is the empirical evidence that the *whole* universe is contingent? Of course, *to date* all observable facts appear to be contingent, but it is a fallacy to argue for the same essential nature of a whole from the nature of its parts. [Neither is it legitimate on inductive grounds to dogmatize on the nature of being *in the future* from the nature of being *in the present*. Induction can give no assurance that a non-contingent datum will not turn up. For that matter, there is no logical reason why the entire universe might not be made up of *inter-dependent* contingencies.—RLR]
4. The argument from grades of perfection is empirically weak for “from sensation alone one can draw no distinction between good and bad, perfect and imperfect.” Furthermore, if “good” is capable of a comparative and superlative degree, so is “bad.” There is no empirical basis for rejecting the idea that an evil god as absolute evil is setting the standard of “perfection” and that what we call “good” really is “bad” but not “worst.”
5. The argument from purpose is mitigated in its total effect by the indisputable presence of evil. How can a partly good and partly bad world point to an *absolutely* good God? A flaw in a statue forces the critic to adjudge the artist as inferior. Is not the God of the teleological argument less than perfect? The empiricist cannot evade a negative response.

Two further weaknesses in the theistic arguments can be indicated. The cosmological argument begins with a view of the world as an *effect* which requires a *cause*. Now assuming the legitimacy of the cause-and-effect relationship, which Hume denied, to assume the world is an *effect* is to “beg the question,” for an effect to be an effect *demand*s a cause in the first place to produce it, but this is the very point that the argument is supposed to demonstrate. In short, the conclusion is appealed to uncritically to support the premise, which then in turn is used to lead back to the conclusion. Moreover, the empirical proofs deny infinite regress, for to do otherwise would rule out a “first cause.” But there is no logical reason to rule out infinite regress, and to do so begs the question once again. (For Gordon Clark’s criticism of the cosmological argument, cf. his *Religion, Reason and Revelation*, pp. 35–39.) Thomas’ arguments must be adjudged as invalid and hence useless as proofs for God.

2. Negation and Analogy

Thomas is likewise significant for his treatment of human knowledge of God and His attributes by way of (1) *negation* and (2) *analogy*. Concerning the former, Thomas was certain that although the divine essence by its immensity far surpasses every form to which human intellection, unaided, reaches, yet by taking the path of negation and determining what God is not, we may know something at least of what God is. Clark’s account of Thomas’ thought here helpful:

In mundane matters knowledge of what a thing is, i.e., the definition of the thing, is expressed by giving its genus and specific difference; but as God is not a genus and as he exceeds all that the human mind can grasp, we cannot know what God is—we cannot know his essence. However, it is possible to know what God is not. Such a knowledge, although admittedly imperfect, is nonetheless true as far as it goes. Thus it is true that God is not changeable [How does Thomas know this if he does not know what God is?], therefore not temporal, therefore eternal. Similarly God is not passive, for potency involves contingency, and God is not contingent; therefore God is pure act. Therefore he is not matter, and hence without parts and simple. Simplicity entails the identity of essence and existence. Yet, when we say that God is eternal or simple, we have no concept of eternity or simplicity. Though the words seem positive, the knowledge, because it refers to nothing in experience, is negative, imperfect but true. (*Thales to Dewey*, p. 276)

Concerning the latter, following Aristotle's lead, Thomas concerned himself with the precise meaning of a given predicate when applied to different subjects. In his treatment (*Summa*, I, 13, 5), Thomas sets the *analogical* relationship over against univocism and equivocism. A single predicate applied to two subjects *univocally* would indicate that the subjects possess the predicate in a precisely *identical* sense. When I say, "A sundial is a clock," and "A timepiece is a clock," I mean that both subjects are instruments for keeping time. Here the word "clock" is used in both sentences in a univocal fashion. Opposed to this usage is the attachment of a single predicate to two subjects *equivocally* whereby the predicate intends completely *unrelated* meanings. For example, when I say, "A tree has a bark," and "A dog has a bark," the word "bark" is used equivocally in the two sentences. Now Thomas was convinced that nothing predicated of both God and man could intend a meaning in either of these two senses. To say that God is good and that man is good and intend a univocal meaning by the word "good," for Aquinas, was to ignore the differences between the essence of God and man. (God's essence includes His existence, but man's essence does not include his existence.) But neither should one intend these statements in an equivocal sense, for then there would be complete ambiguity prevailing between God and His works, leading thereby to epistemological skepticism. Thomas saw the *via media* between these two as the way of proportionality or analogy (*analogia entis*). In other words, God is not known directly but rather proportionately. Hans Meyer explains analogy this way: "Between equivocation and univocation is analogy. ...it is a relation based on a comparison, a proportion, a relationship [which] can obtain only when there is neither complete agreement nor complete disagreement between two things" (*The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 128–29). Thus the assertion, "God and man are good," means by way of analogy, "Just as man is good in a way proportional to man, so God is good in a way proportional to God." That is to say, God's goodness and man's goodness are related proportionally—*partly the same, partly not the same*, i.e., different, and Thomas restricts man's knowledge of God to analogical knowledge.

The glaring problem in Thomas' thought here, as Carnell forcefully displays, is this:

Thomas admits that there is no univocal element of relation existing between God and creation, and yet he turns to the analogy to lead us to the Almighty, *when the very-thing which saves analogy from being sheer equivocation is its univocal element...* The success of any analogy turns upon the strength of the univocal element in it... Without fear of confutation we may say that the basis for any analogy is non-analogical, i.e., univocal. (*Apologetics*, p. 147; cf. also J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, I, 29–30)

To deny this is to make God unknowable. Furthermore, analogical language concerning God alone renders the "five ways" invalid, for Thomas reasons from the *existence* of sensory data to the *existence* of God, but existence means one thing for God and something else for sensory data, according to the predication by analogy. Hence, when Thomas argues from the existence of the world to the existence of God and understands the term "existence" in *two* senses—one appropriate to God and another appropriate to the sense world, he commits the fallacy in logic of equivocation.

In so many ways then the theistic proofs prove to be invalid. But though they are invalid, are they not at least useful? Unfortunately Christian opinion varies on this point. Some scholars discard them as worthless. Others contend that they are helpful as "testimonies" to the existence of God, even though formally invalid. One is reminded here of A. C. MacIntyre's remark:

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

One occasionally hears teachers of theology aver that although the proofs do not provide conclusive grounds for belief in God, they are at least pointers, indicators. But a fallacious argument points nowhere (except to the lack of logical acumen on the part of those who accept it). And three fallacious arguments are no better than one. (*Difficulties in Christian Belief*, p. 63)

I have to agree. Indeed, they are not only not valid; their use is inimical to the best interests of Christian theism. If they *were* valid, they would not prove the existence of the Christian God; rather they would point to Aristotle's god. To use them with the intent of *proving* the existence of God is also to imply that men do not already have a *sensus deitatis* within them; it is to imply that God's self-revelation is not so clear that men may not after all fail to see His credentials everywhere, as if every datum in His universe did not scream out the fact of God's existence! It is also to imply that men have done full justice to the evidence when they conclude, as they will and must, that God at best only probably exists. Furthermore, they place men in a position to pass judgment on the question of God's existence, as if men did not already have sufficient reason to conclude that God does not exist! Their use concedes that fallen man's *pou sto* is a legitimate rather than an apostate stance, that he may think of himself as an authority in religious matters. Finally, their use is the employment of "shabby tools" as means to win men to Christ. The defects in these arguments have been indicated. Is there not something suspect, even dishonest and dishonoring to one's position, in trying to win people over by specious intellectual devices? Is not the apologist leaving himself open to humiliation should his hearer have the insight to point out the defects in his argument? This is hardly honoring to the self-attesting Christ of Scripture. If, however, the data which they purport to use be drawn into the circle of revelation and be employed in a way that their use obviously presupposes Christian theism, the data are valuable, indeed, the data assume revelational status, but then the Christian apologist will find that he will be proclaiming the gospel as it should be proclaimed—in an authoritative manner, the effectual working of this proclamation being left to the sovereign operation of the Holy Spirit of God.

Buswell's Inductivistic Reformulation of the Theistic Proofs

J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., is a Reformed Presbyterian theologian and, as such, believes in the divine authority of Christ; nevertheless, he has insisted through the years that the theistic proofs constitute valuable evidence for the truthfulness of the Christian faith. He has argued that Thomas' formulations must be viewed as "inductive probability reasonings" (*Systematic Theology*, I, 75); and "inductive reasoning in theology carries us as far, and is as reliable, as inductive reasoning is, or claims to be, in any sphere" (*ibid.*, I, 23). He writes: "The theistic arguments are no exception to the rule that *all* inductive arguments about what exists are probability arguments. This is as far as the arguments, qua arguments, claim to go" (*ibid.*, I, 72). Nonetheless, not uncritically, he has urged that they are in need of some major overhaul in their formulation to rid them of inherent *prioris* and to make them truly inductive. When this is done, however, these inductive arguments "establish a presumption in favor of faith in the God of the Bible" (*ibid.*, I, 100).

Buswell realizes full well that by assuming this position he is in disagreement with other Protestant interpreters of Thomas. Clark writes:

"...Thomas Aquinas *intended*, and natural theology *demand*s, that the argument for God's existence should be a formally valid demonstration. The conclusion must follow necessarily from the premises" (*Religion, Reason and Revelation*, pp. 35–36, emphasis

supplied). Carnell writes: “Let us be careful to point out that Thomas is referring to deductive demonstration, not probable induction, in his proof for God” (*An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, p. 127, n. 9). Van Til quotes Thomas himself from *Summa Contra Gentiles* (I, 3, 2) to this effect: “...there are some truths which the natural reason also is able to reach. Such are that God exists, that He is one, and the like. In fact, such truths about God have been proved demonstratively by the philosophers, guided by the light of the natural reason” (*A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, p. 170). On the other hand, as we have already stated, Buswell denies that Thomas regarded his arguments as “irrefragable in the sense of strict deductive logic” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 74, n. 6). His arguments are as follow:

1. Thomas regarded himself as following an effect-to-cause pattern, which kind of argument is customarily designated as inductive or a *posteriori* argument.
2. Thomas’ rejection of the Anselmic, or deductive (*a priori*), form of the ontological argument, by implication, would argue for his own being classified as inductive arguments.
3. With no pretense of deductive demonstration, Thomas affirms that the “first mover,” “original efficient cause,” “necessary being,” etc., is the God of Scripture, obviously indicating that he regarded his arguments as inductions rather than deductions.
4. The mere fact that Thomas employs the word “demonstration” is not sufficient ground for charging him with attempting to demonstrate with logical infallibility the existence of God. Thomas himself distinguishes between (1) demonstration from that which is prior to the nature of things, and (2) demonstration from that which is prior in our experience to that which is inferred from these effects. It is the latter sense of demonstration that he intends.

