

The Scientifically Constructive Scholarship of B. B. Warfield¹

by David Smith

Introduction

THROUGHOUT THE NINETEENTH century, the Old Princeton² faculty was often at the center of controversy because they believed the establishment and advancement of the gospel was related to, if not dependent on, the church believing and declaring the truth about a variety of issues. Though they maintained that the biblical message of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was what people needed to believe in order to experience salvation, the Princetonians also asserted that this message was ultimately related to every subject matter. This view was based on what the Princetonians called the “unity of truth.”³ Believing that God was the creator, sustainer and

¹I am thankful to Dr. Douglas A. Sweeney for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper, as well as for discussions with Dr.’s Brad Gundlach and John Woodbridge over the nature and scope of Warfield’s scholarship.

²For a history of Princeton Seminary, cf. David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 1, Faith and Learning 1812-1868* and *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 2, The Majestic Testimony 1869-1929* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994 and 1996). For histories of its founding and early years, see Lefferts A. Loetscher, *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism: Archibald Alexander the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1983); Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989). Also helpful is Noll’s *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921: Scripture, Science and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983; reprint 2001).

³Bradley John Gundlach, “The Evolution Question at Princeton: 1845-1929,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1995), 53-72. For the relation of the “unity of truth” to the task of humans engaging in systematic theology, cf. Warfield, “The Task and Method of Systematic

redeemer of all reality, they affirmed that knowledge of and belief in the gospel was related to people's understanding of many things that on first glance might seem unrelated to the gospel.⁴ The belief in the "unity of truth" was integral to the Princetonians view of science and their approach to thwarting work that they saw as being illegitimately labeled as science. Yet there were also arguments that sustained an immediate bearing on the veracity of the gospel, such as arguments about the nature and authority of Scripture, which gained the most attention from the Princeton faculty. In fact, this apologetical approach was, and still is, central to many of the controversies regarding Old Princeton. While their apologetical approach is often attributed to their epistemological dependence on Scottish Common Sense Realism, their theology is thought, by some, to be primarily indebted to Francis Turretin, thereby an expression of scholastic rationalism.⁵

Theology," *Studies in Theology*, vol. IX in *The Collected Works of B. B. Warfield* (NY: Oxford UP, 1932; reprint Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 95. (Hereafter, *Works*)

⁴The point here is not to attempt to explain in detail the nature of these relations. Rather, it is to acknowledge the Princetonian emphasis that the "unity of truth" meant that all subject matters and truth claims are related to the gospel in some way because all truth is unified and finds its origin in God. The point, in other words, is to state a belief the Princetonians possessed, not to explicate that belief in detail for greater clarity. For an example of what this meant for some of the Princetonians with respects to the topic of evolution and how it related to gospel belief cf. Gundlach, *op cit.* fn. 3.

⁵Much of the contemporary analyses critical of the Princetonians along these lines is indebted to Sydney Ahlstrom's, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History*, 24 (1955): 257-72. For other works that agree and advance Ahlstrom's thesis in varying ways see James D. Bratt, "The Dutch Schools" in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development* ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1998); Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Theodore P. Letis, "B. B. Warfield, Common-Sense Philosophy and Biblical Criticism," *American Presbyterians* 69 (Fall 1991): 175-90; George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); *The Soul of the American University* (NY: Oxford UP, 1994); Tim McConnel, "The Old Princeton Apologetic: Common sense or Reformed?" *JETS* 46/4 (December, 2003): 647-72; Nancey Murphey,

There are, however, voices of dissent opposed to interpreting the Old Princeton theologians in this way, and their number appears to be growing. In recent years, Calhoun (cf. fn. 2), Muller,⁶ Gundlach (cf. fn. 3), Riddlebarger,⁷ Helseth,⁸ Hicks,⁹ and Chrisope¹⁰

Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1996); Mark A. Noll, "Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought," *American Quarterly* 37, 2 (1985): 216-38; Jack Rogers and Donald K. McKim. *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: UP, 1970); John C. Vander Stelt, *Philosophy and Scripture: A Study in Old Princeton and Westminster Theology* (Marlton, NJ: Mack, 1978); John William Stewart, "The Tethered Theology: Biblical Criticism, Common Sense Philosophy and the Princeton Theologians, 1812-1860," (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Michigan, 1990); Marion Ann Taylor, *The Old Testament in the Old Princeton School: 1812-1929* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992); Steve Wilkens and Alan G. Padgett, *Christianity and Western Thought, Vol. 2: Faith and Reason in the 19th Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 264-68.

⁶Richard A. Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists': Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy, Part I" *CTJ* 30 (1995): 345-75; Part II *CTJ* 31 (1996): 125-60. "The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism—A Review and Definition," in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 45-64. For further clarification on some of Muller's work, cf. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, "Introduction" in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, 11-43.

⁷Kim Riddlebarger, "The Lion of Princeton: Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield on Apologetics, Theological Method and Polemics," (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Seminary, 1997).

⁸Paul Kjoss Helseth, "Moral Character and Moral Certainty: The Subjective State of the Soul and J. G. Machen's Critique of Theological Liberalism," (Ph.D. diss., Marquette Univ., 1996). For an accurate analysis of "right reason" in Warfield, cf. "B. B. Warfield's Apologetical Appeal to 'Right Reason': Evidence of a Rather Bald Rationalism?" *The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 16, 2 (Autumn 1998): 156-77; "B. B. Warfield on the Apologetical Nature of Christian Scholarship: An Analysis of His Solution to the Problem of the Relationship between Christianity and Culture" *WTJ* 62, 1 (Spring 2000): 89-111; "Re-Imagining' the Princeton Mind: Postconservative Evangelicalism, Old Princeton, and the Rise of Neo-Fundamentalism," *JETS* 45/3 (September 2002), 427-50.

have reinforced Hoffecker¹¹ and Woodbridge,¹² and along with an array of shorter works, challenged many of the conclusions that had been standard presuppositions regarding how one thought about the Old Princeton scholars and their work.¹³ Calhoun's two-volume work, illuminating on most of the seminal issues, is the most comprehensive by any scholar on the institution and her instructors. Though Muller's work does not directly or even primarily address the Princetonians, it is relevant to the discussion because it refutes

⁹Peter Hicks, *The Philosophy of Charles Hodge: A 19th century Approach to Reason, Knowledge and Truth* Studies in American Religion Vol. 65 (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997).

¹⁰Terry A. Chrisope, "J. Gresham Machen and the Modern Intellectual Crisis" *Presbyterian* vol. XXIV 2 (Fall 1998): 92-109; *Toward A Sure Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Dilemma of Biblical Criticism, 1881-1915* (Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2000).

¹¹Andrew W. Hoffecker, Jr. "The Relation Between the Objective and Subjective Aspects in Christian Religious Experience: A Study in the Systematic and Devotional Writings of Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield," (Ph.D. diss., Brown Univ., 1970).

¹²John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).

¹³Some of the shorter works include D. Clair Davis, "Princeton and Inerrancy: The Nineteenth Century Philosophical Background of Contemporary Concerns" in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John D. Hannah (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); Donald Fuller and Ronald Gardiner, "Reformed Theology at Princeton and Amsterdam in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Reappraisal" *Presbyterian* vol. XXI, 2 (Fall 1995): 89-117; Moises Silva, "Old Princeton, Westminster and Inerrancy," *WTJ* 50 (1988): 65-80; Peter J. Wallace, "The Foundations of Reformed Biblical Theology: The Development of Old Testament Theology at Old Princeton, 1812-1932," *WTJ* 59 (1997): 41-69. Since Archibald Alexander, Princeton's first professor, studied Turretin (in Latin) under his tutor William Graham as early as 1790, we must recognize that whatever influence Turretin had with the Princeton theologians it certainly pre-dates the founding of the seminary. Of course, Alexander, along with other students of Graham, also read John Owen, Joseph Butler, Thomas Boston and Jonathan Edwards. Further, prior to studying under Graham, Alexander read copiously in Owen, Boston, Richard Baxter, Joseph Alleine, Thomas Halyburton, Ebenezer Erskine, Philip Doddridge, and George Whitefield, among others. For the diversity of influences on Alexander that centered in Graham, see David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 1, Faith and Learning 1812-1868* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 43-59; B. B. Warfield, "Apologetics," *Works*, 9:15.

the thesis that Turretin and other post-Reformation Protestants were rationalistic distorters of Calvin. While not seeking to be an amplification of Woodbridge's work, Muller echoes and advances some of Woodbridge's arguments contra Rogers and McKim. Gundlach reveals that the Princetonians were operating along presuppositional lines of thought in the mid-nineteenth century, long before it became popular in the work of Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper. Gundlach's historical analysis calls into question the accepted story-line that identifies the Old Princeton apologetic as fundamentally out of step with a presuppositional apologetic; furthermore, the general thrust of Riddlebarger's conclusions complement Gundlach's analysis as he contradicts some of the reasoning and research of some who tend to align themselves more readily with either Barthian or Kuyperian views of epistemology, theology and apologetics.

