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B. B. WARFIELD'S APOLOGETICAL APPEAL TO 'RIGHT REASON': EVIDENCE OF A 'RATHER BALD RATIONALISM'?

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Princeton Seminary was founded in 1812 in order to defend biblical Christianity against the perceived crisis of 'modern infidelity'.¹ Its founders took their stand between the extremes of deism on the one hand and 'mysticism' (or 'enthusiasm') on the other, and resolved 'to fit clergymen to meet the cultural crisis, to roll back what they perceived as tides of irreligion sweeping the country, and to provide a learned defense of Christianity generally and the Bible specifically'.² Throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries theologians from Princeton Seminary proved to be the most articulate defenders of Reformed orthodoxy in America. Their apologetical efforts have come under intense critical scrutiny, however, because critics allege that these efforts were based upon an accommodation of theology to the anthropological and epistemological assumptions of 'the modern scientific revolution'.³ Scottish Common Sense Realism and Baconian inductivism rather than the assumptions of the Reformed tradition were the driving forces behind the Princeton theology, critics contend, despite the fact that these forces often were tempered by the Princetonians' personal piety. Critics conclude, therefore, that the theologians at Old Princeton Seminary were not the champions of Reformed orthodoxy that they claimed to be. They were, rather, the purveyors of a theology that was bastardized by an 'alien philosophy'.⁴

¹ Mark Noll, 'The Founding of Princeton Seminary', *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1979), p. 85.

² Noll, 'The Princeton Theology', in *The Princeton Theology*, ed. David Wells (Grand Rapids, MI, 1989), p. 24.

³ George Marsden, 'The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia', in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN, 1983), p. 241.

⁴ This is the general theme of John Vander Stelt's *Philosophy and Scripture: A Study of Old Princeton and Westminster Theology* (Marlton, NJ, 1978). The Dutch and Neo-Orthodox branches of the

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What, then, are we to make of this conclusion? Were the Princeton theologians in fact 'nineteenth-century positivists who did not reject theology'?⁵ Did they accommodate their theology to anthropological and epistemological assumptions that are diametrically opposed to those of the Reformed tradition? I have argued elsewhere that such a conclusion cannot be sustained, simply because it misses the moral rather than the merely rational nature of the Princetonians' thought. When Old Princeton's 'intellectualism' is interpreted within a context which affirms that the soul is a single unit that acts in all of its functions – its thinking, its feeling, and its willing – as a single substance, it becomes clear that the Princeton theologians were not cold, calculating rationalists whose confidence in the mind led them to ignore the import of the subjective and the centrality of experience in religious epistemology.⁶ They were, rather, Reformed scholars who consistently acknowledged that subjective and experiential

Reformed camp generally agree with this assessment of Old Princeton. Contemporary interpreters who endorse this assessment are indebted in one way or another to Sydney Ahlstrom, 'The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology', *Church History* 24 (1955), pp. 257-72. See, for example, Ernest Sandeen, 'The Princeton Theology: One Source of Biblical Literalism in American Protestantism', *Church History* 31 (1962), pp. 307-21; Samuel Pearson, 'Enlightenment Influence on Protestant Thought in Early National America', *Encounter* 38 (1977), pp. 193-212; and Marsden, 'Collapse', pp. 219-64. Older studies that are critical of the 'intellectualism' of Old Princeton include Ralph Danhof, *Charles Hodge as Dogmatician* (Goes, 1929); John O. Nelson, 'The Rise of the Princeton Theology: A Generic History of American Presbyterianism Until 1850' (Ph.D., Yale University, New Haven, CN, 1935); William Livingstone, 'The Princeton Apologetic as Exemplified by the Work of Benjamin B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen: A Study of American Theology, 1880-1930' (Ph.D., Yale University, New Haven, CN, 1948).

⁵ George Marsden, 'Scotland and Philadelphia: Common Sense Philosophy from Jefferson to Westminster', *Reformed Theological Journal* 29 (1979), p. 11.

⁶ The word 'rationalism' and its cognates are used in this essay to refer to a confidence in the mind that springs from indifference to the noetic effects of sin. This indifference, moreover, has its origin in an accommodation of theology to the assumptions of Enlightenment philosophy.

concerns are of critical importance in any consideration of religious epistemology. Indeed, they recognized that the operation of the intellect involves the 'whole soul' – mind, will and emotions – rather than the rational faculty alone, and as a consequence they insisted that the ability to reason 'rightly' – *i.e.* the ability to see revealed truth for what it objectively is – presupposes the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit on the 'whole soul' of a moral agent. Old Princeton's 'intellectualism', in short, sprang from an endorsement of the classical Reformed distinction between a merely speculative and a spiritual understanding of the gospel rather than from accommodation to the assumptions of Enlightenment thought.⁷

The question arises, however, as to how the assumptions of the Reformed tradition are related to the Princeton apologetic in general and the apologetic of Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921) in particular. Is not Warfield's insistence that the Christian religion has been placed in the

⁷ The Princeton theologians endorsed an understanding of Christian anthropology known as Realistic Dualism. According to this doctrine, the soul is a single unit that necessarily acts as a single substance. It is comprised of two rather than three faculties or 'powers': the understanding, which takes precedence in all rational activity, and the will, which is broadly defined to include the emotions and volitions. The will, moreover, is not a self-determining power, but rather a power that is determined by the motives of the acting agent. For an excellent analysis of the doctrine of free agency that flows from this anthropology, see Paul Ramsey's introductory essay to Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will* (New Haven, CN, 1957), especially pp. 38-40. For an excellent statement of the distinction between a merely speculative and a spiritual understanding of the gospel, see Jonathan Edwards, 'Christian Knowledge', *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1992), II, pp. 157-63. For an extensive analysis of the issues addressed in this paragraph, see my dissertation, 'Moral Character and Moral Certainty: The Subjective State of the Soul and J. G. Machen's Critique of Theological Liberalism' (Ph.D., Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, 1996), chs. 1, 2, and my article "'Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind: The Moral Context', *Journal of Presbyterian History*, forthcoming.