Buswell concludes: “Nothing could be clearer than Thomas’ own disclaiming of ‘deductive demonstration’” (*Systematic Theology*, 75–76).

What shall we say to this difference of opinion? Could it be possible that a professional philosopher of the stature of Clark has misread Thomas’ intent? Or is it possible that Buswell has misinterpreted Thomas? Any answer will be an involved one. I would urge, however, the following considerations in favor of Clark’s view.

1. While formally it is true that Thomas’ arguments are inductions from effect to cause (Clark would acknowledge their a *posteriori* form; cf. *Thales to Dewey*, p. 285), Thomas’ arguments begin with premises—potentiality, actuality, a definition of motion, the necessity of a mover, the repudiation of infinite regress, etc.—which are all “conclusions from a long series of prior arguments and [which] involve discussions not only on physics, but chiefly on epistemology” (Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, pp. 274–75). Consequently, as they appear in the arguments, *which are not complete demonstrations but more like summaries of demonstrations*, they, as “effects” and notions, are *a priori* freighted with such meaning for Thomas that, for him, the conclusion follows necessarily as a formally valid demonstration. (I would urge that Clark’s entire section on Thomas’ natural theology be read very carefully in *Thales to Dewey*, pp. 272–78.) This means, in other words, that Thomas intended to argue formally from certain notions to the existence of God, but that the notions thus employed carried such inherent meaning in his argument that the existence of God was assured. Buswell is absolutely correct when he identifies the *form* of Thomas’ arguments as a *posteriori*; but he errs when he concludes that they, therefore, were, for Thomas, only “probability arguments,” because the “effects,” understood as they were by Thomas, required the suggested “cause.” This by no means exonerates Thomas of empiricism; his epistemology, influenced as it was by Aristotle, remains as a system an unrelieved

empiricism as we noted in the preceding discussion of Thomas (recall again his oft repeated insistence that “nothing is in the intellect which shall not have been first in the senses”).

2. It is true, of course, that Thomas did reject Anselm’s ontological argument, but this does not mean that Thomas therefore regarded his own arguments as “probability constructs.” I would suggest that it only means that Thomas saw the fallacy in the Anselmic argument, namely, that a conception in the mind is something different from real existence.

3. I believe that Thomas’ willingness to move from “first mover,” etc., to the God of Christianity is simply his “asserting the consequence” under the influence of revelation as we suggested earlier. It is really a very easy thing to do.

4. I agree with Buswell that the mere use of the word “demonstration” need not mean *a priori* demonstration; but if Thomas regarded his arguments as pure *a posteriori* constructs, why does Buswell feel it extremely necessary to reframe the arguments in a way to make them more consistently *inductive*? Apparently they were *not inductive enough!* As a result, Buswell goes to great lengths to point out their *a priori* “inconsistencies” and to reformulate them to rid them of their deductive remnants (cf. *Systematic Theology*, I, 81–101). In so doing, he alters them into true “inductive probability reasonings.” As such, “they do not claim to be one hundred percent demonstrations. But they do claim to be as good as inductive arguments can be” (*ibid.*, I, 81). In doing this, it seems to me, Buswell by implication concedes an *a priori* character in these arguments as construed by Thomas.

That Buswell is willing to argue the case for Christian theism inductively from empirical data there is no doubt. He is even concerned to improve upon Thomas’ efforts. In fact, Buswell has consistently argued through the years that the cosmological and teleological arguments are imbedded in Scripture statements “in such a sense that if these arguments are unsound, then these words of Scripture are false” (*Systematic Theology*, I, 86). But I insist that *never* did any Scripture writer present the data of the created universe as only probable evidence for God’s existence. They always *insist* that *every* fact of the universe speaks unmistakably of His existence, and they insist that all men everywhere ought to understand this as they do. Buswell, of course, is absolutely right when he says that “the created universe is sufficient evidence for the eternal power and divine character of God,” but he, as the biblical writers, acknowledges the *createdness* of the universe when he says this; hence, Buswell ought not to suggest that “created data” only *probably* point to their Creator. As Van Til says, this certainly appears to reflect unbiblically on the living God “to say that his revelation of Himself so lacks in clarity that man... does justice by it when he says that God *probably* exists” (*A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, p. 291). I am not saying that the Christian is not to argue with the non-Christian, and I am not saying that the Christian is not to refer the non-Christian to a consideration of the phenomenal world (Paul certainly does, for example, in Acts 14:17). It is only to urge that our representation of created data is always to be *just* that to the non-Christian (again as Paul does in Acts 14:17). Never am I to permit him to think that the reason he is unable to understand the true nature of the universe lies in the lack of full and certain testimony in the evidential universe itself. Rather, it must always be made clear that the reason lies in *his* unwillingness and inability, because of his sin, to acknowledge the data as revelational of the Deity. This is only to say, however, that the data should be viewed and presented always from the circle of revelation. Otherwise, the data will be reinterpreted to mean that the Christian God does not exist or only *probably* exists, depending upon the acumen of the interpreter. But in neither case will

justice have been done to the evidence. Of course, it cannot be otherwise when the data is taken up in the inductive argument.

Buswell has made many truly helpful contributions to the field of systematic theology as a brilliant teacher of many years' experience. His discussions of God's eternity and Paul's intention in Romans 7:14–25 are two cases in point (cf. *Syst. Theol.*, I, 43–47; II, 115–119). But he has not been as consistent, in my opinion, to his Reformed commitment as he might have been when he espouses the legitimacy and validity of the inductive arguments for God. The same difficulties inherent within the arguments of Thomas militate against their propriety in Buswell's thought.

Carnell's Systematic Consistency

As another Reformed theologian, E. J. Carnell wrote a prize-winning *Introduction to Christian Apologetics*. In it he attempted to demonstrate the wisdom in Christian commitment. He himself had a real commitment to the God of Christian theism, and had many truly admirable things to say about the Bible:

When God says something it is true, for God cannot lie; and when man reposes in God's word, he has faith. If he fails to rest in it as truth, we call him an infidel, i.e., he is not one of the faithful. The power by which the heart is enabled to see that the word of God is true is the Holy Spirit. *The word of God is thus self-authenticating*. It bears its own testimony to truth; it seals its own validity. *If the word required something more certain than itself to give it validity, it would no longer be God's word*. If God, by definition, is that than which no greater may be conceived, then His word is that than which no truer may be conceived. It would be a derogation to the efficiency of revelation to suppose that any more than God's Spirit is needed to seal the word to the heart of believers. (*Introduction to Christian Apologetics*, p. 66, emphasis supplied)

For Carnell, the Christian, indeed, any thinker, must acknowledge God as his ultimate point of reference if he is to know anything: "The Christian... is careful to point out that 'instead of beginning with facts and later discovering God, unless a thinker begins with God, he can never end with God, or get the facts either'" (*ibid.*, pp. 152–53, favorably quoting Clark). To regard the Bible as merely "another piece of human writing" is unbiblical and therefore unchristian:

...a fundamental presupposition of the higher critic is that the Bible is *just another piece of human writing*, a book to which the scientific method may safely be applied, not realizing that the Bible's message stands pitted in judgment against that very method itself. It does not occur to the higher critic that he has started off with his philosophy of life in a way that makes the consistency of redemptively-conceived Christianity impossible. (*ibid.*, pp. 193–94, emphasis supplied; cf. also J. T. Packer, '*Fundamentalism*' and the Word of God, p. 112)

The Bible is its own authenticator:

If we try to come to the Bible with a principle of selectivity found outside of the Bible, we render the Bible needless, since we can accept of it only what coincides with the truth which we had before we ever came to Scripture in the first place. In this case, we do not need Holy Writ at all; all we need is the truth, and we already have that. (*ibid.*, p. 198)

Finally, the Christian understands his differences with all other men ultimately to be bound up with the issue of one's ultimate authority:

The conservative is convinced that the question which separates his view of Scripture from that of the higher critic is more than simply the status of certain objectively verifiable facts. Rather, two basic philosophies of life are at issue. The conservative conceives of reality

supernaturalistically and redemptively, while the higher critic views it naturally and mechanically. *The Christian denies the competency of man's mind to know reality without revelation* while the non-Christian confesses it. (*ibid.*, p. 20 l, emphasis supplied)

All of this certainly appears to portray Carnell as a thorough-going presuppositionalist, but it must immediately be pointed out that this apparent presuppositional commitment is what Carnell designates his “logical starting point.” He explains:

The logical starting point is the coordinating ultimate which gives being and meaning to the many of the time-space universe. For Thales it was water, for Anaximenes it was air. For Plato it was the Good and for the Christian it is the Trinity. The logical starting point is the highest principle which one introduces to give unity and order to his interpretation of reality. This is why it is the *logical* starting point—it is what one logically conceives as the over-all synthesizing element which unites the particulars. (*ibid.*, p. 124)

But “all logical ultimates must be tested..., and the only way to do this is to work out *a still more primitive starting procedure*” (*ibid.*, emphasis supplied) and this procedure Carnell calls the “synoptic starting point.” “The synoptic starting point... is the answer to the question, How do you prove the logical starting point?” (*ibid.*, pp. 124–25). Now, for Carnell, truth is divine revelation, the mind of God. “For the Christian,” Carnell writes, “God is truth because He is the Author of all facts and all meaning” (*ibid.*, p. 46). But, he asks, “How can one segregate a right authority from a wrong one? Shall we count the number of words used, to distinguish between the worth of the Vedas, the Shastras, the writings of Confucius, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, the works of Mary Baker Eddy, the Scriptures, and the *ex cathedra* pronouncements of the popes?” (*ibid.*, p. 72). To this query Carnell responds with his theory of “systematic consistency.”