Riddlebarger concludes that much concerning Warfield's apologetics and theological method has been unjustly maligned. He affirms that (1) Warfield legitimately stands within the historic Reformed tradition, (2) Scottish Presbyterian evidentialists and Reformed Scholastics play a more seminal role in Warfield's theology and apologetics than Scottish Common Sense Realism, (3) those critical of Warfield actually misanalyze SCSR and its influence in his work, and therefore draw erroneous conclusions about his theology and apologetics, and (4) Warfield's analysis of the relation of faith to reason and the Holy Spirit is "too often ignored or taken out of context, or otherwise misrepresented."¹⁴

Helseth significantly disputes most of the standard Neo-Orthodox and Dutch Reformed interpretations of the Princeton theologians that view them as Scholastic rationalists, who were

¹⁴Riddlebarger, op. cit. fn. 7, 329-31. Part of the misanalysis is a failure to understand that SCSR is not "inherently antithetical to certain Reformed doctrines" (331). This truth, however, is used by some within the Reformed tradition to polemicize for an epistemology they believe is faithful to Scripture, yet one they believe is fundamentally at odds with Warfield's. Cf. Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God" in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: UND Press, 1983), 16-93; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Thomas Reid and Rationality," in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a MEANING in This TEXT?: The Bible, The Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 289.

dependent on an Enlightenment view of science. In particular, Helseth argues that Hodge, Warfield and Machen faithfully maintained a balance between the objective and subjective elements within epistemology, and explains that they understood epistemology to be inherently moral. Therefore, to transfer their use of terms to an anthropology devoid of such a moral understanding is to misread their concepts and to misunderstand their position.

The intensity, intricacies and importance of these debates regarding the Princetonians may be properly understood in light of Calhoun's assessment that "Princeton Seminary was one of the centers—in its earlier years, perhaps *the* center—of American evangelicalism during the nineteenth century."¹⁵ In other words, to struggle with the character and future of evangelicalism today forces one to wrestle with its nineteenth-century heritage. It should not surprise us that these debates swirl around Old Princeton.

Possibly the most distinguished apologist at Old Princeton was B. B. Warfield.¹⁶ Warfield may be best known for his work with A.A. Hodge in the formulation of the inerrancy articles that were part of the debate with Charles Augustus Briggs over the nature and use of biblical criticism.¹⁷ The exchange with Briggs led to one of

¹⁵Calhoun, 1: xxii, op. cit. fn. 2.

¹⁶David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 2, The Majestic Testimony 1869-1929* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1996), 320, explains "by profound study and extensive reading in English, German, French and Dutch, B. B. Warfield, to a degree that has rarely been equaled, excelled in the whole field of theological learning—exegetical, historical and doctrinal.... John DeWitt said that he had known intimately the three great Reformed theologians of America in the preceding generation—Charles Hodge, William Shedd and Henry B. Smith—and that he was certain not only that Warfield knew a great deal more than any one of them, but that he knew more than all three of them put together!" One need not be a supporter of Warfield's theology to recognize his abilities. The prodigious liberal theologian Adolf Von Harnack echoed these same sentiments about Warfield. For further biographical details on Warfield, see Calhoun, 2: 114-19; Riddlebarger, op. cit. fn. 7, 1-12. Despite their occasional differences, Machen's statement about Warfield upon the latter's death is illustrative, "He was really a great man. There is no one living in the Church capable of occupying one quarter of his place." Still further, ". . . It seemed to me that the old Princeton—a great institution it was—died when Dr. Warfield was carried out." Calhoun, 2:318.

¹⁷The exchange took place in *The Presbyterian Review*, while Warfield was still teaching at Western Seminary prior to his coming to Princeton in

the most famous essays in evangelical scholarship, co-authored by Hodge and Warfield in 1881, entitled "Inspiration." In it the authors set forth a doctrine of inerrancy that has been considered both insightful and influential in the theological and cultural controversies occupying American evangelicals throughout the twentieth century.¹⁸

Through not only the "Inspiration" article but also other scholarly work during the latter part of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century,¹⁹ B. B. Warfield engaged in what he considered a constructively scientific biblical and theological scholarship. By refuting the historicist and anti-supernaturalistic

1887. *The Presbyterian Review* had been formed in 1880 to be a journal addressing theological matters as opposed to *The Princeton Review* which addressed philosophy, science and literature, and succeeded in 1878 the *Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review*. The latter had succeeded the more famous *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*. Cf. Calhoun, vol. 2, 83. Biblical criticism is subdivided into "lower," or textual criticism, and "higher" criticism. The former "deals strictly with the *text* of Scripture, endeavoring to ascertain what the real text of each book was as it came from the hands of its author." The latter "concerns itself with the resultant problems of age, authorship, sources, simple or composite character, historical worth, relation to the period of origin, etc." James Orr, "Criticism of the Bible," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, general editor James Orr, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 749. Cf. William Baird, "Biblical Criticism: New Testament Criticism," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, editor-in-chief David Noel Freedman, vol. 1 (NY: Doubleday, 1992), 730-36. In short, biblical criticism is the practice of bringing all knowledge relevant to the process of interpretation to bear upon one's exegesis and interpretation of a biblical passage. Such a definition demonstrates that biblical criticism is controversial for the very reason that it is by no means self-evident, and certainly of great significance, what one thinks constitutes "all knowledge relevant to the process of interpretation."

¹⁸Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, op. cit. fn. 5, 36-39, 75-76, 117-121, 160.

¹⁹Riddlebarger notes that from 1880-1886, "Warfield's first five major published works were in the field of New Testament, and all of them were specifically oriented towards defending orthodoxy by utilizing the 'latest' critical methodology." During this same time he published "at least 60 additional works in New Testament studies, the vast majority of these dealing with the latest developments in textual criticism, New Testament background, word studies and exegetical issues, as well as related Patristic studies." op cit. fn. 7, 59.

biblical and theological scholarship of his day, he articulated more biblically faithful thinking. One of the primary manifestations of the historicist and anti-supernaturalistic scholarship was the historical-criticism of the Bible that attacked the authority of Scripture, in part, by denying its plenary inspiration. Though Warfield championed the use of criticism in biblical scholarship, he criticized uses of criticism that failed to take into account all the relevant facts.²⁰ Such uses of biblical criticism, according to Warfield, were not worthy of the terms “criticism” or “scientific.”²¹ Furthermore, such scholarship revealed itself to be energized by historicist and anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions alien to the Scriptures, and rendered the criticism rooted in these presuppositions as non-Christian.²² By denying that such work could be labeled “Christian,” “scientific” or “critical,” Warfield believed he wielded an offensive weapon that not only undercut the intellectual and ecclesiastical validity of this opposing polemical scholarship, but also strengthened and defined the truth claims of his position.²³ Such a

²⁰B. B. Warfield, “Inspiration and Criticism,” in *Works* 1:395-425.

²¹Ibid, 408, 420-21. The latter pages address the erroneous analysis and conclusions of allegedly critical work that fails to pay attention to “the prime question of the intentions and professions of the writer” and a failure to recognize that “it is a first principle of historical science that any solution which affords a possible method of harmonizing any two statements is preferable to the assumption of inaccuracy or error—whether those statements are found in the same or different writers.”

²²“The Rights of Criticism and of the Church,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. 2, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1970, 1973; reprint, 2001), 595-603.

²³The Princeton theologians were deeply involved in the affairs of the Presbyterian Church, and this is seen, in part, by how they addressed the matter of the historical-criticism of the Bible in the church courts. Briggs’s heresy case was pursued diligently by Princeton faculty members. Cf. Calhoun, vol. 2, 131-36. Thus, they were concerned to articulate what had validity not simply in the academy, but also in the church. Further, they considered themselves to be servants within the church possessing a particular duty that did not fall to everyone to perform but did affect the health of the whole body. Commensurate with their belief in the unity of truth was their belief in the “division of labor.” Cf. Gundlach, op. cit. fn. 4. For the progressive nature of systematic theology as a science, cf. “The Task and Method of Systematic Theology,” 105, op. cit. fn. 4. Relating to the whole matter of a task that impinged upon both the academy and the church was the distinction made between the religious and theological use

conclusion corresponds to Warfield's view of Christian apologetics as containing not just, or even primarily, a defensive quality, but predominantly possessing an offensive or constructive character. This essay explores some of Warfield's work at the end of the nineteenth century that he viewed as constructive and scientific, and investigates some conclusions that may be drawn from it and his intentions through that scholarship.

Warfield's View of Apologetics and the Role of "Right Reason"

Our understanding of apologetics among Old Princeton scholars plays a vital role in our assessment of their work.²⁴ There is

of the Bible. The former related primarily to Christian practice or holy living, while the latter related primarily to Christian thought. Though a distinction was to be made between these two, no *separation* existed. They existed in an organic union. It did not fall to everyone in the church to explicate the relation between the two or to express one's gifts in identically the same way in each sphere. Yet, because the organic union that existed between them was characterized by the theological use (thinking) being the root of the religious use (practice), Warfield, believed it was his responsibility to address intellectual arguments that, though not understood by all people, could cause some to have a corrupt view of God's word and possibly be severed from it. See Warfield, "A Review of *Studies in Theology*" in *SSW*, 2:300-07. For the continuation of such a view cf. J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to Its Literature and History*, ed. W. John Cook (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 378. For how the addressing of these intellectual arguments inimical to Gospel belief could be a demonstration of love for one's fellow man, cf. J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999; reprinted from original, 1937), 134. One should also recognize that the scholarship the Princetonians considered rooted in something other than the biblical gospel was itself no less polemical than the Princetonians' scholarship.