world 'to reason its way to its dominion'⁸ a particularly egregious example of Old Princeton's 'rather bald rationalism'?⁹ Is not Warfield's apologetical appeal to 'right reason', in other words, in fact evidence of an accommodation of theology to the assumptions of an essentially humanistic philosophy?¹⁰ This essay argues that it is not, simply because the moral considerations that rule in the epistemological realm also rule in the realm of apologetics. Whereas Warfield certainly affirmed that the primary mission of the Christian apologist 'is no less than to reason the world into acceptance of the "truth"',¹¹ he nonetheless recognized that the 'rightness' of the apprehension that leads to the advancement of the kingdom is produced by the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*. He acknowledged, therefore, that the labours of the apologist will be of little or no consequence without the sovereign workings of the Spirit of God, for he recognized that only the renewed soul has the moral capacity to see revealed truth for what it objectively is, namely glorious. That this is the case, and that a reorientation in how we think about the appeal to 'right reason' is long overdue, will be clear after an examination of the relationship between the objective and the subjective in Warfield's religious epistemology.

Knowledge of God and Religious Faith: Conditioned by the 'Ethical State' of the Soul

Warfield maintained that the correct context for understanding the relationship between the objective and the subjective in religious epistemology is that provided by Augustine's ontology of 'theistic Intuitionism' and Calvin's conception of the *sensus deitatis*. Whereas Augustine argued that 'innate ideas' are 'the immediate product in the soul of God the Illuminator, always present with the soul as its sole and

⁸ B. B. Warfield, 'Introduction to Francis R. Beattie's *Apologetics*', *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 2 vols, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, NJ, 1970 and 1973), II, pp. 98-9.

⁹ Livingstone, 'The Princeton Apologetic', p. 186.

¹⁰ For this appeal, see Warfield, 'Beattie's *Apologetics*', *Shorter Writings*, II, pp. 99-100, and 'A Review of *De Zekerheid des Geloofs*', *Shorter Writings*, II, pp. 120-21.

¹¹ 'Christianity the Truth', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 213.

indispensable Light, in which alone it perceives truth',¹² Calvin insisted that the knowledge of God, as a fact of self-consciousness that is quickened by the manifestations of God in nature and providence, 'is given in the very same act by which we know self. For when we know self, we must know it as it is: and that means we must know it as dependent, derived, imperfect, and responsible being.'¹³ Though Warfield conceded that there are some interesting differences between Augustine's and Calvin's ontologies of knowledge, he argued that their doctrines are essentially the same simply because both acknowledged that God is not only the God of all grace and the God of all truth, but 'the Light of all knowledge' as well.¹⁴ Both acknowledge, in other words, that

man's power of attaining truth depends. . . first of all upon the fact that God has made man like Himself, Whose intellect is the home of the intelligible world, the contents of which may, therefore, be reflected in the human soul; and then, secondly, that God, having so made man, has not left him, deistically, to himself, but continually reflects into his soul the contents of His own eternal and immutable mind – which are precisely those eternal and immutable truths which constitute the intelligible world. The soul is therefore in unbroken communion with God, and in the body of intelligible truths reflected into it from God, sees God. The nerve of this view, it will be observed, is the theistic conception of the constant dependence of the creature on God.¹⁵

If Warfield was convinced on the one hand that the knowledge of God reflected into the soul constitutes the foundational fact of human self-consciousness, he was persuaded on the other that this knowledge is the spring of religious expression as well. The justification for this contention is to be found in his assertion that 'Man is a unit, and the religious truth which impinges upon him must affect him in all of his activities, or in

¹² 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge and Authority', in *Tertullian and Augustine, The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield IV* (New York, 1930), pp. 143-4.

¹³ 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God', in *Calvin and Calvinism, The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield V* (New York, 1931), p. 31. Cf. 'God and Human Religion and Morals', *Shorter Writings*, I, pp. 41-5.

¹⁴ 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 143.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-6. On the differences between Augustine's and Calvin's ontologies of knowledge, see 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 117.

none.¹⁶ Because he recognized that the soul is a single unit that acts in all of its functions as a single substance, Warfield argued that the knowledge of God that is reflected into the soul and quickened by the manifestations of God in nature and providence 'can never be otiose and inert; but must produce an effect in human souls, in the way of thinking, feeling, willing'.¹⁷ It must produce, in other words, an effect that manifests itself first in the conceptual formulation of perceived truth (perception 'ripening' into conception), and second in the religious reaction of the will (broadly understood to include emotions and volitions) to the conceptual content of this formulated perception ('as is the perception ripening into conception, so is the religion').¹⁸

But if it is the knowledge of God that is reflected into the soul that underlies the religious reaction of the will, then why, we must ask, are there so many forms of religious expression? Why, in plain English, do not all rational agents react in the same fashion to the knowledge of God that is manifest in nature and providence? The answer to this question lies in Warfield's warning against supposing that 'the human mind is passive in the acquisition of knowledge, or that the acquisition of knowledge is unconditioned by the nature or state of the acquiring soul'.¹⁹ While Warfield maintained that the religious reaction of the will is determined by the conceptual formulation of perceived truth, he nonetheless recognized that the conceptual formulation of perceived truth is itself conditioned by the moral or 'ethical state' of the perceiving soul.²⁰ It is the 'ethical state' of the perceiving soul that determines the religious reaction of the will,

¹⁶ Warfield, 'Authority, Intellect, Heart', *Shorter Writings*, II, pp. 668. Anyone who doubts that Warfield endorsed the doctrine of Realistic Dualism should read this short yet extremely important essay. See also 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge', pp. 150-51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁸ Warfield, review of *Foundations: A Statement of Christian Belief in Terms of Modern Thought*, by Seven Oxford Men, in *Critical Reviews, The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield X* (New York, 1932), p. 325; cf. 'The Idea of Systematic Theology', *Studies in Theology, The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield IX* (New York, 1932), pp. 53-4; 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', pp. 37-8.