What is “systematic consistency”? It is Carnell’s test for truth. Rejecting instinct, custom, tradition, universality of belief, feeling, sense perception, intuition, correspondence, and pragmatism all as inadequate, Carnell contends that systematic consistency alone can judge truth. By “consistency” he means “obedience to the law of contradiction.” This is the *horizontal* test: Is the truth claim consistent within itself? Carnell believes that “any theology which rejects Aristotle’s fourth book of the *Metaphysics* is big with the elements of its own destruction” (*ibid.*, pp. 56, 77–78, 108–09). But consistency is not enough, for while the law of contradiction is “our surest test for the absence of truth,” it alone cannot pinpoint the how, where, or why of truth. So consistency *per se* must become *systematic* consistency, that is, the truth claim must fit all the data taken into the truth claim from the totality of our experience, both within and without. In other words, the truth claim must be “true to nature”—this is the *vertical* test (*ibid.*, p. 109). To illustrate, the truth claim must be both internally self-consistent and externally true to history, archaeology, social order, the antiquity of man, cosmogony, and the nature of man. With this test of truth in hand, however, Carnell faces fearlessly the question, how shall we make a selection from among the many claims of revelation? Let us hear his answer:

We can answer this in a sentence: Accept that revelation which, when examined, yields a system of thought which is horizontally self-consistent and which vertically fits the facts of history. When viewing the Bible, the Christian says, “I see a series of data in the Bible. If I accept the system as it is outlined, I can make a lot of problems easy.” Bring on your revelations! Let them make peace with the law of contradiction and the facts of history, and they will deserve a rational man’s assent. A careful examination of the Bible reveals that it passes these stringent examinations *summa cum laude*. (*ibid.*, p. 178)

Now all of this, taken together, is very strange! On the one hand I hear Carnell saying that the Word of God is self-authenticating, that if it required something more certain than itself to give it validity it would no longer be God's word. I hear him say that man's mind is not competent to know reality without revelation. On the other hand I hear him saying that every revelation must be tested *before* it will deserve a rational man's assent. And *the test is the very test devised by the apostate autonomous man to determine what can and cannot be, and what is and is not true, the very test which has for its theory of fact pure contingency and which has for its goal, at best, only probability* (cf. *ibid.*, p. 113)! Let me make it crystal clear that I believe in the validity of the law of contradiction. I have given my reasons in an earlier chapter. By it I reject as *false* all of the other alleged claims to revelation which surround the Bible, such as the Vedas, the Shastras, the writings of Confucius, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, and papal pronouncements, because they disagree with the truth of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture and are therefore false. Let me also make it crystal clear that with Paul (Acts 24:14) I believe the biblical revelation is true to the nature of things—to history and to all the rest of experience. (I readily confess that I have not determined scientifically the “systematic consistency” of the Christian Scriptures at every point—but did Carnell or has anyone else, even Paul, done so?—but I have never *found* it to be inconsistent with itself or untrue to the facts of history. I am equally sure that no man ever will.) But I will resist an effort which urges the “rational man” to examine all the alleged “revelations” in all their details before he assents to one, for he will die long before he could make such an examination. Moreover, I will resist an effort to invite the “rational man” to judge the Christian Scriptures in accord with *his* understanding of what can and cannot be, not because his logic is different in kind from mine (we both employ the law of contradiction), but because the *pou sto* from which he reasons is autonomous from God. He already believes that he can make himself and all other things intelligible to himself without the God of Christian theism. If autonomous man is invited to judge the Scriptures in a way consistent with his epistemological *pou sto*, he will conclude that the Bible cannot be true. The Bible contains matter that not even the Christian can easily comprehend (Rom. 11:33). How much less can the “rational man” who cannot know the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14)! I *will* invite him, however, to read the Bible that he may hear therein the self-attesting voice of the Son calling him forth from the tomb of death. I will do all I can to answer his questions concerning history, archaeology, alleged contradictions, the biblical cosmogony, and so forth, but praying all the while that the Holy Spirit will give him ears to hear and eyes to see. I will also assume his position with him to help him see that until he places the self-attesting Word of Scripture at the point of his *pou sto*, his “whole effort at asking and answering questions ceases to have significance, and, worse than that, he himself remains under the wrath of the Lamb” (Van Til, *Jerusalem and Athens*, p. 366).

By this approach, have I ignored the apologetic question raised by Carnell regarding alleged “revelations”? Not at all! With my Standards I readily acknowledge concerning the Bible that the “heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, *are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God,*” but I also insist with my Standards that “our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, *is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts*” (*Westminster Confession of Faith* I/v). Carnell believed this as well. I wish he had been more

consistent with his own *pou sto*. I wish that he had not been willing to separate facts from their meaning (*Introduction*, p. 213). This error allowed him to hold that on the personal and scientific levels, there is no difference between the manner in which the believer and non-believer look at things. At these levels, fallen man's autonomy is approved and he is permitted to put his meaning on the facts. At these levels he works "creatively and constructively," bringing meaning to his universe. But, of course, it is on the scientific level as "rational man" that he is invited to examine and to test all claims to revelation *before* he assents to one. And of course, he believes most assuredly already that it is his right to determine whether the Bible is in fact an authority to be heeded. Of course, he will conclude, and on grounds that we have granted to him as being valid, that he is not sure. I regret that Carnell felt that only at the level of what he terms "the metaphysical ultimate" does "common ground" cease to be, for at this level only does Carnell want to deny the "rational man" his autonomy, but *after the "rational man" has already concluded that the Scriptures may not be revelational of God*. Now Carnell has to inform him that he was not in a position to pass such judgment on Scripture, or at least that he is wrong. Such an apologetic system compromises Christianity itself. I regret that Carnell's apologetic method is not committed to the self-attesting Christ *throughout* the apologetic task. Then the "rational man," who is lost just because of his autonomy, would be challenged to forsake his autonomy and to return to the Father's house.

Carnell wrote other highly engaging books. In each he searches for a point of contact between Christianity and culture. As he himself wrote in *The Kingdom of Love and the Pride of Life*:

I have consistently tried to build on some useful point of contact between the gospel and culture. In *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* the appeal was to the law of contradiction; in *A Philosophy of the Christian Religion* it was to values; and in *Christian Commitment* it was to the judicial sentiment. In this book I am appealing to the law of love. (p. 6)

In these later works Carnell continues to make his appeal to the "rational man," only now he appeals to him as "moral man" and asks him to choose from among the religious options the one "which leaves the whole individual with the least cause for regret" (*A Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 229). But in so doing, Carnell appeals to man *as he is*, granting him the liberty to choose his life commitment on the grounds of what he honestly concludes most adequately fulfills the "whole individual." Again, it is the natural man that is granted the right to determine the criteria of testing the truth claims of Christianity. I must conclude that Carnell fails to challenge fully the sinner to forsake his false claim to autonomy and to confess the apostasy inherent in his "neutrality."

Schaeffer's Evangelistic "Apologetic"

Francis Schaeffer, a Reformed Presbyterian minister and founder of L'Abri, is deeply concerned to confront his century with biblical Christianity. His analysis of modern culture has proven helpful to literally thousands of collegians who are trying to understand themselves and this last third of the twentieth century through which they are passing. Schaeffer is absolutely convinced that until the Christian apologist understands his times and works out a method of communicating to it meaningfully, he is always in danger of using mere "God words" as far as his contemporaries are concerned.

According to Schaeffer, for modern man, his gravest plight, aside from his lostness in sin, is his own despair and meaninglessness. To explain how men have come to this depth is

the burden of Schaeffer's analysis of culture, and the conclusions he draws from his analysis largely determine the form his construction of an effective *evangelistic* (which for Schaeffer is practically synonymous with *apologetic*) method takes.

Schaeffer begins by describing the entire history of philosophy in general prior to Hegel as (1) rational, (2) rationalistic, and (3) optimistic. It is very important that one understands what Schaeffer means by these terms. By *rational* Schaeffer means "logical" (*The God Who Is There*, p. 17). The world's philosophers were rational men, that is to say, they thought generally in terms of antithesis ("antithetical thinking")—"A is not non-A." Therefore, there was the possibility (contingent upon discovering the universals) of absolutes in knowledge and ethics. ("If A is true, then non-A is false.") By *rationalistic* Schaeffer means the history of philosophy for the most part was *the humanistic effort on the part of unregenerate men, beginning with and from themselves and rejecting any and all outside (divine) help, to examine enough of the "particulars" of the universe to discover by antithetical thinking the universal concepts or ideas which give the particulars their meaning (ibid.)*. (Note that this definition of rationalism defines the history of philosophy from the standpoint of its *humanistic pou sto* and therefore includes both rationalism and empiricism, epistemological theories within humanism.) To understand what Schaeffer means by *optimistic*, one must recall that the history of philosophy has been a history of one philosopher attempting to "draw the circle" of a unified field of knowledge, followed by the next who crossed out the former circle, so to speak, and who then "drew his own circle," only to be followed by the next philosopher who rejected the second circle and "drew his own"—*ad infinitum*. The optimism to which Schaeffer refers, therefore, is the confident spirit with which the philosophers went about their work—the sure certainty that sooner or later man by himself would "draw the circle" which would encompass all the particulars of the universe into a unified field of knowledge, thereby grounding knowledge and explaining both himself and everything else (*ibid.*).

By the time of Hegel (1770–1831), however, Schaeffer affirms that the "options" which were open to the philosopher as a rationalist had been exhausted. (Schaeffer, of course, would correctly insist that none of these so-called "options" ever had the slightest chance of succeeding; they were "options" only from the rationalist's point of view.) Consequently, with Hegel, "philosophers came to the realization that they could not find this unified rationalistic circle and so, departing from the classical methodology of antithesis [the only "rational" way to think], they shifted the concept of truth and modern man was born" (*The God Who Is There*, p. 18).

With this shift from classical antithesis to Hegelian and then to Kierkegaardian antithesis, so asserts Schaeffer, the philosopher lost hope of ever "drawing the one circle" which would unify and ground knowledge, thereby forsaking his optimism and "moving below the line of despair."

What does Schaeffer mean by his expression, "living below the line of despair"? He means that the man "living there" has abandoned any hope of arriving at a meaningful existence grounded in rationality and has decided, in his pessimism, that his fate is to live with "a divided field of knowledge." "Downstairs," in the lower story, is the rational area, where modern man lives with mathematics, science, and mechanics, but none of these ever gives meaning and purpose to life. "Upstairs," in the upper story (which in no way is related to the lower story) is the non-rational area, where modern man "chooses" whatever experience will give him purpose, significance, and (hopefully) love. He moves from the

lower story of non-meaning to the upper story of meaning by an existential, irrational leap of faith. He leaps to anything that holds out the possibility of bringing significance to his life, even though it is a completely irrational leap that may even in the end destroy him. He has given up hope of finding any meaning in a rational act.