²⁴A number of works within the secondary literature testify to this. Taylor's *The Old Testament in the Old Princeton School* faults the Princetonians for allowing apologetics to overwhelm and stultify Old Testament scholarship at Princeton (cf. p. 282). In turn, their views of apologetics is considered organically related to their dependence on Scottish Common Sense Realism and Reformed confessional orthodoxy (cf. pp. xix-xx), cf. fn. 2. This entrenchment is interpreted as preventing the Old Princeton school from adapting with the times. One is left wondering to what extent

no denying the integral role of apologetics within the history and theology of Old Princeton. Yet, it would be a mistake to think that the participation of either Warfield or any of the Old Princeton professors in the inerrancy debate and other polemical engagements was simply, or even primarily, “defensive.” The Princetonians did not believe that apologetics was only a “defensive” operation with no “constructive” consequences. Apologetics certainly did include a defense of the Christian faith but it was not limited to a defensive posture nor was this its primary nature or place in Old Princeton’s conception of the theological task.²⁵ As Warfield explained:

Apologetics undertakes not the defense, not even the vindication, but the establishment, not, strictly speaking, of Christianity, but rather that knowledge of God which Christianity professes to embody and seeks to make efficient in the world, and which it is the business of theology scientifically to explicate. It may, of course, enter into defense and vindication when in the prosecution of its task it meets with opposing points of view and requires to establish its own standpoint or conclusions. Apologies may, therefore, be embraced in apologetics, and form ancillary portions of its structure, as they may also do in the case of every other theological discipline. It is, moreover inevitable that this or that element or aspect of apologetics will be more or less emphasized and cultivated, as the need of it is from time to time more or less felt. But apologetics does not derive its contents or take its form or borrow its value from the prevailing opposition; but preserves through all varying circumstances *its essential character as a positive and constructive science* which has to do with opposition only—like any other constructive science—as *the refutation of opposing views becomes from time to time incident to construction*. So little is defense or vindication of the essence of apologetics that there would be the same reason for its existence and the same necessity for its work, were there no opposition in the world to be encountered and no contradiction to be overcome. It finds its deepest grounds . . . in the fundamental needs of the human spirit. . . . It is, in other words, the function of apologetics to investigate, explicate, and establish the grounds on which theology—a science, or systematized knowledge of God—is possible; and on the basis of which every science which has God for its object must rest, if it be a true science with claims to a place within the circle of sciences.²⁶

biblically faithful scholarship and thinking modifies itself to conform to the contemporary *Zeitgeist*.

²⁵“The Idea of Systematic Theology,” *Works*, 9:49-87.

²⁶Warfield, “Apologetics,” op. cit. fn. 13. Emphasis mine.

Apologetics, then, was primarily an offensive or constructive enterprise through the work of the Holy Spirit enabling people to reason rightly about the evidence. It is the role of “right reason” in Warfield’s thought that plays a vital role in many controversies regarding his apologetical method and theology, and is one of the seminal points in evaluating some of the assessments of Warfield’s apologetical method, anthropology, epistemology and theology. It is on this point that Cornelius Van Til inaccurately assessed Warfield.²⁷ Given the depth of controversy on this point and the importance of this belief within Warfield’s scholarship, a brief assessment of Van Til’s treatment regarding this matter proves fruitful.

Van Til’s criticism of Warfield notes:

Having stressed the objective rationality of Christianity, Warfield does not adequately stress the difference between the principle of the natural man and the principles of the Christian. This appears primarily in the fact that he attributes to ‘right reason’ the ability to interpret natural revelation with essential correctness. It is not easy to discover just what Warfield means by ‘right reason’. But clearly it is not the regenerated reason. It is not the reason that has already accepted Christianity. It is ... the reason that is confronted with Christianity and has some criterion apart from Christianity with which to judge the truth of Christianity.²⁸

²⁷For additional examples of criticisms based on an erroneous analysis of Warfield, cf. James Bratt, “The Dutch Schools,” in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of its Modern Development* ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1997), 122. Bratt, 123, believes the Rogers and McKim proposal, critical of the Princetonians for their scholastic rationalism and deductive, defensive apologetics, “showed considerable debts to Dutch-Calvinist sources.” For a critique of the Rogers/McKim proposal, cf. Woodbridge, op. cit. fn. 12. For an example of apologetics having a constructive result, see B. B. Warfield, “Christian Evidences: How Affected By Recent Criticisms,” *SSW* 2:124-31.

²⁸Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 264; *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1969), 244; Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1998), 597-98, 602-612. Cf. fns. 7 and 8 for the most extensive treatments that refute that “right reason” in Warfield’s thought was the reasoning of the unregenerate.

Warfield's assessment of the intellectual and spiritual climate at the turn-of-the century reveals why he laid the stress where he did, and warrants being quoted at length in order to help clarify how and why Warfield used the term "right reason." Under the section titled "The Value of Apologetics," Warfield wrote:

For faith, it seems, after Kant, can no longer be looked upon as a matter of reasoning and does not rest on rational grounds, but is an affair of the heart, and manifests itself most powerfully when it has no reason out of itself (Brunetiere). If repetition had probative force, it would long ago have been established that faith, religion, theology, lie wholly outside of the realm of reason, proof, and demonstration.

It is, however, from the point of view of rationalism and mysticism that the value of apologetics is decried. Wherever rationalistic preconceptions have penetrated, there, of course, the validity of apologetic proofs has been more or less of their extent questioned. Wherever mystical sentiment has seeped in, there the validity of apologetics has been with more or less emphasis doubted. At the present moment, the rationalistic tendency is most active, perhaps, in the form given by Albrecht Ritschl. In this form it strikes at the very root of apologetics, by the distinction it erects between theoretical and religious knowledge. . . . [T]he mystical tendency is manifesting itself at the present day most distinctly in a widespread inclination to set aside apologetics in favor of the 'witness of the Spirit.' The convictions of the Christian man, we are told, are not the product of reason addressed to the intellect, but the immediate creation of the Holy Spirit in the heart. Therefore, it is intimated, we may do very well without these reasons, if indeed they are not positively noxious, because tending to substitute a barren intellectualism for a vital faith. It seems to be forgotten that though faith be a moral act and the gift of God, it is yet formally conviction passing into confidence; and that all forms of conviction must rest on evidence as their ground, and it is not faith but reason which investigates the nature and validity of this ground. . . . Though faith is the gift of God, it does not in the least follow that the faith which God gives is an irrational faith, that is, a faith without cognizable ground in *right reason*. We believe in Christ because it is rational to believe in him, not even though it be irrational. Of course, mere reasoning cannot make a Christian; but that is not because faith is not the result of evidence, but because a dead soul cannot respond to evidence. The action of the Holy Spirit in giving faith is not apart

from evidence, but along with evidence; and in the first instance consists in preparing the soul for the reception of the evidence.²⁹

Warfield, like his Princeton predecessors, gives expression here to a view of reason held by Turretin. Turretin affirmed that it was the role of “right reason” to apprehend “the truth of conclusions, and of itself determines what may be inferred from some other thing.”³⁰ However, just because reason is to be used in this way does not mean that it is “the principle and rule by which doctrines of faith should be measured.”³¹ Turretin affirmed that reason had an instrumental or ministerial use, but it was not the foundation or basis of the Christian faith.³² According to Turretin, “[W]e must

²⁹Warfield, “Apologetics,” 15-16. Warfield did see many good results from the nineteenth-century biblical scholarship that he also criticized, as can be discerned from “The Century’s Progress in Biblical Knowledge,” *SSW*, 2:3-13. Yet he also believed that “days of loose speech and looser thinking” had resulted from much of this scholarship. Cf. “A Review of *Studies in Theology*,” *SSW*, 2: 300.

³⁰For the use of the term “right reason” in Turretin cf. his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1 trans. George Musgrave Geiger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1992), 24-26. Cf. Riddlebarger, op. cit. fn. 7, 291-314 for the Scottish Presbyterian roots of Warfield’s view of apologetics and the ministerial and instrumental use of reason that concurred with Turretin, but was not a rationalistic understanding. For the use of the term “right reason” in Hodge’s theology see Helseth, “Moral Character and Moral Certainty,” 56-66. Cf. Calhoun, vol. 2, 417-21 for how Old Princeton faculty members before and after Warfield held to the belief that the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit was necessary for saving faith; cf. Helseth, “Moral Character and Moral Certainty,” regarding the continuity in Hodge, Warfield and Machen on the necessity of the Holy Spirit’s work for saving faith. Cf. Warfield, “The Westminster Doctrine of Holy Scripture” in *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work, Works*, 6:199, 224-28 for Warfield’s belief that the Scriptures teach, and the Westminster Confession confirms, the *instrument* of human reason to receive *some* true knowledge of God that leaves humans inexcusable for their rejection of God but that it is the work of the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit that gives God’s people right reason by which they are enabled to deduce from Scripture particular things not “expressly set down in Scripture.” I am grateful to the Rev. Adam Brice for drawing my attention to this latter essay. For a more detailed analysis of saving faith cf. “On Faith in Its Psychological Aspects,” *Works*, 9:313-42.

³¹Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:26.