¹⁹ 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 149.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149, n. 37. Cf. 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', pp. 31-2, 38; 'Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy', *Tertullian and Augustine*, pp. 295-6, 401-4.

Warfield argued, for it is the 'ethical state' of the soul that conditions the purity or clarity of perception and thereby the purity or clarity of the conception that underlies religious expression. Since knowledge is a function of the 'whole man' rather than of the rational faculty alone, we must conclude that there is more than one form of religious expression simply because the knowledge that kindles the religious reaction of the will is qualified and conditioned by the 'whole voluntary nature' of the agent that knows.²¹

Relationship between the Conception of the Mind and Religious Reaction of the Will

Having established that the 'ethical state' of the soul conditions both the perception and the conception of the mind, we must now consider how the conception of the mind is related to the religious reaction of the will. Why, in short, does 'the nature of our [theological] conceptions so far from having nothing, [have] everything, to do with religion'?²² The key to understanding the relationship between conception and religious expression can be found in Warfield's assertion that 'Religion is not only the natural, but the necessary product of man's sense of dependence, which always abides as the innermost essence of the whole crowd of emotions which we speak of as religious, the lowest and also the highest.'²³ While Warfield insisted that dependence upon God is the foundational fact of human self-consciousness, he also maintained that the vital manifestation of this consciousness in religion unveils the flowering of this sense of dependence in a manner that is determined by the moral agent's conceptual formulation of perceived truth.²⁴ In this statement, however, Warfield links religious expression with the sense of dependence in a manner that seems to bypass the determining role of conceptual truth. Religion, to wit, is in this instance not explicitly regarded as the vital effect of the knowledge of God in the human soul, but rather as the necessary product of the natural sense of dependence, *i.e.* of the innermost essence of the whole crowd of emotions that constitute the very core of human being. How, then, does Warfield reconcile what might appear to be a

²¹ 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 149, n. 37; *cf.* pp. 149-50.

²² Warfield, *The Power of God Unto Salvation* (Philadelphia, PA, 1903), pp. 243-4.

²³ 'God and Human Religion', *Shorter Writings*, I, p. 42.

²⁴ *Cf.* Warfield, 'On Faith in its Psychological Aspects', *Studies in Theology*, p. 338.

contradiction at this point? How can he maintain that religion is both the vital effect of the knowledge of God in the human soul and the necessary product of the natural sense of dependence without appearing to suggest that religious expression has its origin in more than one source (one rational and objective, the other emotional and subjective)? The solution to this apparent contradiction will be virtually self-evident after a brief analysis of the mental movement called faith.

In response to the notion that responsibility attaches to faith only when the act of faith springs from the 'free volition' of an autonomous moral agent, Warfield argued that we are responsible for our faith simply because faith – from its lowest to its highest forms – is an act of the mind the subject of which is 'the man in the entirety of his being as man'.²⁵ While Warfield acknowledged that the mental movement called faith 'fulfills itself', *i.e.* is specifically 'formed', in that voluntary movement of the sensibility called trust, he insisted that the act of faith includes – indeed is based upon – 'a mental recognition of what is before the mind, as objectively true and real, and therefore depends on the evidence that a thing is true and real and is determined by this evidence; it is the response of the mind to this evidence and cannot arise apart from it'.²⁶ Since Warfield was convinced that faith is a mental conviction which as such is 'determined by evidence, not by volition', he concluded that the act of faith is best defined as that 'forced consent' in which 'the movement of the sensibility in the form of trust is what is thrust forward to observation'.²⁷

It must be borne in mind, however, that though Warfield insisted that the fulfilment of faith in the movement of trust is determined or 'forced' by what is rationally perceived, he never suggested that the consent of the mind is 'the mechanical result of the adduction of the evidence'.²⁸ 'There may stand in the way of the proper and objectively inevitable effect of the evidence', he argued, 'the subjective nature or condition to which the evidence is addressed'.²⁹ But how can this be? If faith is indeed a 'forced consent', then how can 'the subjective nature or condition to which the evidence is addressed' block 'the objectively inevitable effect of the evidence'? Warfield maintained that 'Objective adequacy and subjective effect are not exactly correlated', simply because "'Faith," "belief" does not

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 342, 315.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 317, 331.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 314, 336.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 314, 336.

follow the evidence itself. . .but the judgment of the intellect on the evidence.'³⁰ According to Warfield, the 'judgment of the intellect' refers not to an act of the rational faculty alone, but rather to an act of the mind in which the 'complex of emotions' that reflects the 'ethical state' of the soul and forms the 'concrete state of mind' of the perceiving agent plays the decisive or determining role.³¹ What, then, does the 'complex of emotions' that forms the 'concrete state of mind' of the perceiving agent do? Why, in other words, is the 'judgment of the intellect' the most prominent element in the movement of assent, the 'central movement in all faith'?³² It is the most prominent element in the 'central movement in all faith', in short, because the 'complex of emotions' that forms the 'concrete state of mind' of the perceiving agent determines not only the 'susceptibility' or 'accessibility' of the mind to the objective force of the evidence in question, but also the reaction of the will to what is rationally perceived.³³ When the 'judgment of the intellect' is conceived of in this fashion, or in that fashion which recognizes that 'judgment' is an act of the 'whole man' that 'underlies' the agent's response to perceived truth,³⁴ it becomes clear that the conception of the mind is related to the religious reaction of the will simply because the 'complex of emotions' that forms the 'state of mind' of the perceiving agent also determines the activity of the will, broadly understood. This explains, among other things, why 'The evidence to which we are accessible is irresistible if adequate, and irresistibly produces belief, faith.'³⁵

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 314, 331. For more on the 'judgment of the intellect' and the 'complex of emotions' that form the 'concrete state of mind' of the perceiving agent, see Helseth, 'Moral Character and Moral Certainty', p. 89, n. 71.