Schaeffer suggests that it was in the area of philosophy that men first moved below the line of despair, with the insistence by Kierkegaard that faith and meaning have nothing to do with reason. Indeed, truth is contradiction or paradox, and faith is an irrational leap. Then this modern pessimism influenced in turn art, music, general culture (the novel, drama, poetry, cinema), and finally theology. Hence, today the distinctive mark of the twentieth-century intellectual and cultural climate is the unifying factor of the concept of a divided field of knowledge. To find meaning, modern man has abandoned his rationality and has become a mystic. This is *not* an age of reason, Schaeffer asserts; rather, it is an age of mysticism.

In a word, Schaeffer sums up the present predicament of man and how he got there like this: around 1800, men were faced with a choice; they could either abandon their humanistic rationalism, accept the outside aid of a transcendental revelational *pou sto*, retain their rationality, and have the prerequisites for knowledge acquisition; or they could retain their humanistic rationalism, but adjust their efforts to find meaning to a new concept of truth which requires that they abandon rationality. In their apostasy and depravity, men chose to “escape from reason” in order to retain their rationalism. The result is modern man, still rationalistic but no longer rational in his effort to find meaning in life (*ibid.*, p. 18).

Now, in its witness to this man, Schaeffer insists, only an apologetic which is willing to talk about presuppositions will be effective. The modern man no longer shares the concept of truth which at one time pervaded Western culture, influenced as it was by a Christian consensus. As a result, the unwary Christian apologist by his witness may be “speaking only God words,” providing thereby another “first order experience” in an irrational leap of faith, when he urges, “Try Jesus.” It is absolutely imperative, writes Schaeffer, that we communicate to modern man that we are talking about real *truth*, real *guilt* before God, and an atonement that occurred in space-time *history* (*ibid.*, p. 127). How this is to be accomplished is, of course, Schaeffer’s evangelistic “apologetic.” This subject he develops in *The God Who Is There*, section IV, entitled “Speaking Historic Christianity Into the Twentieth Century Climate.” Briefly, it is as follows: Schaeffer suggests that the Christian apologist begin in his witness by finding out where the non-Christian is presuppositionally (somewhere between the real world and the logical conclusions of his non-Christian presupposition). Then he should attempt to move him logically toward the conclusion to which his presupposition would take him had he not stopped short of it in order to live in the real world. By so doing, the non-Christian will be forced to see his inconsistency before the truth of the external world and before the truth of what he himself is. As soon as he is willing to acknowledge his “horrible darkness,” the apologist should present the truth of Scripture concerning God, man, sin, Christ, and salvation to him, praying that God’s gracious Spirit would enlighten his mind and heart.

His little book, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, purports to be a book with relevance for Christian apologetics. He indicates in its “Introduction” (pp. ix–x): “This book deals with one of the most fundamental of all questions: how we know, and how we know we know. Unless our epistemology is right, everything is going to be wrong.” In it he seeks to show the

(1) metaphysical, (2) moral, and (3) epistemological necessity for the God of Christian theism.

In the first chapter he treats the issue of the metaphysical necessity of God. In a word, the question here is, how do we explain the fact that man and things *are*, in other words, the problem of existence. Schaeffer contends that there are only three basic *possible* answers to the question of existence: (1) everything that exists has come out of *absolutely* nothing; (2) everything that exists has come out of an impersonal beginning (mass, energy, or motion) plus time plus chance; and (3) everything that exists has come from a personal beginning. Schaeffer, while admitting the theoretical possibility of the first answer, dismisses it with a single sentence: “I have never heard this argument sustained, for it is unthinkable that all that now is has come out of utter nothing” (p. 8). He rejects the second possible answer, primarily on the grounds that it cannot explain (a) the complex “form and order” of the external world (p. 5) or (b) the personality of man (p. 10). He accepts the third possible answer because it explains both the form and order which Schaeffer sees everywhere and the personality—the “mannishness”—of man. Now in order for this personal beginning to be “big enough” to give meaning to things, Schaeffer affirms that we need a personal *infinite* beginning (pp. 12–13). Still further, Schaeffer urges, if this personal infinite beginning is not to be put in the position where it (shall I now say he or He?) must create in order to love and to communicate, it must possess a unity and diversity within it (pp. 13–16). When we look around to see if any religion has a god which meets all these “metaphysical requirements,” we discover that “the Judaeo-Christian content to the word ‘God’ as given in the Old and New Testaments does meet the need of what exists” (p. 14). In fact, Schaeffer affirms, in response to the question, how can he accept the Christian conception of a triune God, that without such a conception of God he would still be an agnostic, “because there would be no answers” (p. 14).

In the second chapter Schaeffer argues for the moral necessity of God in a way closely akin to his argument of the former chapter. He insists that when one begins with an impersonal beginning, there is no meaning to the words right and wrong. He acknowledges that societies can and have been able to give meaning to the words through laws often determined by majority opinion, but in this setting “we cannot talk about what is really right and what is really wrong” (p. 23). But by postulating a personal beginning, we not only can keep metaphysics and morals separated, but also we can justifiably insist that men are moral creatures. Of course, unless we insist that man is not now what he once was, and unless we insist that man has changed himself, the personal beginning (God) would be evil since man is cruel. Now this is precisely, says Schaeffer, what did happen. At a certain point in history (he refers here to the fall recorded in Genesis 3) man, by his free choice, changed himself and since then has been morally abnormal. Schaeffer insists that in no way did God change man, for then He would be a bad God (p. 30). Rather, “man as he now is *by his own choice* is not what he intrinsically was” (*ibid.*); “the non-programmed creature revolted and thus brought into existence the present dualism of good and evil” (*ibid.*, p. 35).

Comments on the last two chapters—dealing respectively with the problem and answer involved in the epistemological necessity for God—will be reserved until the arguments already presented have been examined.

Our overview of Schaeffer’s thought, admittedly, has been brief. The student of apologetics will want to read the trilogy, *The God Who Is There*, *Escape From Reason*, and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, for himself. For myself, while I admire Schaeffer and the “labor of love” which he has rendered to his Lord in the L’Abri work, I am not persuaded

that his great success under the good hand of God in challenging thousands of collegians to consider seriously the claims of Christ is due to the “rightness” of the methodological “theory” as set forth in these books. My criticisms mainly center on what appear to me to be concessions to apostate man in his methodology as set forth *theoretically* in these books.

Schaeffer claims to be a presuppositional apologist and indeed insists that the need of the hour is a presuppositional apologetic. But as I understand him, he does not mean by this term an apologetic method that takes with radical seriousness as its self-attesting “first principle” all that the Scriptures teach about God, man, and the relationship between them. He seems rather to mean that the evangelist today should be able to deal effectively primarily with the fact of the shift in the concept of truth from antithesis to synthesis (Hegel) and dialectic (Kierkegaard): “...this change in the concept of the way we come to knowledge and truth is the most crucial problem,” writes Schaeffer, “facing Christianity today” (*GWT*, p. 13). Schaeffer does not seem to appreciate the fact that the non-believer, irrespective of the way he reasons, operates from an apostate *pou sto* by nature as over against the paligenetic *pou sto*, for he asserts that prior to the shift in concepts of truth around the turn of the century “everyone would have been working on much the same presuppositions... both in the area of epistemology and methodology” with the *basic* one being the acceptance of the possibility of absolutes: “Thirty or more years ago you could have said such things as ‘This is true’ or ‘This is right’ and you would have been *on everybody’s wavelength*” (*ibid.*, p. 14, emphasis supplied). He acknowledges that classical apologetics (evidentialism) prior to this shift was effective and implies that, if the shift had not occurred, it would still be effective when he writes: “The use of classical apologetics before this shift took place was effective only because non-Christians were functioning, on the surface, on the same presuppositions [as Christians],” but now, since man thinks differently concerning truth, “more than ever before, a presuppositional apologetic is imperative” (*ibid.*, p. 15). Knudsen’s criticism seems justified: “Schaeffer leaves unexplained... why the apostate philosophy was that much better before it learned to employ dialectical logic.” Again, Knudsen writes: “Schaeffer does not ask... whether the same apostate motives that are at work in philosophies where there is a rejection of the law of the excluded middle and an adoption of a dialectical method are also at work in philosophies where there is a clear distinction between what is true and what is false. He simply tries to reinstate the making of distinctions” (*Jerusalem and Athens*, p. 290). For once Schaeffer has been able to restore the concept of antithesis in the thinking of modern man (in what he calls “pre-evangelism”), he invites the man, now “rational,” to test the truth claims of Scripture, reminiscent of Carnell, by its consistency and the space-time evidence, and to do this *prior* to faith (*GWT*, pp. 94, 109, 141). Schaeffer writes:

...scientific proof, philosophical proof, and religious proof *follow the same rules*. We may have any problem before us which we wish to solve; it may concern a chemical reaction or the meaning of man. After the question has been defined, in each case proof consists of two steps:

- a. The theory must be non-contradictory and must give an answer to the phenomenon in question.
- b. We must be able to live consistently with our theory. For example, the answer given to the chemical reaction must conform to *what we observe* in the test tube. With regard to man and his “mannishness,” the answer must conform to *what we observe* in a wide consideration of man and how he behaves.

Specifically in relation to the question of man, does the Christian answer conform to and explain *what we observe* concerning man as he is...? (*ibid.*, p. 109, emphasis supplied)

Note the expression “what we observe.” Surely Schaeffer is aware that what a man observes is dependent upon his religious *pou sto*. What Schaeffer observes may not be at all what another man observes. Still, with Carnell, Schaeffer invites the non-believer to judge Christianity with an apostate epistemology. His illustration of the mutilated book points this up clearly (*ibid.*, p. 108). He asks us to imagine a book that has had all its pages torn out, leaving only an inch of print on each page. When the torn-out pages are finally located, the fact that they belong to this particular book and thus provide the printed material necessary to an understanding of the whole is tested by the inch of print still in the binding. In his explanation of the illustration, the inch of printed matter remaining in the book corresponds to the universe and the “mannishness” of man, the torn-out pages to the Scriptures. Hence, the test or proof that Scripture is true is whether or not it explains the universe and man. But are we to permit the non-believer to judge whether Scripture is true or false on the basis of whether, in his opinion, it explains the universe and the nature of man? From his point of view, it would be the last interpretation he would accept, for he does not observe things as Schaeffer “observes” them. Or, to continue Schaeffer’s illustration, he does not agree with Schaeffer concerning what “the inch of print” still remaining in the book says. Consequently, on grounds Schaeffer grants him, he can conclude that Scripture is false. But what is worse, Schaeffer is willing to grant that even the *Christian* “must have the integrity to live open to the questions: “Does God exist? Is the content of the Judaistic-Christian system truth?” (*ibid.*, p. 131).¹ Apparently, for Schaeffer the truth of the Christian Scriptures must never be regarded even by the Christian as finally a settled question. To regard it so would not be an act of integrity! In the face of such concessions, it appears actually to be working at cross purposes with Christian evangelism to say, as does Schaeffer, “...we are not asked to believe until we have faced the question as to whether [Christ is the Son of God] is true on the basis of the space-time evidence” (*ibid.*, p. 141). But if I must always be open to the question of the truthfulness of the content of the Christian faith, I will never believe it!