³²Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:25-26. Cf. fns. 7 and 8.

observe the distinction between an instrument of faith and the foundation of faith.”³³ In other words, the reasoning of humans, even as finite and fallen, is still the means by which God’s special revelation is intelligible to them. Which interpretive conclusions are then drawn by individual humans in their various states of fallen or redeemed conditions is another, albeit, related issue. While maintaining a use for reason, Turretin clearly taught the noetic influence of sin, seen in the following.

The reason of an unregenerate man is blinded with respect to the law (Eph. 4:17, 18; Rom. 1:27, 28; 8:7). With respect to the gospel, it is evidently blinded and mere darkness (Eph. 5:8; 1 Cor. 2:14) Therefore, it must be taken captive that it may be subjected to faith, not exalted that it may rule it (2 Cor. 10:3-5). (2) The mysteries of faith are beyond the sphere of reason to which the unregenerate man cannot rise; and, as the senses do not attempt to judge of those things which are above it and supernatural. (3) Faith is not referred ultimately to reason, so that I ought to believe because I so understand and comprehend; but to the word because God so speaks in the Scriptures. (4) The Holy Spirit directs us to the word alone (Dt. 4:1; Is. 8:20; Jn. 5:39; 2 Tim. 3:15, 16; 2 Pet. 1:19). (5) If reason is the principle of faith, then first it would follow that all religion is natural and demonstrable by natural reason and natural light. Thus nature and grace, natural and supernatural revelation would be confounded. Second, it would follow that reason is nowhere to be made captive and to be denied, against the express passages of Scripture; and those possessed of a more ready mind and a more cultivated genius can better perceive and judge the mysteries of faith against universal experience (1 Cor. 1:19, 20; Mt. 11:25). (6) Reason cannot be the rule of religion; neither as corrupted because it is not only below faith, but also opposed to it (Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14; Mt. 16:17); nor as sound because this is not found in corrupt man, nor in an uncontaminated man could it be the rule of supernatural mysteries. Nor when it is corrected by the Spirit must it be judged according to itself, but according to the first principle which illuminated reason now admits (viz. the Scriptures).³⁴

With respects to Van Til’s criticism, it seems that one might question what constitutes an “adequate stress” on the differences of principles between the natural and Christian man. The term “adequate” implies a goal to be achieved, i.e., “adequate” for what?

³³Ibid, 25.

³⁴Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:24-25.

Surely what is “adequate” will vary according to one’s apologetical situation. Further, it is by no means axiomatic *how* one ought to go about stressing the difference between the principles of the Christian versus the principle of the natural man. It is, in fact, *how* Warfield stresses the difference, I believe, that distinguishes him from some within the Reformed camp, and is at the heart of many disagreements concerning his apologetical method.

For Warfield, then, “right reason” is not the reasoning of the unregenerate. If the faith that God gives is not an irrational faith, and if this faith that God gives is further explained as a faith not “lacking cognizable ground in right reason,” then, according to Warfield, “right reason” is being used as a synonym for the saving faith of the regenerate person. Consequently, when Warfield makes reference to the Christian making an appeal to “right reason” he is not saying, as Van Til claimed, that we appeal to a criterion of “reason that is confronted with Christianity and has some criterion apart from Christianity with which to judge the truth of Christianity” (cf. fn. 28). Rather, he is saying that when the Christian makes an appeal to the non-Christian, the Christian is appealing to the Christian’s reasoning that has been “righted.” It is this “right reason” that is able to reason rightly about the evidence and see it for what it is, namely true and glorious. Though “mere reasoning cannot make a Christian . . . because a dead soul cannot respond to evidence” (cf. fn. 29), this did not mean reasoning did not have a place in the evangelization of the non-Christian. According to Warfield, the dead soul reasons wrongly about the evidence and therefore does not reach correct conclusions about the evidence, and thereby does not place his or her faith in Jesus. Hence, the dead soul remains dead. There must be an action from the Holy Spirit that acts upon the individual enabling him or her to respond to the evidence so that the person finds it reasonable to place one’s faith in Jesus. The non-Christian’s reasoning must be “righted” by the Holy Spirit. Yet, it is because the Holy Spirit utilizes means, such as the “right reason” of the regenerate, that the Christian is obligated and privileged to reason with the unregenerate.

Part of the work of the Holy Spirit, Warfield explained, was to prepare the person for the evidence. This did not mean that apologetics made people Christians, “but that apologetics supplies to Christian men the systematically organized basis on which the

faith of Christian men must rest.”³⁵ Warfield clarified the matter this way:

[T]he sinful heart—which is enmity towards God—is incapable of that supreme act of trust in God—or rather of entrusting itself to God, its Saviour—which has absorbed into itself the term ‘faith’ in its Christian connotation. And it is to avoid this conclusion that many have been tempted to make faith not a rational act of conviction passing into confidence, resting on adequate grounds in testimony, but an arbitrary act of sheer will, produced no one knows how. This is not, however, the solution of the difficulty offered by the Christian revelation. The solution it offers is frankly to allow the impossibility of ‘faith’ to the sinful heart and to attribute it, therefore, to the gift of God.³⁶

Warfield believed apologetics constituted an activity in which the foundations of Christianity were either laid or explicated in such a way that people were shown how the Christian system of truth or knowing³⁷ was the only system with a credible foundation. As Warfield wrote, “Apologetical Theology prepares the way for all theology by establishing its necessary presuppositions without which no theology is possible.”³⁸ By revealing these “necessary presuppositions,” Warfield believed that he was revealing the sole credibility of the Christian system of truth. He thereby affirmed that he was not only revealing that biblical Christianity was true, but also demonstrating that every competing claim against it was false. Response to arguments against the entire Christian system of knowing, or against one particular knowledge claim within the system, merely provided the opportunity to demonstrate the soundness of the Christian system of knowing and the instability

³⁵Warfield, “Apologetics,” *Works*, 9:16.

³⁶Warfield, “On Faith in Its Psychological Aspects,” *Works*, 9:337.

³⁷I am using the term “system of truth” and “system of knowing” interchangeably because to make a claim to knowledge is to claim to know some truth. Even if we were to think that something was simply “true for us,” we are nonetheless confessing that such a “truth” is something we know. If we say we “know” something, we are acknowledging something to be true. Whether we believe it is true for everyone or just ourselves is another issue. I speak of “the Christian system of truth,” because Warfield in particular, and the Princetonians in general, believed in “the unity of truth.”

³⁸“The Idea of Systematic Theology,” *Works*, 9:64.

and inadequacy of other systems.³⁹ This appears, at least in Warfield's estimation, to have served to advance the church's cause of bringing God's creation under its dominion.⁴⁰

Yet opposition was not necessary for the validity of the apologetical task. Because of the way we are constituted as God's image bearers, we have been created to know God. Moreover, the way in which we know him necessitates that we increase in our understanding of the "necessary presuppositions" of truth and knowledge, for in doing so we actually enlarge our knowledge of God—becoming more convinced of the truth of the Christian faith we profess.⁴¹ Intimately related, then, to Warfield's apologetically constructive scholarship is his understanding of truth and how we know it.

A Warfieldian View of Epistemology

In his essay, "The Idea of Systematic Theology" (cf. fn. 14), Warfield explains the nature and necessity of systematic theology. In this essay, first appearing in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* in April of 1896, Warfield revealed how the notion of "the unity of truth" bears on our understanding, not only of systematic theology, but also theology as a whole and knowledge in general. Those who criticize the Princetonians for referring to theology as a science often think this betrays their indebtedness to an Enlightenment epistemology. One must be careful, however, not to impress a definition upon the term "science" that the Princetonians did not hold. Although their use of the term is not so radically different

³⁹Warfield believed that everyone systematized, and that, indeed, true science "is not born save through the efforts of the mind in subsuming the facts under its own intuitions and forms of thought. No mind is satisfied with a bare cognition of the facts." *Ibid*, 54. "Systematization is only a part of the irrepressible effort of the intelligence to comprehend the facts presented to it, an effort that the intelligence can escape only by ceasing to be intelligence. It may systematize well, or ill; but systematize it must whenever it holds together, in its unitary grasp, more facts than one." *Ibid*, 95.

⁴⁰Cf. B. B. Warfield, "A Review of Herman Bavinck's *De Zekerheid des Geloofs*," in *SSW*, 2:120-21.

⁴¹Warfield defined faith as "a conviction of truth, founded as such, of course, on evidence," *Ibid*, 120.

from the Enlightenment view of science that no similarities can be seen in the two views, we should be careful to scrutinize Warfield's analysis of epistemology and science. Such scrutiny will allow us to see how he understood the organic union between the object known, the subject who knows, and the language used to express the knowledge of the object.

For Warfield, to affirm that systematic theology was a science was to "declare that it deals with absolute truth and aims at organizing into a concatenated system all the truth in its sphere."⁴² As a result, two kinds of theologies could not coexist. That was not to deny conflicting claims between theologians; rather, it was to deny that such conflicting claims could all be correct.⁴³ With respect to theology, Warfield gave the example of Pelagian and Augustinian theologies being in conflict with each other. At those points in which they conflicted, if one was shown to be correct, the other by the very nature of the case was false.⁴⁴ There is, according to Warfield, one theology that is true. This one theology can certainly

⁴²Warfield, "The Idea of Systematic Theology," 51. Warfield would later write "Theology a Science," in the *Bible Student* in January of 1900. He criticized Andrew Dickson White's *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology* for trying to set science off against theology. Among other things, Warfield makes clear that the term "knowledge" ought to be clarified and that in the Christian view of reality "knowledge" of God "involves the whole man and all his activities," cf. *JSW*, 2:210. Knowing God "in the deeper sense is not the act of the mere understanding, nor can theology fulfil its function of making man 'to know God' simply by framing propositions for the logical intellect" (210). As a result, theology had a practical element to it, just as any science does. Warfield denies a bare propositionalistic view of theology, and acknowledges its inherently practical character. For a similar view cf. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishers, 1987), 76. Warfield did not deny that some of the sciences occasionally come into conflict with each other. But he believed that it was as absurd to talk about a warfare between theology and science as it was to speak of a warfare between astronomy and science. White, in other words, was simply trying to coop the term "science" for a particular view of science that restricted science to certain kinds of *sciences*.