³² Warfield, 'On Faith', p. 341. The movement of assent is the central movement in faith because it 'must depend' on a prior movement of the intellect, and the movement of the sensibilities in the act of 'trust' is the 'product' of assent. Thus assent ties together the intellectual and the volitional aspects of faith. Cf. pp. 341-2.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 336-7; cf. review of *The Christian Faith: A System of Dogmatics*, by Theodore Haering, in *Critical Reviews*, p. 412.

³⁴ 'On Faith', p. 314.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

'Faith' of Sinners in their Natural State

The foregoing analysis has established that faith is both the vital effect of the knowledge of God in the human soul and the necessary product of the natural sense of dependence simply because it is the response of the 'whole man' to the knowledge of God that is reflected into the soul and quickened by the manifestations of God in nature and providence. The question that we must now consider is what makes the faith that informs the religious reaction of the will 'saving' faith. If it is indeed true that 'no man exists, or ever has existed or ever will exist, who has not "faith"',³⁶ then what for Warfield sets the faith of the elect apart from the faith of those who are perishing? The forthcoming discussion proposes an answer to this question by examining the nature of faith in moral agents that are fallen and moral agents that are renewed. It suggests, in short, that the regenerate form their consciousness of dependence in a manner that renders their salvation certain because the regenerate alone have the moral ability to see revealed truth for what it objectively is, namely glorious.

Again following Augustine and Calvin, Warfield maintained that 'it is knowledge, not nescience, which belongs to human nature as such'.³⁷ He insisted, therefore, that had human nature not been disordered by the 'abnormal' condition of original sin, all moral agents – 'by the very necessity of [their] nature'³⁸ – not only would have known God in the purest and most intimate sense of the term, but they would have entrusted themselves to his care because their consciousness of dependence would have taken 'the "form" of glad and loving trust'.³⁹ The capacity for true knowledge and loving trust was lost, however, when Adam fell into sin, for Adam's sin plunged his posterity into a state of spiritual death. Why, then, does spiritual death prohibit the unregenerate from responding to the consciousness of dependence in a loving and trusting fashion? The answer has to do with the 'noetic as well as thelematic and ethical effects' of the fall.⁴⁰ Warfield argued that the unregenerate remain largely indifferent – if

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

³⁷ 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 158.

³⁸ 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', pp. 36, 43.

³⁹ 'Review of *De Zekerheid*', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 116; cf. 'On Faith', p. 338. On the relationship between 'the disease of sin' and Warfield's contention that 'Man as we know him is not normal man', see 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge', pp. 156-8; 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', pp. 32, 70.

⁴⁰ 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 158.

not hostile – to the gospel because the knowledge of God that is reflected into their souls is ‘dulled’, ‘deflected’ and twisted by the power of sin.⁴¹ Whereas ‘unfallen man’ had an intimate knowledge of God because the truth of God was reflected clearly in his heart, the unregenerate are incapable of such knowledge and love because the sinful heart ‘refracts and deflects the rays of truth reflected into it from the divine source, so rendering the right perception of the truth impossible’.⁴² While ‘abnormal man’ thus remains conscious of his dependence upon God and believes in God in an intellectual or speculative sense, he can neither ‘delight’ in this dependence nor can he trust in the God on whom he knows he is dependent simply because the truth of God is deflected by a corrupt nature ‘into an object of distrust, fear, and hate’.⁴³

Since, then, the fallen sinner’s consciousness of dependence is formed by fear and hate rather than by loving trust, it follows – given the intimate nature of the relationship between the conception of the mind and the religious reaction of the will – that the fallen sinner is unable to respond to the consciousness of dependence in glad and loving trust because the sinner as such is morally unable to do so. Herein lies the heart of the depravity that constitutes the fallen condition. While the fallen sinner cannot escape the knowledge that he is and always will be dependent upon God in every aspect of his existence, he is morally incapable of entrusting himself to God because ‘he loves sin too much’,⁴⁴ and thus cannot use his will – which in the narrower sense is ‘ready, like a weathercock, to be turned whithersoever the breeze that blows from the heart (“while” in the broader sense) may direct’⁴⁵ – for believing. Fallen sinners, therefore, neither will nor can trust in God not because there is a physical defect in the constitution of their being, but rather because the sinful heart lacks the moral ability to ‘explicate’ its sense of dependence and obligation ‘on right

⁴¹ ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of Knowledge’, p. 32; cf. ‘Augustine’s Doctrine of Knowledge’, pp. 155-6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 155. On the failure of general revelation, see ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of Knowledge’, pp. 39-45.

⁴³ ‘On Faith’, pp. 338, 339; ‘God and Human Religion and Morals’, *Shorter Writings*, I, p. 42; cf. ‘Review of *De Zekerheid*’, *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 116.

⁴⁴ ‘Inability and the Demand of Faith’, *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 725; cf. ‘On Faith’, p. 339.