His philosophical arguments for the necessity of God in *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* are also invalid. From the manner in which Schaeffer develops his thought in these chapters, it would appear that Schaeffer is a Christian because the unique content of the word “God” in the Christian framework meets a psychological need in his life (cf. his comment, “I would still be an agnostic if there were no Trinity,” p. 14). As arguments, his chapters “beg the whole question” as far as demonstrating the *necessity* for God, as is clear from the following facts:

1. He assumes as the “given” to be explained a universe and man, both of a particular character; but their “particular character” just happens to be the character described by the Christian Scriptures.
2. The reason that his own conclusion, for him, is the *necessary* answer to existence is because it alone both explains the form and order in the external world and defines the personality of man as he views them. But from what source does he derive his view of the world and man? Doubtless, he would say, from the world that is really there. But I am not convinced that the world is so self-evidently the world that

¹ In a private conversation with Dr. Schaeffer, I asked him if he meant by this statement simply that the Christian should be willing to entertain questions from *others* about these issues (which all would readily acknowledge) or that the Christian himself should always be willing sincerely to reexamine these questions as to the possibility of his having been “taken in” by his Christian commitment. He replied that he intended the latter, referring to his own experience recounted in the introduction of his *True Spirituality*.

Schaeffer sees. Rather, it is the mind informed by the teaching of Scripture that views the “world that is really there” as necessitating the God of Christian theism. If his understanding of the world and of himself is *not* derived from Scripture, then he opens himself to all the fallacies of the cosmological argument. If it *is* derived from Scripture, then he has “begged the question” of demonstrating the metaphysical necessity of His God. What Schaeffer has done here, it seems to me, is to attempt to prove, while presupposing the existence of the God of Christian theism (but never acknowledging in so many words that he has done so), the compatibility between such a God and “things as he sees them,” failing (uncritically?) to point out that “things as he sees them” happen also to be “things as the Bible sees them.” Apart from Scripture, for example, he cannot define the “mannishness of man” in such a way that it necessitates the Christian God. Schaeffer himself acknowledges that for many people the world (including man) is chaotic, irrational, and absurd (p. 5). For these people there is no “metaphysical necessity” for the God of Christian theism, for there is no cosmic order or “mannishness” of which they are aware that requires Him. It is only an effect of a particular kind that necessitates a cause of a particular kind. But how is the particular nature of this “cosmic effect” to be established sufficiently to necessitate the existence of the “First Cause” of Christian theism apart from presupposing Christian theistic revelation? The informed Christian can almost hear the chuckle of David Hume at Schaeffer’s argument. It is the old cosmological argument of Thomas in new garb, but Schaeffer “out-Thomases” Thomas. Thomas, at least, was not willing to deduce personal diversity in the Godhead from observed effects, while Schaeffer, on the basis of observed effects alone (e.g., human love), purports to demonstrate not only the necessity of a *personal* God, but an *infinite* personal God which exists ontologically in personal unity *and diversity!* Needless to say, I find this point incredible. Of course, Schaeffer is absolutely right when he confesses faith in the infinite personal God on the high order of Trinity, but it is *Scripture alone* which informs him of such a God, not the observed phenomena of the world, and he should acknowledge his affirmation is the product of Christian commitment and not the outcome of reflection on the “real world” and the “mannishness of man.” I gladly acknowledge that the real world does demand as a necessity the God of Christian theism, but this is because of my particular view of “things,” a view confessedly informed by Holy Scripture.

3. Schaeffer is, of course, only being biblical when he rejects as an option the impersonal plus time plus chance as the correct explanation for man’s nature, but he does not show why an impersonal beginning plus time plus chance has not produced the immense complexity of the life forms upon this planet. Schaeffer writes: “No one has ever demonstrated how time plus chance, beginning with an impersonal, can produce the needed complexity of the universe, let alone the personality of man” (p. 9). And again, “...no one has ever thought of a way of deriving personality from non-personal sources” (*GWT*, p. 88). But surely Schaeffer is aware that hundreds of thousands of evolutionary scientists are

convinced on what to them is sufficient evidence that it is precisely by an evolutionary process that man's personality has come about. Schaeffer's remark is simply a value judgment at best and a form of enthusiastic rhetoric, and not in keeping with the actual situation in the "real world."

In the second chapter of *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* Schaeffer deals with the moral necessity for the Christian God. It is fraught with the same difficulties, as a moral argument for God, that the cosmological argument faces. Only it does raise the whole problem of human evil. If we acknowledge, for the sake of argument, that man, as a moral creature, was created by God, how can we explain his cruel practices and inhumanities to man? Schaeffer is correct, of course, when he appeals to the space-time fall of Genesis 3 as the historical point when man became abnormal. But does he present the whole of Scripture teaching when he implies that the fall of man was due solely to human choice (pp. 30, 35), that man was and is not a "programmed man"? He defends the goodness of the Christian God by laying the reason for the fall wholly at the feet of men. But Schaeffer, as a Reformed Presbyterian minister, subscribes to a Creed which affirms that God has decreed immutably and irrevocably *whatsoever* comes to pass, that the providence of God is His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing *all* His creatures and *all* their actions, this providence expressly described as extending itself to the fall of man and to all other sins of men and angels. Man, according to Schaeffer's Confession, is in one sense at least "programmed," and that one sense an all-important one, no one being free from God's sovereign will. I cannot help but wonder, if the collegian knew that Schaeffer believed in *divine* determinism, whether that would be any more popular than *chemical* determinism. I appreciate Schaeffer's concern to press home the point that men's decisions are significant, but I do not believe that it preserves the biblical balance for Schaeffer to describe man as "the non-programmed creature."

The two chapters directly given to a discussion of epistemology which follow and conclude *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* claim much more forthrightly to be presuppositional in methodology than the former chapters, but Schaeffer's willingness (1) to concede that before the shift in truth both saved and lost operated with the same presuppositions, and (2) to entertain an empiricistic verification test of truth, compromises what otherwise might be regarded by some as positive gain (for contexts where Schaeffer calls for such verification, cf. *The God Who Is There*, pp. 109, 141; *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, pp. 94, 100).

One final question must be raised. He defines rationalism as "the system whereby man, beginning absolutely by himself, tries rationally to build out from himself, having only man as his integration point, to find all knowledge, meaning and value" (*GWT*, p. 17). Note the word "rationally," and bear in mind that each part of a definition should be germane to the term being defined. Now, according to Schaeffer, when rationalism was faced with the choice of retaining either rationality or its rationalism, in some way, unexplained by Schaeffer, it was able to continue as rationalism even though it forsook one main element which defined it as such. But how can rationalism, so defined, give up its rationality and still be rationalism? Would it not become irrationalism? One would think so, and indeed I do believe that the strain of irrationalism looms large in the philosophical and theological existentialism traceable to Kierkegaard.

There are some contradictions which I hope will be cleared up in later editions of his book. For example:

...the other possible answers that *do not involve a mystical leap of faith* are of the following nature:

1. That the impersonal plus time plus chance have produced a personal man. But this theory is against all experience and thus usually the advocates of this theory *end with a leap of faith* (GWT, p. 110, emphasis supplied)

Because of his imprecision in definition and inarticulation of concepts, I have found his books to be difficult to understand. But my main criticism is the (uncritical?) dialectic in Schaeffer which calls for both what occasionally really does appear to be a presuppositional methodology (GWT, p. 93) and also a test for truth devised by and acceptable to apostate man (p. 109) rather than the self-authenticating test for truth which Scripture claims itself to be (Ps. 119:142, 151; Dan. 10:21; John 16:13; 17:17; 2 Tim. 2:15) and which the Westminster Standards confess. I detect real tension in Schaeffer's thought at this point, and sincerely hope—that he will give some attention to these matters in forthcoming publications. For further discussion of Schaeffer's methodology, cf. to the review of *The God Who Is There* in *The Westminster Theological Journal* XXXII/1 (Nov., 1969), pp. 114–116; the unpublished classroom syllabus "The Apologetic Methodology of Francis Schaeffer," by Van Til; and the careful, critical study, *Francis Schaeffer's Apologetic: A Critique*, by Thomas V. Morris.

Montgomery's Historical Apologetic for Christ's Claims

John Warwick Montgomery is a Lutheran church historian. He does not want to challenge men with a *self-attesting* Christ speaking in Scripture at the *outset* of confrontation with them. In the February, 1966, issue of *His* magazine, he terms those who do this adherents of a "misguided orthodoxy" (p. 11), whose approach, he says, opposes true Christian apologetics even more than the "anti-apologetic views of modernism, neo-orthodoxy and Bultmann's existentialism" (p. 12). In his *History and Christianity*, Montgomery illustrates how the apologist should go about his work. He is certain his way is correct because it is the way he was brought into the kingdom of God. How was that? In his own words, "by the historical evidence in behalf of Jesus' claims" (p. 13). He begins, he says, not by naively assuming the inspiration or infallibility of the New Testament records. Rather, he says, he will regard them "only as documents, and we will treat them as we would any other historical materials" (pp. 25–26). He does this, in spite of the fact that Scripture itself declares its own inspiration and infallibility, and not to acknowledge this fact is already to set aside one claim of the data of Scripture. But to do otherwise, Montgomery insists, is to be guilty of circular reasoning, and besides, he would say, "I'm not 'theologizing' now; I'm witnessing" (as if our witnessing should not reflect a sound "theologizing").