⁴³Warfield gave as an example rival psychologies that certainly do not "obtain the right to exist side by side in equal validity, but in strenuous effort to supplant and supersede one another." Cf. "The Idea of Systematic Theology," 52.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 52.

be subdivided according to a variety of ways of classifying it, i.e., methodologically, topically, ecclesiastically, historically, etc., but these classifications were not to be seen as wholly different kinds of theology. The reason was because theology as a science was “inclusive of all the truth in its sphere, however ascertained, however presented, however defended.”⁴⁵ For Warfield, then, truth is ultimately unified. Such a unity, therefore, allows for explicating the relationships that exist among all the constituent parts that comprise that unity as long, of course, as the individual is able to ascertain through some means an understanding of those relations. In order to explicate the relations that exist within all the constituent parts of any science, one must be clear about the presuppositions which support that science. Yet this begins by first understanding what is true of every science.

Warfield, therefore, elucidated the three things that are presupposed within any science:

- (1) the reality of the subject matter; (2) the capacity of the human mind to apprehend, receive into itself and rationalize this subject matter; and (3) some medium of communication by which the subject matter is brought before the mind and presented to it for apprehension.⁴⁶

The second presupposition revealed two very important truths. First, systematizing is done by us because we are human. The human mind, Warfield affirmed, is not “satisfied with a bare cognition of the facts.”⁴⁷ By nature we correlate facts in order to make coherent sense of the reality we receive. Second, Warfield acknowledges that for any science to be called a science there must be a recognition and accounting for human involvement in the acquisition, organization and communication of the facts that comprise that science. As Warfield stated:

The mind brings to every science somewhat which, though included in the facts, is not derived from the facts considered in themselves alone, as isolated data, or even as data perceived in some sort of relation to one another. Though they be thus known, science is not

⁴⁵Ibid, 53.

⁴⁶Warfield. “The Idea of Systematic Theology,” 53.

⁴⁷Ibid, 53-4.

yet; and is not born save through the efforts of the human mind in subsuming the facts under its own intuitions and forms of thought.⁴⁸

No science is, therefore, simply an objective enterprise, but *ipso facto* a subjective one. Warfield's use of the term "science" is not an Enlightenment view of it that considers the human knower as a neutrally objective observer and analyzer of facts.

Helseth (cf. fn. 8) is surely correct when stressing the point that for Hodge, Warfield, and Machen the emphasis on "right reason" and the objective nature of knowledge is set within an explanation of epistemology as inherently moral. As a result, the acquisition of knowledge is an inherently moral enterprise so that any talk of objectivity *ipso facto* includes the operation of the Holy Spirit to overcome the noetic effects of sin. In other words, the objective and subjective elements in knowledge can never be separated, and so when the Princetonians addressed the objectivity of knowledge and God's revelation, they were, by the very nature of the case, dealing with the subjective element. This is also why they could affirm that what the *non-Christian* knows he or she knows through God. That did not mean, however, that such knowledge was always sufficient to save one from sin.⁴⁹ It is also important to note that Warfield's stress on objectivity must be understood, in part, as an attempt to combat the rationalism and romanticism taking seed and blossoming in theological affirmations during the nineteenth century, and which he believed was greatly indebted to the views of Schleiermacher.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ibid, 53, emphasis mine.

⁴⁹Cf. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:33-34.

⁵⁰Cf. fn. 29; Warfield was not alone in this, cf. Hicks, *The Philosophy of Charles Hodge*, op. cit. fn. 9 and Helseth, *Moral Character and Moral Certainty*, op. cit. fn. 8. For the presence and character of that rationalism and romanticism cf. David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Steve Wilkens, and Alan G. Padgett, *Christianity and Western Thought, Volume 2: Faith & Reason in the 19th Century* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000); Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century, Volume I, 1799-1870* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1972). For Warfield's acknowledgement of Schleiermacher's influence consider the following. "Thus theologians of the school of Schleiermacher usually derive their definition from the sources rather than the subject-matter of the science—and so speak of theology as 'the science of faith' or the like; a *thoroughly*

With respects to calling theology a science the following three affirmations corresponding to the above presuppositions are, therefore, presupposed: (1) that God exists; (2) that humans have a religious nature capable of understanding that God exists, what he is, and therefore, how he stands in relation to his creatures; and (3) that there is some means of communication by which we know God and “divine things.”⁵¹ Such affirmations, therefore, included “the objective reality of a revelation.”⁵² It was, in part, the objective nature of that revelation that Warfield believed was being dismissed or overlooked in his day.

For Warfield there is ultimately only one true system of truth. This, of course, is why Warfield and the Princetonians disagreed with Kuyper on the notion of two kinds of science. It seems that much of the debate on this issue breaks down, *inter alia*, because not a sufficient amount of attention is paid to Warfield’s and the Princetonians’ emphasis on the issue of correspondence. Warfield and the Princetonians emphasized that coherence was certainly present in some anti-Christian views of reality, but coherence was not the only test to be passed in order to earn the title of “science.” This was so because truth, ultimately, resides outside of us and the creation, and in God. To abdicate the matter of correspondence was to concede that the anthropocentric and subjective views prevalent in Schleiermacher, and in many of the German theologians, were essentially correct. Further, one of the consequences of a Schleiermacherian view of the Bible’s inspiration was that it neglected the test of correspondence, which was organically related to Schleiermacher’s anthropology.

Its characteristic conception is that the Christian man has something within himself,—call it enlightened reason, spiritual insight, the Christian consciousness, the witness of the Spirit, or call it what you will,—to the test of which every ‘external revelation’ is to be subjected, and according to the decision of which are the contents of the Bible to be valued.⁵³

unscientific procedure,” “The Idea of Systematic Theology,” 56, emphasis mine.

⁵¹Warfield, “The Idea of Systematic Theology,” 55.

⁵²Ibid, 56.

⁵³Cf. B. B. Warfield, “The Inspiration of the Bible” in *Works*, 1:59. This originally appeared in *Bibliotheca Sacra* vol. 51, 1894, pp. 614-40, as “The Church Doctrine of Inspiration.” Here we have Warfield denying

Warfield considered Schleiermacher's view to be "essentially naturalistic" and as having "broken in upon the church like a flood, and washed into every corner of the Protestant world"⁵⁴ during the nineteenth century. Such a view also led to

. . . men still professing historical Christianity, who reason themselves into the conclusion that 'in the nature of the case, no external authority can possibly be absolute in regard to spiritual truth'; just as men have been known to reason themselves into the conclusion that the external world has no objective reality and is naught but the projection of their own faculties.⁵⁵

Warfield, like Charles Hodge, believed that it was Schleiermacher, and all those following his lead, who had expressed, or were expressing, a view of the Christian faith that abdicated its objectivity, and thus, offered no grounds upon which sinners could be challenged to repent and believe the gospel.⁵⁶ By confusing the objective and subjective aspects of theology, Schleiermacher's fundamental principle of theology was grounded, first and foremost, in one's feelings, unscientific (cf. fn. 31), and unfaithful to the Christian view of theology, and by implication all reality.⁵⁷ Warfield (as well as Hodge) certainly did account for the noetic effects of sin, but he was not willing to concede an objective ground upon which the unregenerate could be truly accountable for sin, and by which they could be called to faith in Jesus. Warfield, in keeping with the Princetonian perspective, acknowledged that if the noetic effects of sin so incapacitated the sinner so that he or she was *unable* to have *any true* (not exhaustive) knowledge of any of God's revelation, there was neither any basis upon which the unregenerate could be said to be accountable for their sin, nor any basis upon which true communication could actually occur. Hodge believed that those conceptions of the Christian faith that robbed it of its authority to interpret the creation, which we take in with our five senses and of which the unbeliever is a part, were conceptions that stood on a subjective foundation that could not be substantiated by

man the right to do what Van Til believed Warfield allowed for in Warfield's use of the term "right reason".

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid, 69.

⁵⁶Hodge *Systematic Theology*, 1:54.

⁵⁷Cf. fn. 52.