⁴⁵ ‘Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy’, pp. 403-4.

lines'.⁴⁶ It lacks the moral ability to form its consciousness of dependence in loving trust, in other words, because it is blind to the true significance of what it can rationally perceive.⁴⁷

Saving Faith: Certain Consequence of 'Right' Knowledge of God

But does this 'abnormal' state of fallenness prevent the unregenerate from ever delighting in the knowledge of God? Does spiritual death, in other words, render saving knowledge of God impossible? According to Warfield, it does not for the elect because God has graciously intervened to meet this desperate condition by means of a twofold provision for the removal of the natural incapacities of fallen sinners.⁴⁸ To begin with, God has rescued fallen sinners from their 'intellectual imbecility'⁴⁹ by imparting a supernatural revelation that 'supplements' and 'completes' the truth manifest in general revelation.⁵⁰ Whereas God has published a compelling revelation of his truth in the natural constitution of the moral agent as well as in nature and providence, this general revelation 'is insufficient that sinful man should know Him aright' because it is not reflected clearly in minds that are blinded by sin.⁵¹ As the remedy for this inability to know God aright God has given to fallen sinners a revelation adapted to their needs. It is this special revelation, the purpose of which is to 'neutralize' the noetic effects of sin by providing a 'mitigation for the symptom', that then serves as the objective preparation for the 'proper

⁴⁶ 'God and Human Religion', *Shorter Writings*, I, p. 44.

⁴⁷ For a more comprehensive discussion of the relationship between the inability to see revealed truth for what it objectively is and the 'infinite variety' of 'religions and moralities' that are produced by 'reprobate minds', cf. 'God and Human Religion', *Shorter Writings*, I, pp. 42-4; and my brief discussion of Warfield's distinction between 'man-made' (*i.e.* natural) and 'God-made' (*i.e.* supernatural), 'unrevealed' and 'revealed' religion in 'Moral Character and Moral Certainty', appendix 2.

⁴⁸ Cf. 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 47; 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 159.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

⁵⁰ Warfield, 'Christianity and Revelation', *Shorter Writings*, I, p. 27.

⁵¹ 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 32; cf. 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 222.

assimilation' of the knowledge of God manifest in general revelation.⁵² 'What special revelation is, therefore – and the Scriptures as its documentation – is very precisely represented by the figure of the spectacles. It is aid to the dulled vision of sinful man, to enable it to see God.'⁵³

While special revelation as such is 'the condition of all right knowledge of higher things for sinful man',⁵⁴ it is clear that this revelation alone – its objective adequacy notwithstanding – will not yield a true and compelling knowledge of God if the soul to which it is addressed is morally incapable of perceiving and receiving it. This is due to the fact that sinners who are at enmity with God need more than external aid to see God; they need 'the power of sight'.⁵⁵ They need, in other words, a remedy for their moral bondage to sin so that 'the light of the Word itself can accredit itself to them as light'.⁵⁶ Wherein, then, is this remedy to be found? Warfield insisted that it is found in the central component of regenerating grace, namely the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*. Whereas the subjective corruption of the fallen sinner's moral nature precludes the possibility of a 'hospitable reception' for the truth of God in the perceiving mind and heart,⁵⁷ the testimony of the Spirit renders the perception and reception of the truth certain because the internal operation of the Spirit renews and inclines the powers of the soul 'in the love of God', *i.e.* in affection not only for the knowledge of God that is reflected into the soul, but for the consciousness of dependence upon God as well.⁵⁸

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 159, 222.

⁵³ 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 69. Warfield suggested that general and special revelation together form an 'organic whole' that includes all that God has done – in nature, history, and grace – to make himself known. As such, special revelation was not given to supersede general revelation, but rather to meet the altered circumstances occasioned by the advent of sin. *Cf.* 'Christianity and Revelation', *Shorter Writings*, I, p. 28.

⁵⁴ 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 161.

⁵⁵ 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 70.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁷ 'God and Human Religion', *Shorter Writings*, I, p. 43.

⁵⁸ 'On Faith', p. 339. On the relationship between regeneration and the 'habits or dispositions' that govern the activity of the soul, *cf.* Warfield, 'Regeneration', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 323; 'New Testament

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Since regenerating grace radically alters the moral nature and thereby the certain operation of the 'whole soul', we can infer that the elect perceive and receive the truth of God because they have been enabled by grace to 'feel, judge, and act differently from what [they] otherwise should'.⁵⁹ As a consequence, '[they] recognize God where before [they] did not perceive Him; [they] trust and love Him where before [they] feared and hated Him; [and they] firmly embrace Him in His Word where before [they] turned indifferently away'.⁶⁰

Yet how, specifically, does the testimony of the Spirit render the perception and reception of the truth certain? Why, in other words, is the witness of the Spirit effectual? Warfield maintained that the internal operation of the Spirit accomplishes its ordained end simply because it implants, or rather restores, 'a spiritual sense in the soul by which God is recognized in His Word'.⁶¹ This restoration of susceptibility to spiritual truth then has two certain effects. In the first place, it enables the regenerate to reason 'rightly'. Though Warfield acknowledged that the witness of the Spirit is not revelation in the strict sense of the term, he insisted that it 'is just God Himself in His intimate working in the human heart, opening it to the light of the truth, that by this illumination it may see things as they really are and so recognize God in the Scriptures with the same directness and surety as men recognize sweetness in what is sweet and brightness in what is bright'.⁶² Despite the fact that the testimony of the Spirit thus 'presupposes the objective revelation and only prepares the heart to respond to and embrace it', it nonetheless is the source of all our 'right knowledge' of God because it is the means by which the regenerate are enabled to 'see' through the spectacles of Scripture, *i.e.* to 'discern' the beauty and truthfulness of the Word.⁶³

If the testimony of the Spirit on the one hand is the immediate means by which regenerated sinners are enabled to see and know things 'as they really are', on the other it is the less direct though no less effectual means to the rise of saving faith in the regenerated soul. The justification for this contention lies in Warfield's commitment to the unitary operation of the

Terms Descriptive of the Great Change', *Shorter Writings*, I, pp. 267-77.