With the documents before him, Montgomery subjects them to the *bibliographical*, *internal*, and *external* tests of reliability employed in general historiography and literary criticism. By the first test he refers to the "analysis of the textual tradition by which a document reaches us" (p. 26), that is, he seeks the reconstruction of the texts to see what they say Jesus claimed. Montgomery is, of course, confident that such a reconstruction is possible by textual criticism. In the *internal* test, one must "listen to the claims of the document under analysis and not assume fraud or error unless the author disqualifies himself by contradictions or known factual inaccuracies" (p. 29). Montgomery, I suggest, deals with this test in a naive manner, for he refers to a few instances where the writers claim to be eye-witnesses to the data they report, and then declares that such considerations "provide a

weighty basis for the claim that the New Testament documents are reliable historical sources” (p. 31). Clark, in my opinion, more correctly discerns what the internal test entails:

...it is interesting to note that Dr. Montgomery's actual procedure is (dogmatically) better than his empirical theory... Dr. Montgomery said, “One might suppose that the documentary passage just cited (II Peter 1:16) would constitute, at least hypothetically, the kind of proof that is marshalled for any historical event.” In this Dr. Montgomery appeals to the veracity of Peter. At least the present writer hopes he (inconsistently) makes this appeal, for this would seem to be the correct Christian procedure. It is an appeal to divine revelation. True enough, the sentence quoted can mean something else more in accord with Dr. M's theory. The sentence says that the verse in II Peter is “the kind of proof that is marshalled for any historical event” by any secular historian. The present writer, however, does not believe that an appeal to this verse is the kind of proof the secular historians use. But if it be so taken, then one must search for a mass of evidences archaeological evidences, second century evidences, any extra-biblical evidences to prove that it was Peter who spoke *and that he spoke the truth*. Note well that the evidence would have to establish a first century date and an apostolic author, but also *it would have to establish that the apostle spoke the truth. Secular assumptions forbid us to take the veracity of apostles on faith. It must be proved independently for every verse. This secular process never arrives validly at the veracity of Peter. In fact it never arrives validly at anything.* (*Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, pp. 117–18; emphasis supplied)

This quotation is damaging enough, and requires no further comment. Let us proceed. The *external* test asks: do other historical materials confirm or deny the internal testimony provided by the documents themselves? Montgomery, of course, is certain that all external testimony confirms the internal testimony; but again, I suggest, Clark's comments register against Montgomery's contention, that is, that this cannot be assumed at any point but must be checked at *every* point. Nonetheless, Montgomery concludes at this juncture of his argument: “What, then, does a historian know about Jesus Christ? He knows, first and foremost, that the New Testament documents can be relied upon to give an accurate portrait of him” (p. 40).

The second step in Montgomery's method is a study to determine what the New Testament documents teach about Christ. This in itself is a mammoth undertaking, requiring, among other things, exegesis. But Montgomery traverses this field rather readily, leading him to conclude: “We may not like the Jesus of the historical documents; but like him or not, we meet him there as a divine being on whom our personal destiny depends” (p. 58). Now Montgomery is right, of course, that the Jesus of Scripture is divine, but I wonder if Montgomery thinks he came to that conclusion *solely* on the basis of exegetical evidence. As anyone who has labored in exegesis readily knows, all along the way decisions have to be made, often highly subjective ones. Of course such decision-making seeks to be controlled by knowledge of grammar, historical usage, and the “analogy of Scripture,” but even so, sometimes a choice has to be made on a subjective basis, say, for example, with regard to the problem in Romans 9:5. What is the “neutral” historian to do? Why, give the benefit of the doubt to the writer, Montgomery avers (p. 29). But what is the writer's position? Is that not the very point of exegetical labors? The point I am wishing to make here is that the exegete is circumscribed in the conclusions he reaches by his own academic limitations, prejudices, and self-interests. Is it not possible that Montgomery reached his conclusion concerning Christ not on the basis of exegesis alone, but because he *chose* to do so; or if he replies that such a conclusion is the last conclusion he himself in his sin would have *chosen*, can he be sure that the Holy Spirit of God did not “persuade and enable” him to choose such a conclusion? Can he demonstrate, on *empirical* grounds, that this divine factor was *not* an influence upon him?

I think not. The biblical testimony (Ps. 65:4; John 6:44–45, 65), in fact, declares that this is precisely what did happen.

Although sufficient difficulties have been indicated to keep him occupied for a life–time, Montgomery, nevertheless, takes the next step in his apologetics. Having satisfied himself (and his readers, presumably) that he is still on solid ground empirically, he delineates the nature of the next move—it is a “process of elimination.” He has determined scientifically that the New Testament data claim deity for Jesus: now, “logically, if Jesus was not divine..., we are reduced to three, and only three interpretations of the New Testament data: (1) Jesus claimed to be the Son of God but knew he was not. He was a charlatan. (2) Jesus thought he was the Son of God but actually he was not. He was a lunatic. (3) Jesus never actually claimed to be the Son of God, though his disciples put this claim in his mouth. So, the disciples were charlatans, lunatics, or naive exaggerators” (p. 61). Montgomery contends now that “*by process of elimination*, we are brought to affirm Jesus’ deity, not only as a claim, but also as a *fact*” (*ibid.*). Voila! Historical evidence alone will bring us to an affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ.

Montgomery dismisses the first option because he finds it impossible to think that a teacher of such high ethics as was Jesus would be so unscrupulous as to base his entire life and teaching upon a false claim. I would only say that teachers of ethics have been found to be very unscrupulous, although I agree, of course, that Jesus was not. He rejects the second option because, “in view of the eminent soundness of Jesus’ teachings, few have been able to give credence to the idea of mental aberration” (pp. 64–65). But, of course, some authorities have, as he admits. He dismisses the third option for three reasons:

First all types of Jewish messianic speculation at the time were at variance with the messianic picture Jesus painted of himself, so he was a singularly poor candidate for deification. Second, the apostles and evangelists were psychologically, ethically and religiously incapable of performing such a deification. Third, the historical evidence for Christ’s resurrection, the great attesting event for his claims to deity, could not have been manufactured. (pp. 66–67)

He supports his first contention by quoting Edersheim, Baron, Burrows, Bruce, and Herford, but is he not following the same practice—relying on modern authorities—he earlier condemned in Stroll (pp. 67–72; cf. p. 17)? His second point he supports by the “picture” of the disciples in the documents as practical, ordinary, down–to–earth folk who could find it easy to be skeptical. But this, of course, rests on the assumption that the New Testament documents are trustworthy when they portray the disciples as guileless men who would never misrepresent their real character in any way. His third point—that Jesus’ claim to deity is attested by His resurrection from the dead—is defended, as is often done, (1) by seeking to show the incredibility credibility of alternative theories suggested to answer the question, what *did* happen to Jesus after His death and burial? and (2) by appealing to the modern conception that in our universe the possibility of unusual events cannot now be ruled out on grounds of “natural law,” because the concept “cause” is “peculiar, unsystematic, and erratic” (pp. 72–78).

Three observations are in order here in response to this line of argumentation by Montgomery. First, Montgomery himself says, “The *only* way we can *know* whether an event *can* occur is to see whether *in fact* it *has* occurred” (p. 75; emphasis supplied). Has Montgomery demonstrated, beyond all shadow of doubt, with his line of reasoning, that the resurrection has occurred? No, he himself claims only *probability* for the resurrection of

Christ from this line of argument (p. 79). Then it follows that we do not know *for sure* that the resurrection *did* happen, this conclusion being drawn sadly from *evidence which includes evidence from the disciples themselves!* Second, to support the possibility of the resurrection of Christ by appeal to the modern concept of indeterminacy is to grant legitimacy to the modern view of the universe as governed by Chance and one in which no interpretation of the data is ever final. What meaning, in a universe like that, would a resurrection have if it did occur? Precisely none! Modern man can simply conclude that the universe in which he lives is certainly mysterious, a universe in which anything might happen; but how such contingent incidents as a first-century resurrection could carry any significance for faith and life, particularly the significance that Montgomery attaches to it, is impossible to demonstrate on Montgomery's own grounds. Third, as a matter of fact, it is entirely possible to be convinced on grounds similar to those advanced by Montgomery that Jesus was raised from the dead, and still not discover in that historical event the necessary attestation of Jesus' full deity as that deity was understood classically by Chalcedon. Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Jesus—God and Man* is a contemporary case in point. In no uncertain terms Pannenberg insists, from the two lines of evidence of the empty tomb and the many post-resurrection appearances, that Jesus was raised from the dead. He concludes from this "historically attested fact," however, that (1) God was establishing the *man* Jesus' complete dedication to God, and (2) it was this complete dedication to God that constituted Jesus' union with God, that is to say, that constituted the "divinity" of the man Jesus. While for Pannenberg Jesus' "divinity," established by his resurrection, has an ontically retroactive influence on Jesus, it does not vindicate for Pannenberg Jesus' eternal ontic preexistence as the Second Person of orthodoxy's ontological Trinity.

These three facts then show that Montgomery has not made and cannot make a case for Christian theism on historical grounds alone.

We have followed Montgomery through his extended argument, on the basis of empirical (historical) data, for the veracity of the claims of Christ. He claimed by it, on the basis of evidence and by the process of elimination, to bring men to affirm Jesus' deity as fact, this claim being made in spite of Paul's affirmation that no man can affirm Jesus' lordship except he be taught by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3; cf. Hodge on 1 Corinthians, p. 241). He does not, of course *At best*, he has built up a probability argument with all the problems inherent within it that we have noted earlier in conjunction with Warfield's, Buswell's, and Carnell's apologetic efforts. What would a position that is *probably* true mean in a world governed by Chance?

Montgomery is an empiricist. He argues his case from historical evidence. In some respects he is also an Arminian. He does not regard men "who hesitate to enter into... a personal relationship [with Christ]" because they doubt the validity of Jesus' claims as "dishonest persons endeavoring to hide willful opposition to Christ under the cloak of alleged intellectual doubts" ("The Place of Reason," *His*, March, 1966, 14). The Calvinist, of course, regards such men precisely as men in willful opposition to Christ. But Montgomery takes "doubting Thomas" as his "key example" of one who honestly doubted Christ's claims *prior to his salvation*. Montgomery *must* regard Thomas as a non-Christian; otherwise, he would not serve as the "key example" of an unsaved man being brought to salvation through empirical evidence. For Montgomery, it is clear that Thomas was unsaved in John 20:25, "since belief in the resurrection is an essential element in the gospel" (*ibid.*). If this exegesis were true, it would follow that none of the disciples were Christians prior to the "upper

room” experience because *none* expected the resurrection before it occurred. *None* had understood Christ’s oft–repeated promise of resurrection. But few expositors would draw the conclusion that the disciples were not Christians before the “upper room” experience because they doubted Christ’s resurrection. This is, on Montgomery’s part, a failure to appreciate the unique position in “salvation history” that the disciples occupied prior to the resurrection and Pentecost. I would suggest that Thomas simply illustrates the Christian disciple who, because of faithlessness under those circumstances, is graciously dealt with by his Lord in a condescending way. Montgomery’s exegesis is poor here, but then, as I suggested earlier, exegesis can be difficult. One might even be colored in his exegesis by self–interest.