Scripture. This did not deny that people already possessed guilty status as sinners, ontologically, but simply expressed the matter from an epistemological perspective. Ontology and epistemology were inseparable in the Old Princeton view. This is precisely why they could affirm that any talk of knowledge automatically included an objective and subjective element. Humans are sinners (ontology) and this is revealed in that they know truth (epistemology) and suppress it.⁵⁸

It bears repeating that in affirming a unitary view of truth, Warfield asserted that it was the responsibility of apologetics within the whole theological task to make clear the “necessary presuppositions without which no theology is possible.”⁵⁹ It was not, however, simply these presuppositions upon which theology rested, but upon which every branch of knowledge rested, because nothing in creation was truly known apart from it being related to God. This meant that theology “enters into the structure of every other science.”⁶⁰ It also, then, weds the Christian view of reality to the term “science.” For a belief or practice to be contrary to Scripture is *ipso facto* for it to be unscientific, even sinful and dead. Warfield, citing E. B. Pusey, affirmed:

God alone *is* in Himself, and is the Cause and Upholder of everything which He has given being. Every faculty of the mind is some reflection of His; every truth has its being from Him; every law of nature has the impress of His hand; everything beautiful has caught its light from His eternal beauty; every principle of goodness has its foundation in His attributes. . . . Without Him, in the region of thought, everything is dead; as without Him everything which is, would at once cease to be. All things must speak of God, refer to God, or they are atheistic. History, without God is a chaos without design, or end, or aim.⁶¹

Any belief or practice contrary to Scripture, but claiming for itself the imprimatur of Scripture not only deserved being exposed for what it was not, but also became incapable of advancing knowledge, or being constructive, because it was unscientific and dead.

⁵⁸Hodge, *ST*, 1:34-60.

⁵⁹“The Idea of Systematic Theology,” 64.

⁶⁰“The Idea of Systematic Theology,” 69. For this same affirmation, cf. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, op. cit. fn. 42.

⁶¹*Ibid*, 70-71.

Warfield, therefore, acknowledges an organic union between epistemology and theology, claims that epistemology is inherently theological, and analyzes them in relation to each other.

One can see that in such a conception of knowledge and theology there is similarity with what Van Til called “block-house” methodology.⁶² Van Til wrote, “A truly Protestant method of reasoning involves a stress upon the fact that the meaning of every aspect or part of Christian theism depends upon Christian theism as a unit.”⁶³ Still further,

No proposition about historical fact is presented for what it really is till it is presented as a part of the system of Christian theism that is contained in Scripture. To say this is involved in the consideration that all facts of the created universe are what they are by virtue of the plan of God with respect to them.⁶⁴

Finally, “the very essence of the Biblical point of view” is “that the whole claim of Christian theism is in question in any debate about any fact.”⁶⁵ Although Warfield expressed it differently, he had, prior to Van Til, given a clear affirmation of the unity of truth and some of its implications. Concerning all of the sciences in relation to theology Warfield wrote,

There is no one of them all which is not, in some measure, touched by it [theology], or which is not in some measure included in it. As all nature, whether mental or material, may be conceived of as only the mode in which God manifests Himself, every science which investigates nature and ascertains its laws is occupied with the discovery of the modes of the divine action and as such might be considered a branch of theology. And, on the other hand, as all nature, whether mental or material, owes its existence to God, every science which investigates nature and ascertains its laws, depends for its foundation upon that science which could make known what God is and what the relations are in which He stands to the work of His hands and in which they stand to Him; and must borrow from it those conceptions through which alone the material with which it deals can find its explanation or receive its proper significance. . . . The science of Him [God] and His relations is the necessary ground of all science.

⁶²Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 114.

⁶³Ibid, 115.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

All speculation takes us back to Him; all inquiry presupposes Him; and every phase of science consciously or unconsciously rests at every step on the science that makes Him known. Theology, thus, as the science which treats of God, lies at the root of all sciences.⁶⁶

It is based on this conception of the Christian faith, theology, apologetics and science that Warfield analyzed and evaluated the higher criticism of the Bible prevalent in his day.⁶⁷ Any belief upon which higher criticism rested that did not correspond to this unitary view was considered evidence by which Warfield concluded that such criticism was both unchristian and unscientific. Scholars could either call the whole system of Christian truth into question directly or indirectly through a denial of one of the truth claims upon which such a unitary view rested. But in either case, such scholars expressed views that, in Warfield's estimation, were not only *not* Christian, but also *not* truly scientific. It was just as true to say that they were unchristian because they were uncritical or unscientific as it was to say they were uncritical or unscientific because they were unchristian. They, therefore, had no business being endorsed by, or being received into, either the church or the academy.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Warfield, "The Idea of Systematic Theology," 69, 71.

⁶⁷The point here is not that Warfield had not investigated and criticized higher criticism prior to articulating this view in writing, but simply that Warfield possessed this view in his evaluation of higher criticism.

⁶⁸In order to proceed along these lines it was necessary, according to Warfield, for people to recognize that the church did not establish the authority of the Bible for her faith and life, but that she received the Scriptures as authoritative on the basis of the authority of the apostles through their relationship to Jesus. Warfield stated in 1889 in "The Authority and Inspiration of the Scripture," in *SSW*, 2:538-39, "That the apostles thus gave the Church the whole Old Testament, which they had themselves received from their fathers as God's word written, admits of no doubt, and is not doubted. That they gradually added to this body of old law and additional body of new law is equally patent. In part this is determined directly by their own extant testimony. Thus Peter places Paul's Epistles beside the Scriptures of the Old Testament as equally with them law to Christians (2 Peter iii. 16); and thus Paul places Luke's Gospel alongside of Deuteronomy (1 Tim. v. 18)." Since the Bible was authoritative for thinking and living, it did not bow to human reasoning but rather human reasoning had to come into subjection to it. Cf. "Heresy and Concession," *SSW*, 2:674. Warfield was endorsing the same thing

Late Nineteenth-Century Works of Warfield

Within Warfield's work in the 1880s and 90s we see characteristics of his view on apologetics, epistemology and truth in action. In "Inspiration and Criticism," Warfield, when being inaugurated to the chair of New Testament at Western Seminary in 1880, had explained what progress unchristian uses of criticism had made in disproving the plenary inspiration of Scripture. Warfield's conclusion, after investigating the claims of the criticism that denied the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture, was that such criticism had proved nothing against the doctrine.⁶⁹ Such a failure, though, when investigated and rightly identified, had a profoundly constructive result for the Christian faith. According to Warfield,

all the enemies of Christianity—eager to discover error by which they might convict the precious word of life of falsehood—have proved utterly vain, the Scriptures stand before us authenticated as from God.

expressed by Hodge, which, in part, explains why one critic of Hodge stated, "It is enough for Dr. Hodge to believe a thing to be true that he finds it in the Bible!" Cf. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 2:34. Cf. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:48 for the belief that the Bible is received by faith based on its authority. Hodge affirmed that the Christian's "duty, privilege, and security are in believing, not in knowing; in trusting God, and not our own understanding." Further, Warfield denied that the authority of the Scripture rested on a previous proof of their inspiration (540). This was a repetition of what he had affirmed in "Inspiration and Criticism," *Works*, 1:395-425. In other words, Warfield, as well as Hodge, considered the Bible to be the ultimate, or foremost presupposition upon which the thinking and living of the Christian is based. Warfield briefly addresses the charge of circularity regarding taking the Bible as one's ultimate authoritative presupposition when dealing with the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures in "The Inspiration of the Bible," in *Works*, 1:64. He calls the charge a "desperately illogical shift to be rid of the doctrine of inspiration."

⁶⁹"Inspiration and Criticism," op. cit. fn. 20. After surveying and analyzing the best the higher critics had to offer, Warfield rendered the following judgments. "Modern negative criticism neither on internal nor on external grounds has been able to throw any doubt on the authenticity of a single book of our New Testament" (Ibid, 418). Further, "Modern criticism has absolutely no valid argument to bring against the church doctrine of verbal inspiration, drawn from the phenomena of Scripture" (Ibid, 423).

They are, then, just what they profess to be; and criticism only secures to them the more firmly the position they claim. . . . So, then, gathering all that we have attempted to say into one point, we may say that modern biblical criticism has nothing valid to urge against the church doctrine of verbal inspiration, but that on the contrary it puts that doctrine on a new and firmer basis and secures to the church Scriptures which are truly divine.⁷⁰

Warfield here affirms that the claims and evidence of the “modern negative criticism” results in it unwittingly testifying to the Scriptures truly being the word of God. In other words, apologetics has a constructive result here because it strengthens the believer’s confidence in the Scriptures as God’s word that can be completely trusted.⁷¹

In “Christian Evidences: How Affected By Recent Criticisms,” which first appeared in August of 1888, Warfield argued that “‘Christian Evidences’ are an essentially persuasive science: they undertake to prove something and to prove it to somebody.”⁷² Since historical criticism was deeply philosophical and claimed to be scientific in nature, it was necessary to evaluate its claims against the “Christian Evidences.” Warfield identified the historical criticism of his day that denied the “genuineness” and “unity” of the Bible as

⁷⁰“Inspiration and Criticism,” 1:424. Warfield’s point is not that unscientific criticism actually accomplishes what it thinks based on its presuppositions and practice, but that what it seeks to accomplish based on its presuppositions and practice is the very thing that it does not accomplish, and therefore actually demonstrates the validity of the very Scriptures it seeks to discredit. Such higher criticism is like the basketball team that intends to score against its opponent but instead shoots at the wrong basket and succeeds in scoring a point for its opponent.

⁷¹Warfield’s concluding statement was, “Revelation is but half revelation unless it be infallibly communicated; it is but half communicated unless it be infallibly recorded. The heathen in their blindness are our witnesses of what becomes of an unrecorded revelation. Let us bless God, then, for His inspired word! And may He grant that we may always cherish, love and venerate it, and conform all our life and thinking to it! So may we find safety for our feet, and peaceful security for our souls.” (passim, 425).