⁵⁹ 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 111.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 32, 111-12.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 121, 70, 79.

soul. Because he recognized that there is an intimate connection between the conception of the mind and the religious reaction of the will, Warfield insisted that a 'right' apprehension of revealed truth will immediately and irresistibly manifest itself in an act of saving faith simply because the sense that informs the perception of the mind is the same sense that determines the activity of the will, broadly understood. Since the knowledge of God that is communicated to the regenerated soul via the 'conjoint divine action' of Word and Spirit is a 'vital and vitalizing knowledge of God' that 'takes hold of the whole man in the roots of his activities and controls all the movements of his soul',⁶⁴ we must conclude that the testimony of the Spirit renders both true knowledge and saving faith absolutely certain because it is the implanted sense of the divine that 'forces' regenerated sinners to see and pursue that which they perceive (rightly) to be both true and trustworthy. It follows, therefore, that

If sinful man as such is incapable of the act of faith, because he is inhabile to the evidence on which alone such an act of confident resting on God the Saviour can repose, renewed man is equally incapable of not responding to this evidence, which is objectively compelling, by an act of sincere faith. In this its highest exercise faith thus, though in a true sense the gift of God, is in an equally true sense man's own act, and bears all the character of faith as it is exercised by unrenewed man in its lower manifestations.⁶⁵

'Right Reason': Appeal to the 'Stronger and Purer Thought' of Christian Apologist

Having established that the 'keystone' of Warfield's doctrine of the knowledge of God is to be found in the 'conjoint divine action' of Word and Spirit,⁶⁶ the question that we must finally consider is what we should make of his apologetical appeal to 'right reason'. Must we conclude, along with the consensus of critical opinion, that Warfield was a rationalist whose approach to apologetics was built upon an almost 'Pelagian

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 75.

⁶⁵ 'On Faith', pp. 337-8. On the essential similarity between faith in 'renewed man' and faith in 'unfallen man', see p. 340. For my assessment of how Warfield's understanding of the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti* is related to that of Calvin, see 'Moral Character and Moral Certainty', appendix 1.

⁶⁶ 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 113; cf. pp. 82-3.

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confidence'⁶⁷ in the mental competence of even the unregenerate mind? Must we conclude, in other words, that Warfield's apologetic sprang from an accommodation of theology to anthropological and epistemological assumptions that are diametrically opposed to those of the Reformed tradition? The remainder of this essay argues that we must not, unless we want to do a terrible injustice to Warfield's understanding of the task of apologetics.

Before we move on to this consideration, however, the conclusion to the foregoing analysis must be articulated at this point because it outlines the epistemological context within which the forthcoming discussion must take place. To this point we have seen that objective and subjective factors were of critical importance in Warfield's religious epistemology simply because he acknowledged that the soul is a single unit that acts in all of its functions as a single substance. We may plausibly conclude, therefore, that Warfield's 'intellectualism' had its likely origin not in an accommodation of theology to the rationalistic assumptions of Enlightenment thought, but rather in the desire to preserve two important elements of the Princeton tradition in an increasingly subjectivistic age. The first has to do with the classical Reformed distinction between a merely speculative and a spiritual understanding of the gospel. Because he recognized that the moral or 'ethical state' of the soul determines both the quality of perception and the quality of conception, Warfield maintained there is 'a shallower and a deeper sense of the word "knowledge" – a purely intellectualistic sense, and a sense that involves the whole man and all his activities'.⁶⁸ While he conceded that all moral agents are religious beings because all moral agents 'know God' in at least an intellectual or speculative sense, he insisted that only regenerated sinners know God in a spiritual or saving sense, because it is only in the souls of the regenerate that there is a 'perfect interaction' between the objective and subjective factors that impinge upon religious epistemology and underlie religious life and practice.⁶⁹ Since Warfield was convinced that saving or 'real' knowledge of God involves the 'whole soul' and as such 'is inseparable

⁶⁷ Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco, CA, 1979), p. 290.

⁶⁸ Warfield, 'Theology a Science', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 210.

⁶⁹ 'Authority, Intellect, Heart', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 669; cf. 'Review of *De Zekerheid*', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 115ff.

from movements of piety towards Him',⁷⁰ it is clear that the charge of rationalism cannot be sustained simply because there is more in his thought to a saving apprehension of revealed truth than the merely rational appropriation of objective evidence.

If Warfield's 'intellectualism' had its origin on the one hand in the desire to safeguard the enduring veracity of the distinction between a merely speculative and a spiritual understanding of the gospel, it had its origin on the other in the effort to uphold the foundational principle of Augustinian and Reformed piety, namely that 'It is God and God alone who saves, and that in every element of the saving process.'⁷¹ Whereas the vast majority of Warfield's contemporaries reduced the Christian religion to a natural phenomenon by bending Scripture 'into some sort of conciliation' with the latest pronouncements of modern science, philosophy, and scholarship,⁷² Warfield championed both the objective basis of Christian faith and the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation by grounding the gift of saving faith in the ability to reason 'rightly'. 'Christianity is not', he argued, 'a distinctive interpretation of a religious experience common to all men, much less is it an indeterminate and constantly changing interpretation of a religious experience common to men; it is a distinctive religious experience begotten in men by a distinctive body of facts known only to or rightly apprehended only by Christians.'⁷³ Since Warfield was persuaded that the act of saving faith is 'a moral act and the gift of God' – *i.e.* an act with 'cognizable ground in right reason'⁷⁴ – we must conclude that he was neither an overt nor a covert rationalist who undermined the sovereignty of God in salvation by emptying saving faith of its subjective and experiential components. He was, rather, a consistently Reformed scholar who recognized that because

⁷⁰ 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 37. For more on how objective and subjective factors are related in 'sound religion' and 'true religious thinking', and on how there is a symbiotic relationship between religion and theology because of the unitary operation of the soul, *cf.* 'Authority, Intellect, Heart', *Shorter Writings*, II, pp. 668-71; 'Theology a Science', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 210; Andrew Hoffercker, 'Benjamin B. Warfield', in *The Princeton Theology*, ed. David Wells, p. 67; Helseth, 'Moral Character and Moral Certainty', appendix 2.