Montgomery’s other example, in his article, of unbelievers with “honest intellectual problems” is the Stoics on Mars’ Hill in Acts 17. True enough, as Montgomery says, the Stoics were more “ethically sensitive” than the Epicureans, but does this fact alone make them, as non–Christians, somehow a cut above all men, the men described by Paul as sinners, *none* of whom is righteous, *none* of whom searches after God? (Rom. 3:10–11). I think not and I hope Montgomery thinks so too. Furthermore, I suggest that it is irresponsible exegesis on Montgomery’s part to say, with no qualifying statement, that Paul positioned himself within the unbelievers’ frame of reference when he notes Paul’s reference to the unknown God and his quotation from the poets Cleanthes and Aratus, for in one way he did and in one way he did not. If one means that Paul was willing to assume the pagan notion of God when he employs such terms it ought to be patently clear that he no more does this than the Westminster divines positioned themselves within the frame of reference of Aristotelian metaphysics when they speak of God as “first cause” in the *Confession of Faith*, V/ii. On the other hand, if one means that Paul was willing to employ certain phrases found in pagan poets as literary vehicles for communicating his message, it is equally transparent that Paul did position himself within the pagan frame of reference. But what does this prove? It means, first, that Christians and non–Christians can use the same words. It means, second, that *formally* that is, in the literary *form* of some expressions, Paul positions himself within the frame of reference of the pagan philosophers, but materially, that is, with reference to theological *content, intent, and meaning*, Paul insists that *the pagans, although ignorant² of the fact, really stand within his frame of reference!* It is *his* God that they acknowledge *without clearly realizing it!* It is *his* God by whom all men live and move and have their being *without clearly realizing it*. All men have a *sensus deitatis*. If someone should ask, where then is the point of contact if men do not realize this fact, or how was Paul actually communicating to them, I would reply that it is the Holy Spirit’s work to make men *hear* the Word, and in this case He did (Acts 17:34), but not because Paul assumed their material frame of reference, but because these men actually stood within his material frame of reference! (Cf. Van Til, *Paul at Athens*, for additional commentary on Paul’s Mars’ Hill sermon.)

Montgomery, as we said at the beginning of our analysis of his apologetic method, does not want to confront men with a self–attesting Christ, for this would be reasoning in a circle. He prefers to argue from *evidence*; otherwise, he would be a presuppositionalist. W.

² The point of contact on the psychological level between Paul’s *words* and his auditors’ *minds* was their acknowledged *ignorance* of his God (17:23). Doubtless, Paul understood this ignorance to be of a far more radical character than they would have confessed—what to them was a sign of real religion was to Paul a confession of real religious ignorance. His purpose throughout his sermon, far from assuming or seeking to establish a common *material* ground, was to call the Athenians to *radical* conversion away from their confessed ignorance.

Stanford Reid, in his article, “Subjectivity Or Objectivity in Historical Understanding?” (*Jerusalem and Athens*, pp. 404–19), clearly demonstrates that Montgomery, as a historian, is not without his own presuppositions concerning the nature of reality, and goes on to charge him with trying to skirt dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing men to valid Christian conclusions. I feel Reid’s criticism is basically sound and endorse his article whole–heartedly. Clark, too, insists that Montgomery holds to his own kind of presuppositions regarding empirical evidence. The only evidence that he will admit in evidence as evidence is evidence that is in line with his presupposition as to what the nature of evidence is. Thus he has a “first principle.” Clark correctly insists:

[Montgomery] must hold that sensory experience is more reliable than a divinely given revelation. He must hold that sensation is self–authenticating and that the Bible cannot be self–authenticating... Since the empiricist is as much a “dogmatist” on sensation as the consistent Christian is on revelation, Dr. Montgomery is equally unable to provide any evidence for his own first principle... Therefore the objections he levels against presuppositionalists apply to himself with equal force. (*Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, p. 117)

If one must start with presuppositions, and every man must, how much better to start with the authoritative Christ of Scripture than to begin, with Montgomery, with the “broken cistern” of an empirical apologetic that justifies no truth claim whatsoever!

Pinnock’s Evidential Methodology

The same verdict must be handed down with respect to Clark Pinnock’s methodology, quite similar to Montgomery’s and elucidated in his popular little book, *Set Forth Your Case*, and in his larger study, *Biblical Revelation—The Foundation of Christian Theology*. In the latter volume, for example, he attacks such men as John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Edward J. Young, John Murray, Cornelius Van Til, and Gordon Clark, whom he calls “fideists” (pp. 38–41), for their common affirmation that “the self–testimony of the Scripture itself is sufficient to establish its inspiration” (p. 40). He asserts, though surely he knows better, that “this is precisely Barth’s position too” (p. 42). He confuses the position of these men (who simply insist that the Bible’s inspiration and authority are dependent upon the testimony of the self–attesting Christ of Scripture) with what he regards as a “subjective religious experience” (*ibid.*). Such a ground for inspiration he regards as a “flimsy base” for the case for inspiration. Pinnock, to the contrary, insists that the gospel must be sustained by historical data; otherwise, “it cannot be sustained at all” (p. 45). “The validity of Christian theism rests on its historical credentials” (*ibid.*). Of course, Pinnock admits that the historical evidences for Christian theism do not prove with certainty that Christianity is true—indeed, “it is possible,” he declares, “that Jesus was a Martian, a charlatan, or a madman” (p. 50). But he is convinced that “when we enter the realm of fact, we deal in probabilities”; in fact, probability is the “guide to religious truth” (p. 46). He concludes, therefore, that “it is not probable that [Jesus] was any of these” (p. 50). He argues that “to require a prior commitment to the gospel before the evidence for its truthfulness has been weighed is an apologetic that can never succeed” (pp. 44–45).

He supports his evidentialist apologetic by appealing to 1 John 4:1–6—“Believe not every spirit, but test the spirits” (p. 37). This imperative, however, is actually addressed to Christians who are given *in the context* the proper ground—namely, apostolic teaching—for testing revelation claims—“Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh

is of God, and every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God” (vss. 2–3).

He also urges his readers to heed the warning against self-delusion issued by Pannenberg, whom I have mentioned earlier, who agrees that “in theology there can be no talk of proof in the exact mathematical, scientific sense” (p. 48). “Because faith,” Pinnock affirms, “is related to historical verity, it *cannot* and *must not* escape... involvement in historical probabilities” (p. 51). Pinnock, it is obvious, develops his apologetic for the Christian faith along lines that compromise the *certain* and *unquestionable* authority of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture. He fails even to take seriously what he himself affirms in a different context, namely, that “before conversion, the natural man ‘sees many things, but does not observe them, his ears are open, but he does not hear’” (p. 215). How then is the unbeliever to evaluate properly the truth and meaning of the historical events of Christian theism? Where in such a procedure is there any challenge to the apostate motive that is at work in his thinking? The unbeliever can only judge the claims of Christian theism by what has to be from the very nature of the case his own apostate test of truth. And thereby the truth of Christian theism is compromised at its heart.

McDowell’s Evidential Methodology

In his notebook, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, published by Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., Josh McDowell amasses a staggering amount of data of mixed value supportive of the truth claims of Christianity. He too fails to deal with the apostate motive that governs the unbeliever, thereby failing to challenge fully the latter’s real rebellion against God. He prefers to appeal to the “rational man” judge for himself in the “light of the evidence” whether Christ is liar, lunatic, or Lord (chap. 7) and whether His resurrection was hoax or history (chap. 10). I find no fault with his argument when he appeals to such facts as fulfilled prophecy (chaps. 9 and 11) to establish the truth of the Christian faith (although I disagree with certain of his interpretations in this regard), for by such an appeal he is confronting fallen man with the authority of the Scripture. But when he follows the procedure of the “probability argument,” the Christianity he represents ceases to be the only basis for a true predication of anything. The fallen man is permitted to conclude that, apart from the truth of Christ, he already knows many things truly on the basis of his own epistemological *pou sto*. Rather than calling him to repudiate his false claim to truth, McDowell’s method condemns him to intellectual futility in his effort to justify his knowledge claims. I know that the gospel McDowell preaches has been heard by tens of thousands of collegians, and, I believe, heard to the saving of many souls, but the gospel he preaches he compromises by the probability apologetic he employs.

* * * * *

Our analysis of empirical apologetics is completed. It should be apparent from the concessions to unbelief and from the weakened portrayal of biblical authority within the inductive apologetic methods discussed in this chapter that only an apologetic method that takes with utter seriousness the authority of Christ is consistent with the faith we believe and defend. Only such an apologetic will truly challenge the autonomy of fallen man at the root of his apostasy. Only such an authority can ground human knowledge claims.

At the risk of wearying the reader, I want to say once again that it should be apparent that any argument for Christianity that begins with a “creatively constructive fact” is, at best, only a probability argument that permits men to believe that they can reject what actually is

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

God-revealing data and still be honest men—true to their own best insights. At worst, it is an argument that requires a universe governed by Chance in which there never can be “one truth” inasmuch as every event, including even Christ’s resurrection, is a unique contingency that means nothing. J. I. Packer needs to be heard when he declares that “the apologetic strategy that would attract converts by the flattery of accommodating the gospel to the ‘wisdom of sinful men’ was condemned by Paul nineteen centuries ago, and the past hundred years have provided a fresh demonstration of its bankruptcy” (*Fundamentalism’ and the Word of God*, p. 168). The Church cannot expect to know the fullest blessing of God upon its evangelistic endeavors until it sets aside all accommodations to the autonomy of unbelieving man and insists, in conjunction with the proclamation of the Reformed gospel, that the authority of the word of the self-attesting Christ of Scripture is the only ground sufficiently ultimate to justify human truth claims, and that until His word is acknowledged as authoritative and placed at the basis of a given human knowledge system, that system remains unjustified and no truth assertion within it can be shown to have any meaning at all.