⁷²“Christian Evidences: How Affected By Recent Criticism,” *SSW*, 2:124-131.

being “naturalistic.”⁷³ But in his assessment he denied that it had accomplished anything against Christianity. As Warfield wrote:

Every one of the old lines of proof of the truth of the Christian religion stands today with its validity and cogency unimpaired. The new scientific conception of the world, for example, has not at all either diminished the evidential value of miracles or rendered their occurrence incredible.⁷⁴

Such criticism had failed, according to Warfield, to overthrow the arguments of prophecy through its evidences and argumentation, although it had cast many of those arguments aside.⁷⁵ In doing so, such criticism was demonstrating that it was less than scientific because it had “murdered a host of innocent facts which stood in the way of their purposes.”⁷⁶ This naturalistic criticism, however, had inadvertently helped the Christian cause by pointing out some of the weaknesses in previous arguments, and thereby led to strengthening the arguments of the Christian position. As Warfield expressed it:

Criticism has proved the best friend to apologetics a science ever had. It is as if it had walked with her around her battlements and, lending her its keen eyes, pointed out an insufficient guarded place here and an unbuttressed approach there; and then, taking playfully the part of the aggressor, made feint after feint towards capturing the citadel, and thus both persuaded and enabled and even compelled her to develop her resources, throw up new defenses, abandon all indefensible positions, and refurbish her weapons, until she now stands armed *cap-a-pie*, impregnable to every enemy. The case is briefly this: recent criticism has had a very deep effect upon the Christian evidences in modernizing them and so developing and perfecting them that they stand now easily victor against all modern assaults.⁷⁷

In his essay “The Rights of Criticism and the Church,” which first appeared in April of 1892, Warfield analyzed and evaluated the “higher” criticism, and what “rights” it possessed. He criticized uses

⁷³Ibid, 127.

⁷⁴Ibid, 129.

⁷⁵Ibid, 129-30.

⁷⁶“Christian Evidences,” 130. This earned it the title of “Herodlike.”

⁷⁷Ibid, 131,

of higher criticism that arrogated a name of which it was not worthy. The term “criticism” could only be attached to the

careful scrutiny of the facts, and is good or bad in proportion to the accuracy and completeness with which the facts are apprehended and collected, and the skill and soundness with which they are marshaled and their meaning read. Deny the criticism of the Bible! Nobody dreams of it. Abate the practice of it! At our soul’s peril, we dare not.⁷⁸

But, according to Warfield, this did not accurately describe the “higher criticism” of his day because it was guilty of confusing “the right of Criticism with the rightness of its own criticism.”⁷⁹ Those who employed such criticism were certainly free to do so, but they ought not expect that the church was obligated to acquiesce to their method and conclusions, and, according to Warfield, the church ought not.⁸⁰

The origin of at least some of the expressions of higher criticism was, noted Warfield, rationalism, which was dependent on metaphysical and epistemological theories at odds with Scripture. In “Evading the Supernatural,” “The Divine and Human in the Bible,” and “The Latest Phase of Historical Rationalism,” Warfield identified naturalism, and its attendant fruit rationalism, as the impetus for many of the applications of criticism that believed the

⁷⁸“The Rights of Criticism and of the Church,” in *SSW*, 2:596.

⁷⁹*Ibid*, 596.

⁸⁰Warfield uses here a line of reasoning that would later be used by J. Gresham Machen in *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923; reprint, 1994), 169. Warfield stated in “The Rights of Criticism,” 603, “Let him [the critic] exercise freely his right to criticize; and let the Church also be free to test not only the truth of the Scriptures as he does, but also the truth of his theories of the Scripture, and to act accordingly. What Democrat would feel that his liberty of thought and speech were infringed by the refusal of a Republican club to become or remain sponsor of his political teachings? But, you say, no Democrat would desire to become or remain a member of a Republican club. That is the strangeness of the situation. One wonders that a new Criticism involving, as we are told, a wholly reconstructed theology should find so much attraction in a ‘traditionalist’ Church of an ‘outworn’ creed; or should care to do business under its trademark.”

Bible to be simply a human book in origin and character.⁸¹ In turn, this rationalism was the product of eighteenth-century Deism, perpetuated in the theology of Albrecht Ritschl in his conception of history, and championed by Adolph von Harnack in his reconstructing the history of Christian dogma as the product of Greek thought.⁸² Warfield explained that the distinguishing feature of Ritschl's theology's was "to clear theology of all 'metaphysical' elements,"⁸³ and the "result is the destruction of the whole system of Christian doctrine."⁸⁴ Yet, such a theology was itself dependent on a particular epistemology.⁸⁵ The result, however, was that Scripture was no longer received as authoritative but had to yield its authority to the subjective criterion of human thought.⁸⁶ Warfield, then, criticized Ritschl's belief that the proper use of Biblical criticism was to "separate from essential Christianity what the ages had contributed."⁸⁷ Such a program, in Warfield's view, could only be accomplished by denying the authoritative claims of Scripture, and, moreover, ignoring the actual historical record from the time of the apostles to his day.⁸⁸ There were, therefore, both presuppositional and evidential grounds upon which to argue against such a program.

⁸¹B. B. Warfield, "Evading the Supernatural," in *JSW*, 2:680-84; "The Divine and Human in the Bible," in *JSW*, 2:542-48; "The Latest Phase of Historical Rationalism," *Works*, 9:585-645. The latter writing is divided into two articles with the second article beginning on p. 619. The first two were published in 1894, while the latter appeared in 1895.

⁸²"The Latest Phase of Historical Rationalism," 591-93.

⁸³*Ibid*, 591.

⁸⁴"The Latest Phase of Historical Rationalism," 591. Warfield, 599, believed Ritschl's theology led to the following question for the church: "Are we prepared to surrender the whole body of Christian doctrine as being no part of essential Christianity, but the undivine growth of ages of human development, the product of the 'transformation' of Christianity, or as Dr. T. C. Hall phrases it with admirable plainness of speech, the 'degradations' of Christianity?"

⁸⁵*Ibid*, 592.

⁸⁶*Ibid*, 605.

⁸⁷*Ibid*, 601. This is a quote from Arthur C. McGiffert's inaugural address at his induction to the chair of Church History at Union Seminary in New York. Warfield believed that McGiffert was following Harnack's lead, (594).

⁸⁸*Ibid*, 600-18.

In 1896 Warfield concluded that the seminal issue of the day was the conflict between epistemological authorities, and how these authorities determined one's theology. Further, whether one was willing to force the Scriptures to conform to contemporary thought, or judge contemporary thought by Scripture, was the difference between orthodoxy and heresy. Warfield declared,

. . . the 'concessive' attitude which leads men to accept the tenets which have originated elsewhere than in the Scriptures as the foundation of their thinking, and to bend Scripture into some sort of conciliation with them, is the ruling spirit of our time, which may, therefore, be said to be dominated by the very spirit of 'heresy'. 'Modern discovery' and 'modern thought' are erected into the norm of truth, and we are told that the whole sphere of theological teaching must be conformed to it. This is the principle of that reconstruction of religious thinking which we are now constantly told is going on resistlessly about us, and which is to transform all theology. What is demanded of us is just to adjust our religious views to the latest pronouncements of philosophy and science or criticism. And this is demanded with entire unconsciousness of the fundamental fact of Christianity—that we have a firmer ground of confidence for our religious views than any science or philosophy or criticism can provide for any of their pronouncements. It is very plain that he who modifies the teachings of the Word of God in the smallest particular at the dictation of any 'man-made opinion' has already deserted the Christian ground, and is already in principle a 'heretic.' The very essence of 'heresy' is that the modes of thought and tenets originating elsewhere than in the Scriptures of God are given decisive weight when they clash with the teachings of God's Word, and those are followed to the neglect or modification or rejection of these.⁸⁹

In addition, Warfield blamed an apologetical method that sought only for the defensible minimum as contributing to people's acquiescence to the prevailing thought system of the day. He also believed that such a strategy had the possible practical consequence of causing one to "forfeit the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which needs to attend all defense of the gospel if it is to prevail with men."⁹⁰ This was because "the strongest and best of evidences of

⁸⁹In "Heresy and Concession", 676-77.

⁹⁰"Heresy and Concession," 678. Warfield followed this by writing, "In this sphere, too, it may well prove true that he who speaks boldly in God's name all the truth that has been entrusted to him will have cause to admire God's power." Some may see in these late nineteenth-century

Christianity” was “the great demonstration of the truth of Christianity which springs at once from an apprehension of it as a whole, as a perfect and perfectly consistent system of truth.”⁹¹

In July of 1896, “The Rights of Systematic Theology” appeared.⁹² This essay may be Warfield’s most aggressive in that he levies some strong criticisms against the expressions of the Schleiermacherian conceptions of the Christian faith that he saw as engaging in its own aggression—an aggression against Christianity in the name of Christianity. Warfield communicated the struggle of his day.