⁷¹ Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Philadelphia, PA, 1915), p. 59.

⁷² Warfield, 'Heresy and Concession', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 675.

⁷³ Warfield, review of *Foundations*, pp. 325-6.

⁷⁴ 'Apologetics', p. 15.

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the operation of the intellect involves the 'whole soul' rather than the rational faculty alone, the 'taste for the divine' that informs the ability to reason 'rightly' and leads to the fulfilment of faith in the movement of trust 'cannot be awakened in unbelievers by the natural action of the Scriptures or any rational arguments whatever, but requires for its production the work of the Spirit of God *ab extra accidens*'.⁷⁵

Given Warfield's clear stand within the epistemological mainstream of Reformed orthodoxy, what, then, are we to make of his apologetical response to the modern era's relocation of the divine-human nexus? What are we to make, in other words, of his apologetical appeal to 'right reason'? An important indication of how we should approach this question is suggested by Warfield's definition of the term 'apologetics'. Whereas 'apologies' are defences of Christianity 'against either all assailants, actual or conceivable, or some particular form or instance of attack', 'apologetics' is 'a positive and constructive science' that undertakes 'not the defense, not even the vindication, but the establishment. . . of that knowledge of God which Christianity professes to embody and seeks to make efficient in the world'.⁷⁶ While apologies thus derive their value from that which is incidental to the propagation of the Christian religion, namely the defence of Christianity against 'opposing points of view', apologetics is of the essence of propagation because it

finds its deepest ground. . . not in the accidents which accompany the efforts of true religion to plant, sustain, and propagate itself in this world. . . but in the fundamental needs of the human spirit. If it is incumbent on the believer to be able to give a reason for the faith that is in him, it is impossible for him to be a believer without a reason for the faith that is in him; and it is the task of apologetics to bring this reason out in his consciousness and make its validity plain.⁷⁷

When we approach the appeal to 'right reason' with the positive and constructive nature of apologetics in mind, it becomes immediately clear

⁷⁵ 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', p. 124, n. 99.

⁷⁶ 'Apologetics', p. 3.

⁷⁷ 'Apologetics', pp. 4, 15. The apologist must validate the truth that has been established simply because faith, though it is a moral act and the gift of God, 'is yet formally conviction passing into confidence'. Validation is necessary, therefore, because an intellectual conviction of the truth of the Christian religion is 'the logical *prius* of self-commitment to the Founder of that religion', 'Review of *De Zekerheid*', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 113.

that whatever we make of the appeal must give due consideration to the inherently offensive orientation of the apologetical task. It is this realization, then, that brings us to a critical interpretive juncture. Is the appeal that plays a 'primary' role in 'the Christianizing of the world' addressed to the regenerate reason of the Christian apologist, *i.e.* to the individual who is labouring to establish the 'objective validity' of the gospel of Christ?⁷⁸ Or, is the appeal addressed to the potential targets of apologetical science, *i.e.* to individuals who are analyzing the grounds of faith that are being established by the Christian apologist? Whereas the consensus of critical opinion would have us believe that the appeal to 'right reason' was an appeal 'to the *natural man's* "right reason" to judge of the truth of Christianity',⁷⁹ our analysis of the relationship between the objective and the subjective in Warfield's religious epistemology suggests a different conclusion. We have seen that the ability to reason 'rightly' presupposes the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit on the 'whole soul' of a moral agent simply because the soul is a single unit that acts in all of its functions as a single substance. When we interpret the appeal to 'right reason' in this light, it follows that the appeal was not primarily an invitation to the unbeliever's neutral reasoning to judge of the truth of Christianity. It was, rather, a call to 'the men of the palingenesis' to establish the integrity of 'the Christian view of the world' by urging their "'stronger and purer thought" continuously, and in all its details, upon the attention of men'.⁸⁰ Not only does this interpretation do justice to the

⁷⁸ 'Beattie's *Apologetics*', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 99.

⁷⁹ Jack Rogers, 'Van Til and Warfield on Scripture in the Westminster Confession', in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Philosophy and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1980), p. 154.

⁸⁰ Warfield, 'Beattie's *Apologetics*', II, pp. 102-3, 100-102. While Warfield acknowledged that there 'do exist. . . "two kinds of men" in the world' who give us 'two kinds of science', he insisted that the difference between the science of the regenerate and the science of the unregenerate is not 'a difference in *kind*', but rather a difference in 'perfection of performance'. The science of the regenerate is of a higher quality than that of the unregenerate, he argued, not because it is 'a different kind of science that [the regenerate] are producing', but rather because the entrance of regeneration produces 'the better scientific outlook' and thereby 'prepares men to build [the edifice of truth] better

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context of the appeal.⁸¹ More importantly, it explains why the Christian religion will 'reason its way to the dominion of the world'⁸² without deteriorating into a 'rather bald rationalism'. The Christian religion will bring the 'thinking world' into subjection to the gospel of Christ,⁸³ in short, not because Christians have 'unbounded confidence in the apologetic power of the rational appeal to people of common sense',⁸⁴ but rather because Christians recognize that 'the Christian view of the world' is true and capable of validation 'in the forum of pure reason' through the superior science of redeemed thought.⁸⁵

The Christian, by virtue of the palingenesis working in him, stands undoubtedly on an indefinitely higher plane of thought than that occupied by sinful man as such. And he must not decline, but use and press the advantage which God has thus given him. He must insist, and insist again, that his determinations, and not those of the unilluminated, must be built into the slowly rising fabric of human

and ever more truly as the effects of regeneration increase intensively and extensively'.