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Subject Index

- Analogical knowledge
 - Carnell, 124
 - Clark, 101, 108-09
 - Scripture, 102-03
 - Thomas, 123-24
 - Van Til, 98-104
- see also* Univocal knowledge
- Apologetic activity in Acts, 38
- Apologetic methodology
 - Clark, 105-14
 - Montgomery, 148-56
 - Schaeffer, 136-48
 - Van Til, 98-105
 - Warfield, 47-70
- Apologetics
 - definition, 1, 11
 - issues of concern, 8
 - major problem, 7-8
 - relation to theological encyclopedia, 4, 5
 - Approaching men, 93-97
- Being, Christian theory of, 40 42
- “Borrowed capital,” Van Til’s teaching, 89
- Canonicity
 - Calvin, 33
 - Packer, 34
- Certainty, Warfield on, 57-60
- Christ
 - doctrine of, 31-36
 - offices of, 31-35
 - redeeming activity (Luke’s verification), 28-29
 - relation to questions of authority and standard of truth, 35-36
 - relation to Scripture, 31-32
 - self-attesting, 32
- Christian faith
 - central historical facts, 11
 - content, 13-37
 - epistemological “first principle,” 72
 - relation to Bible, 13
- Church doctrine of, 37
- Clark, 105-14
- Covenant between God and man nature of, 17-18, 21-22
- Creation, doctrine of, 17
- Empirical apologetics, 117-159

definition of, 117
Epistemology
Christian, 42-46
crucial issue of, 72-85
short history of, 72-75
Evidence, probable, 58-59, 61-62, 67-68
inability to prove anything, 90, 105-07
Evidence within presuppositionalism, 68-69
Evidential/historical apologetics, methodology, 7-8
see also Empirical apologetics
Evil thoughts, relation to God, 78-79

Fact
“brute,” 44
meaning and, 44
philosophy of, 24, 71
relation to God’s plan, 44 45
Faith
definition of, 61-62
Packer on, 62
Pinnock on, 157
Fall, man’s
implications for apologetic methodology, 201
nature of, 18-19

God
cause of all things, 78-79
doctrine of, 13-17
nature of his knowledge, 43-44
self-authenticating 15
self-revealing, 14-15
self-sufficient, 14
wrath of, 26
Grace, common, 29

Historical apologetics
Clark’s opinion, 149, 155-S6
Montgomery’s teaching, 148-53

Idealism, metaphysical, definition, 40
Ignorance, sin not responsible per se. 90
Innate ideas, 76
Inspiration, Warfield’s doctrine, 48-52

King, Christ as, 35
Knowing, Christian theory of, 42-46
Knowledge
God’s, 43-44

relation to man's knowledge, 45
significance for man's knowledge, 45
man's, 44-46
relation to God's knowledge, 45

Last things, doctrine of, 37
Logic, laws of, 89
Logos (Christ)
rational nature, 76-77
source of human rationality, 77
Luke's Gospel, prologue, 28-29

Major apologetic systems, 8-9
Man
autonomous, 19
darkened in understanding, 23
depravity of, 24-28
doctrine of, 17-30
inability of, 23
spiritually dead, 27-28
Mars' Hill sermon, 38-39, 154-55
Materialism, metaphysical, definition of, 40
Meaning, relation to fact, 44
Men, two kinds, 92
Modern culture, Schaeffer's analysis, 136-38
Monism, 40
Montgomery, 148-56

Natural religion, definition of, 117
Natural revelation, 25-26
definition of, 117
Natural theology, definition of, 117

"Old Princeton" apologetic, 61
"One and many" problem, 84-85
Ontology, 40

Paradox, 104-05
Particulars, relation to universals, 78-84
Philosophy, Greek, monistic character, 41-42
Pinnock, 156-57
Pou sto
definition of, 30
necessity of transcendent one, 79-85
Presuppositional apologetics
definition of, 8
elucidation of, 71-116
Schaeffer's meaning, 141-42

Priest, Christ, 35
Probability argument
Montgomery, 152-53
Van Til, 62
Prophet, Christ, 31-32

Race, human, depravity of, 22-23
Reasoning, circular, 15-16, 69, 122
Regeneration
necessity for understanding Scripture savingly, 24
noetic effects, 92-93

Salvation, doctrine of, 36-37
Schaeffer, 136-48
Science
two controlling principles, 87-88
two kinds, 92
Scripture
perspicuity of, 24
presuppositions of canonicity, 32
relation to Christ, 31-32
Self-revelation, God's, necessity of, 14-16
Senses, human, 75-76
Clark's teaching, 107
Scripture's teaching, 75, 111-12, 114
Sin
essence, 20
imputation of Adam's, 21-22
noetic effects, 23, 30, 85-92
Testimony of the Holy Spirit, 59, 63-65, 66, 134
Theistic proofs
Clark, 105-06, 127-28
criticism, 125
Schaeffer's apologetic, 139-40
Thomas, 119-20

Universals, relation to particulars, 79-84
Univocal knowledge, 99-102, 108-09, 123-24
see also Analogical knowledge

Van Til
existence of God, 16
fall of man, 20
human analogical knowledge, 98-104
paradox, 104-05
relation of apologetics to theological encyclopedia, 4
relation of God's knowledge to man's knowledge, 45
theory of being, 42

Warfield, 47-70
argument for inspiration, 48-52
Christian certainty, 57-60
view of apologetic task, 52-57

Scripture Index

Scripture references are a special challenge to the indexer who uses a word processor, since authors often chain references together, e.g., Acts 2:23; 4:27–28. The software has no way to pick up implied references. In addition Dr. Reymond mixes abbreviated references along with the full spellings, e.g., Matt. as well as Matthew. After hours of trying to index the complete citations I yielded to a chapter-only style. —Ed.

A

Acts 2.....	1, 11, 26, 31, 56, 93
Acts 14.....	21, 91
Acts 16.....	65
Acts 17.....	11, 21, 25, 28, 30, 79, 107
Acts 18.....	5
Acts 19.....	1, 5
Acts 22.....	1
Acts 24.....	1, 93
Acts 25.....	1
Acts 26.....	1
Amos 3	56

C

1 Chronicles 28.....	31
Colossians 1.....	27, 55
Colossians 2.....	23, 55
Colossians 3.....	13, 23
1 Corinthians 1	26, 27, 51, 55, 60, 107
1 Corinthians 2	12, 17, 26, 94
1 Corinthians 8	11
1 Corinthians 9	1
1 Corinthians 12	107
1 Corinthians 15	9, 26, 27
2 Corinthians 7	1
2 Corinthians 11	14
2 Corinthians 12	1
2 Corinthians 13	10

D

Daniel 4	11
Daniel 10	103

E

Ephesians 1.....	11, 20, 27, 31
Ephesians 2.....	10, 15
Ephesians 3.....	9, 11
Ephesians 4.....	13, 17, 61
Exodus 3.....	10
Exodus 4.....	54, 78
Exodus 34.....	10
Ezekiel 36.....	65

G

Galatians 1.....	1, 23
Genesis 1	10, 13, 14, 32, 63
Genesis 2	13, 14, 16, 32, 61

Genesis 3.....	14, 15
Genesis 11.....	63

H

Habakkuk 2	27
Hebrews 1	11, 26, 30, 44, 48, 49, 55
Hebrews 6	23
Hebrews 11	6, 44, 49
Hosea 6	13, 14

I

Isaiah 6.....	56
Isaiah 40.....	72
Isaiah 55.....	72

J

Jeremiah 17	31
Job 9.....	10
Job 11.....	72
Job 26.....	11, 18
Job 28.....	55
Job 31.....	14
1 John 1	54, 65, 78
1 John 4.....	109
1 John 5.....	28, 65
John 1 ... 11, 20, 23, 54, 55, 63, 65, 67, 72, 78, 103	
John 3.....	65
John 4.....	10, 23, 109
John 6.....	44, 56, 65, 105
John 7.....	23
John 8.....	23
John 10.....	23
John 11.....	20
John 12.....	24, 67
John 14.....	24
John 16.....	23, 103
John 17.....	55, 63
John 20.....	54, 78, 107
Jonah 1	10
Joshua 11.....	56
Judges 9.....	56

K

1 Kings 22.....	56
-----------------	----

L

Luke 1	1, 20, 24, 27, 54, 72
Luke 9	24

THE JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Luke 10.....	72
Luke 12.....	1
Luke 16.....	24, 27
Luke 21.....	1
Luke 24.....	65, 78

M

Mark 4.....	56
Mark 12.....	80
Mark 13.....	23
Matthew 3.....	10
Matthew 5.....	21, 23, 54
Matthew 7.....	23
Matthew 10.....	11
Matthew 11.....	12, 21, 55
Matthew 12.....	80
Matthew 16.....	56
Matthew 22.....	1
Matthew 23.....	56
Matthew 25.....	27

N

Numbers 23.....	63
-----------------	----

P

1 Peter 1.....	10, 11, 23
1 Peter 3.....	1, 3
2 Peter 1.....	21, 54
Philippians 1.....	1
Philippians 2.....	26, 27, 31, 55
Proverbs 8.....	55
Proverbs 16.....	11
Proverbs 20.....	54, 78
Psalms 2.....	26, 27
Psalms 19.....	11
Psalms 36.....	67

Psalms 50.....	30
Psalms 65.....	105
Psalms 90.....	10, 11
Psalms 94.....	54, 78
Psalms 103.....	11
Psalms 104.....	11
Psalms 115.....	11
Psalms 119.....	103
Psalms 135.....	25
Psalms 139.....	31
Psalms 145.....	11
Psalms 147.....	10

R

Revelation 4.....	10, 11
Romans 1.. 1, 11, 18, 20, 21, 25, 54, 61, 65, 80, 94	
Romans 2.....	1, 21, 54, 59, 64, 65, 77
Romans 3.....	17, 107
Romans 5.....	13, 14, 16
Romans 8.....	17, 66
Romans 9.....	11, 31
Romans 10.....	54, 80
Romans 11.....	25, 94

S

1 Samuel 2.....	31
-----------------	----

T

1 Thessalonians 4.....	27
2 Thessalonians 2.....	19
1 Timothy 2.....	14
1 Timothy 5.....	21
2 Timothy 2.....	103
2 Timothy 4.....	1
Titus 1.....	63