There are few phenomena in the theological world which are more striking indeed than the impatience which is exhibited on every hand with the effort to define truth and to state with precision the doctrinal presuppositions and contents of Christianity.⁹³

This was also manifested in the idea that “since good Christians arise under every form of faith or no faith alike, it cannot be of much importance what men believe.”⁹⁴ Of course, if that was true, the question logically follows: Why argue for or against any belief or doctrine, or the importance of one doctrine over another? Yet there certainly was plenty of opposition to Warfield et al. conceptions of the Christian faith, and such opposition therefore revealed itself to be no less doctrinally oriented or polemical than Warfield’s. This meant that the real issue was not *whether* doctrine, the understanding of it, and expressing it in a systematic way was important for the Christian faith, but rather *which* doctrines, understanding and expression of them most closely conformed to what Scripture taught. Thus, the “right and function of Systematic Theology is

words that emboldened Machen and others during the early twentieth-century controversies.

⁹¹Ibid. Warfield, 679, would make reference to “the whole circle of revealed truth.” Again we see an affirmation of the “unity of truth,” and a “block-house” methodology popular with Van Til. Cf fn.62.

⁹²B. B. Warfield, “The Rights of Systematic Theology,” *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* July (1896): 412-58. This can also be accessed in *JSW*, 2:219-79. After its original publication, it was later published in book form in 1897 with the same title and an introduction by James Orr.

⁹³Ibid, 413.

⁹⁴Ibid, 416.

vindicated.”⁹⁵ Yet it was clearly the popular opinion of the day that embraced this allegedly non-doctrinal and congenial approach to Christianity.

On September, 18, 1896 Warfield gave the opening address to the faculty and students at Princeton seminary, and explained the necessity of retaining the supernatural in one’s thinking for a faithful confession and conserving of biblical Christianity.⁹⁶ Since people’s thinking “is super-induced on a basis of world-thinking,” we must recognize that the thinking of confessing Christians will always be “stamped with the traits of the philosophy ruling at the time.”⁹⁷ Anti-supernaturalism was the ruling conception of the day, according to Warfield, and it was the reformulating of Christianity along anti-supernaturalistic lines that constituted an assault upon “Christianity in the very citadel of its life.”⁹⁸

In the February 24, 1898 edition of *The New York Observer*, Warfield’s article, “The Ritschlian School” appeared.⁹⁹ In it he identified “The Ritschlian school” as coming from the “Ritschlian theology,” and labeled them “Socinianism in a new garment, cut from the cloth of Neo-Kantian speculation.”¹⁰⁰ In it he detected a naturalistic philosophy, an unchristian science and a “skeptical history.”¹⁰¹ Warfield surmised that if Ritschlian theology was to be

⁹⁵Ibid, 418. This meant those employed in such opposition were either ignorant of what they were doing or knowingly seeking to deceive others regarding what they were doing. This same line of reasoning would be expressed by Machen in *Christianity and Liberalism*. Some of the practical consequences of this for pastoral work was explicated by Warfield in “The Indispensableness of Systematic Theology to the Preacher,” *SSW*, 2:280-88.

⁹⁶B. B. Warfield, “Christian Supernaturalism,” *Works*, 9:25-46. This first appeared in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, viii, 1897, 58-74.

⁹⁷Ibid, 29.

⁹⁸Ibid, 41. One can see in such an assessment that, according to Warfield and some of the other Princetonians, these matters were not simply over differing theologies that had a legitimate place at the Christian table but regarding the very identity of Christianity.

⁹⁹B. B. Warfield, “The Ritschlian School,” in *SSW*, 2:448-51.

¹⁰⁰Ibid, 449. Warfield would conclude: “Without the authority of the apostolic teaching, Socinianism is inevitable; on that authority it is impossible.”

¹⁰¹Ibid, 450. Warfield, 450, observed, “... the Ritschlian polemic has grown sharper against every element of supernaturalism in redemption—

assailed, it would have to be along historical lines of argumentation whereby the teachings of Christ and the apostles' endorsement and perpetuation of them, were revealed as "the basis and norm of the life of faith and of the spiritual knowledge of the Christian community."¹⁰²

In criticizing the historicist and anti-supernaturalistic applications of biblical criticism, Warfield struck a blow against the foundations or presuppositions of such criticism. This presuppositional line of argumentation, however, did not prevent him from seeing the need to amass historical evidence for what he believed was a Christian view of criticism and the Bible. Warfield's arguments against what he considered unbiblical views and applications of biblical criticism were based on the belief that the supreme authority for the thinking and living of God's people was, and always would be, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Further, he contended that the foundation of the biblical criticism that denied the plenary inspiration of Scripture and considered the Scriptures simply the product of a historical process, originated in "modes of thought and tenets" that did not originate in Christianity but were "an amalgamation with it of ideas discordant with its nature."¹⁰³ As a result, Warfield discerned that the foundational issue pulsating through "the most outstanding fact in the conflicts of our age," that divided orthodoxy from heresy lay in:

from the virgin birth, miraculous life, and bodily resurrection of the Redeemer to the expiatory character of his redemption—and against every element of vital communion with God—from the regeneration of the Spirit down to the access of the individual to God in prayer—the reaction against it has become sharper, until, today, its influence seems distinctly on the wane in the land of its birth."

¹⁰² "The Ritschlian School," 451. This was so because for Ritschl epistemology retained "little more than a historical interest," (451). It was along this historical line of argumentation that Machen wrote *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (NY: MacMillan, 1921) and *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (NY: Harper, 1930). For a brief survey of the content and reception of these books see Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, vol 2, 310-12, 374-76. For a detailed analysis of the historical progression of Machen's thought and scholarship cf. Terry A Chrisope, *Toward a Sure Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Dilemma of Biblical Criticism, 1881-1915* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2000).

¹⁰³ B. B. Warfield, "Heresy and Concession," in *SSW*, 2:672. The quotes are from Warfield's quoting of George Park Fisher's *History of Christian Doctrine* and his explanation of how heresy arises.

Whether a declaration of God is esteemed as authoritative over against all the conjectural explanations of phenomena by men, or whether, on the contrary, it is upon conjectural explanations of phenomena by men that we take our stand as over against the declaration of God.¹⁰⁴

By affirming this, Warfield was acknowledging that:

It is a mark of the Christian man that the Word is his source and norm of truth, and wherever it has spoken he asks no further evidence, nor can he admit any modification whatever its deliverances, no matter from what quarter they may be drawn.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

It is often thought that the apologetical approach of Warfield in particular, and the Old Princeton theologians in general, was rationalistic as a result of their overemphasizing the role of reason and empirical evidences. Yet there is ample evidence that Warfield's arguments in favor of his theological positions reflect a biblically grounded approach that questions the scientific validity of those with whom he disagreed. His arguments were not simply evidentialistic, nor ignorantly dependent on an Enlightenment view of science, nor naively or unbiblically confident in human reason; rather they were of a presuppositional nature that employed evidences to demonstrate the superiority of the presuppositions of the biblical position to handle all the evidence rightly. Thus, he demonstrated the "right reason" of the Christian *in* or *by* his handling of all the available evidence. Warfield not only stockpiled evidence in favor of his conclusions, but also had plenty to say about the *way* evidences were handled. He often criticized the presuppositions that buttressed the conclusions of scholars who considered themselves critical and scientific. He refused to concede that the terms "critical" and "scientific" characterized scholarship that attacked the authority of Scripture yet failed to take into account all of the relevant facts. Such scholarship, argued Warfield, operated with an authority that was ultimately based on nothing more than its own pronouncements.

¹⁰⁴Warfield, "Heresy and Concession," *SSW*, 2:679.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 674.

Warfield's epistemology and criticisms of the historicist and anti-supernaturalistic scholarship of his day demonstrate that he did not bifurcate the objective and subjective elements of epistemology, but gave each its due in accordance with the argument needed. Truth was unified, according to Warfield, and the more one made explicit that unitary nature, the more force one's argument would have against those who attacked the truth. It was, in fact, the historicist and anti-supernaturalistic scholarship that was erected upon a basis that could not give proper epistemological account for its position. This was demonstrated by clearly explicating its epistemological position and its consequences, while also articulating how the available evidence revealed the faulty reasoning and conclusions of those practicing historicist and anti-supernaturalistic scholarship. In other words, Warfield pursued revealing the faulty presuppositions of his theological opponents by his handling of the available evidence. Failing to handle all the available evidence marked one as unscientific; failing to reason properly about the available evidence marked one as either irrational or rationalistic; and both were marks of unchristian scholarship. By revealing the faulty reasoning of his theological opponents in attending to all the available evidence, Warfield believed he had demonstrated the actual union of the objective and subjective elements in epistemology.

Warfield believed that the applications of criticism that opposed the church's historic belief in the trustworthiness of Scripture were ultimately rationalistic and the product of the Neo-Kantian epistemology expressed in the liberal Ritschlian theology. This Ritschlian theology, thought Warfield, expressed itself in historicism. Warfield, therefore, sought to expose the true nature of the Ritschlian theology while suggesting what later lines of argumentation would have to be pursued in order to increase the case against it. Consequently, Warfield believed he gave the church sufficient arguments by which she (1) could refute those who assailed the truth upon which her life depended, (2) could have increased confidence in that truth, and (3) could demonstrate that this uncritical, unscientific and unchristian scholarship did not belong in any true church or academy. He believed his scholarship was constructive and advanced the gospel because it (1) emboldened belief in the Scriptures as completely trustworthy, (2) demonstrated the failures of the opposing views, and (3) helped

pave the way for subsequent scholarship to enlarge the edifice of Christian thought that he received and upon which he built.