⁸¹ Just as the soldier in combat appeals to his sword as the means to advancing the objectives of the Commander in Chief, so too the Christian apologist appeals to his 'right reason' as the means to bringing the 'thinking world' into subjection to the gospel of Christ. To conceive of 'right reason' as anything other than the offensive weapon of the Christian apologist – for instance, as the 'self-established intellectual tool' of the autonomous natural man, Cornelius Van Til, 'My Credo', *Jerusalem and Athens*, p. 11 – is fundamentally to misconstrue the word picture being painted in the context of the appeal. It is to make Warfield guilty, moreover, of reducing the Christian religion to a natural phenomenon, and of endorsing what he elsewhere describes as 'autosoterism'. Cf. Warfield, 'How to Get Rid of Christianity', *Shorter Writings*, I, p. 60.

⁸² 'Review of *De Zekerheid*', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 120.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York, 1980), p. 115.

⁸⁵ Warfield, 'Beattie's *Apologetics*', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 103.

science. Thus will he serve, if not his own generation, yet truly all the generations of men.⁸⁶

Conclusion: Warfield and the Task of Apologetics

This essay has challenged the prevailing historiographical consensus by shifting the focus of interpretation for Warfield's 'intellectualism' from a perspective that locates it within the context of Scottish Common Sense Realism to a perspective that is compatible with the anthropological and epistemological assumptions of the Reformed tradition.⁸⁷ Whereas the consensus of critical opinion would have us believe that Warfield was a rationalist who accommodated his theology to the assumptions of Enlightenment philosophy, this essay has demonstrated that no such conclusion can be justified simply because Warfield's 'intellectualism' was moral rather than merely rational. This is historically significant not only because it neutralizes the rather tenuous claim that Warfield and his colleagues at Old Princeton gave the back of their collective hand to the subjective and experiential components of religious epistemology,⁸⁸ but also because it gives us a clear understanding of why Warfield engaged in the task of apologetics. While Warfield acknowledged that 'rational arguments can of themselves produce nothing more than "historical faith"', he nonetheless insisted that 'historical faith' is 'of no little use in the world' because what the Holy Spirit does in the new birth is not to work 'a ready-made faith, rooted in nothing and clinging without reason to its object', but rather 'to give to a faith which naturally grows out of the proper grounds of faith, that peculiar quality which makes it saving

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Thus, the efforts of the apologist are not directed towards arguing the unregenerate into the kingdom of God, but rather towards establishing the 'objective validity' of 'the Christian view of the world'. The apologetical task, therefore, is focused primarily on the labour of the apologist, and only secondarily on the mind of the unregenerate.

⁸⁷ For a substantial challenge to the historiographical consensus, see Kim Riddlebarger's outstanding dissertation, 'The Lion of Princeton: Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield on Apologetics, Theological Method and Polemics' (Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 1997).

⁸⁸ For example, see Daniel B. Wallace, 'Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?', *Christianity Today* (September 12, 1994), p. 38; Sandeen, 'The Princeton Theology', pp. 307-19.

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faith'.⁸⁹ Since the Holy Spirit 'does not produce faith without grounds',⁹⁰ we can infer that Warfield engaged in apologetics not to argue the unregenerate into the kingdom of God, but rather to facilitate their engagement in the most basic activity of human existence, namely reaction to the truth of God that is reflected into the soul. As Andrew Hoffercker has incisively noted, the underlying assumption of this approach to apologetics is of course that the Spirit – who blows where he wills – will enable the elect to see revealed truth for what it objectively is, thereby rendering their saving response to the truth certain.⁹¹

⁸⁹ 'Review of *De Zekerheid*', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 115; cf. 'Calvin's Doctrine of Knowledge', pp. 124-5, n. 99; Andrew Hoffercker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians* (Phillipsburg, NJ, and Grand Rapids, MI, 1981), pp. 101-3, 108-9.

⁹⁰ 'Review of *De Zekerheid*', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 115.

⁹¹ Cf. Hoffercker, *Piety*, p. 109; Warfield, 'Beattie's *Apologetics*', *Shorter Writings*, II, p. 99. I would like to thank the Revd David W. Hall for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. This essay is the revised edition of an essay that originally appeared in *Premise*, the on-line journal of the Center for the Advancement of Paleo Orthodoxy. See Paul Kjoss Helseth, 'B. B. Warfield and the Princeton Apologetic: The Appeal to "Right Reason"', *Premise* 4, 4 (1997), p. 5. Uniform Resource Locator <http://capo.org/premise/97/Dec/p971205.html>. For an analysis of how the issues addressed in this essay are related to the ongoing debate in the Reformed camp over apologetical method, see Helseth, 'The Apologetical Tradition of the OPC: A Reconsideration', *Westminster Theological Journal* 60 (1998), pp. 109-29. For a more comprehensive version of this last essay, see Helseth, 'J. Gresham Machen and "True Science": Machen's Apologetical Continuity with Old Princeton's Right Use of Reason', *Premise* 5, 1 (1998), p. 3. Uniform Resource Locator <http://capo.org/premise/98/FEB/p980203.html>.