The Protestant Doctrine Of Scripture

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General Introduction

The studies presented in this series are written with a view to the defense of the doctrine of the free grace of God through Christ as he testifies of himself in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. They are written from the point of view of one who believes the Reformed Faith to be the most truly biblical expression of the Christian Faith. They are written from the point of view of one who believes that a world that lies in darkness needs, therefore, to hear about the Reformed Faith.

Moreover, if the world needs to hear the Reformed Faith, the statement of this Faith must be true to the historic Reformed creeds. The Reformed Faith, to be heard, must, therefore, be set over against neo-orthodoxy.

These studies are merely student syllabi; they are not to be regarded as published books.

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Preface

Some Protestant observers at Vatican 2 have expressed their joy with the changes that seem to be taking place in Roman Catholic theology, especially with respect to its teaching on revelation and Scripture. Is there any basis in The Documents Of Vatican 2 for such joy? We believe not.

To be sure the Dogmatic Constitution On Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum) no longer speaks of the Bible and Tradition as two sources of revelation. “Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, which is committed to the Church.” ¹ The church “has always regarded the Scriptures together with sacred tradition as the supreme rule of faith, and will ever do so.” ² Sacred theology, therefore, “rests on the written Word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation.” ³ Moreover the interpretation of the Bible by the Sons of the Church “is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the Word of God.” ⁴

Drawing Scripture, tradition and the teaching office of the church together, the council says: “It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God’s most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.” ⁵

¹ The Documents of Vatican 2, Walter M. Abbot, S. J., General Editor; tr. Very Rev. Msgr. Joseph Gallacher, Translation Editor, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Ch. 11, Sect. 10.
² Ch. 6. 21.
³ Sect. 241.
⁴ Sect. 12.
⁵ Sect. 10.
There would seem to be no evidence in this that there has been anything like an approach to the historic Protestant view of Scripture. The point cannot and need not here be argued. The reason for speaking of it here is to indicate the fact that Protestants today need to look afresh into their own teaching with respect to Revelation in Scripture. The present paper deals with only one phase of this doctrine, namely, that the Protestant doctrine of Scripture is involved in the Protestant view of the content of Scripture. More particularly, the present paper takes notice of the unbiblical character of the views of such Protestants as fail to see this basic point. There can be no proper statement or defense of the Protestant view of Scripture unless it be made in terms of a proper statement and defense of Protestantism as a whole. The Protestant view of Scripture is what it is because Protestantism is what it is as the Roman Catholic view of Scripture is what it is because Roman Catholicism is what it is. And finally there can be no proper statement and defense of Christianity unless it be done in terms of a biblical Protestantism. Protestant Christians must show that human predication at any point is unintelligible unless it be in terms of the self-identifying Christ of Scripture.

What needs to be done today is to show that neither Roman Catholicism nor neo-orthodox Protestantism offer any solid foundation for human interpretation in any field. Roman Catholicism and neo-orthodoxy are drawing together in a common opposition to historic, biblical Protestantism. Following the example of the Pharisees in their opposition to the self-identifying Christ, Roman Catholicism and neo-orthodox Protestantism seek to make the supposedly growing ethical consciousness of man the ultimate standard of truth and error, of right and wrong. Herewith the gospel of man is substituted for the gospel of Christ.

We must, therefore, look anew into the works of such men as Herman Bavinck and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, to discover what the historic Protestant view of Scripture is and how we may, by holding to it, be of service to the Church in our day.
Chapter 1:
The Reformed Doctrine Of Scripture

Recently, a large number of “statements” and discussions on the doctrine of Scripture written both from the “conservative” and from the “liberal” view have appeared. It is not the purpose of this pamphlet to deal with these. Its purpose is rather to deal with some quite striking differences between representative “evangelical” and Reformed Christians on their view of the necessity, the authority, the clarity, and the sufficiency of God’s revelation in Scripture as they, from the Scriptures, seek to present the message of saving grace to men.

It is the Christ who speaks to us in Scripture. In it he tells us who he is and what we are. He tells us that he has come to save us from our sins. For that purpose the Father sent him into the world. In order to bring that work to completion in individual men the Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and gives them unto us (Cf. Jn 16:14–15).

In saving us from sin, Christ saves us unto his service. Through the salvation that is ours in Christ by the Spirit, we take up anew the cultural mandate that was given man at the outset of history. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we want now to do all to the glory of God. Moreover, we want our fellow men with us to do all things to the glory of God. We are bound, as we are eager, to inform them of that which we have been told, namely, that we shall continue to abide under the wrath of God and eventually be cast out into utter darkness unless, by God’s grace, we seek to do all things to the glory of God. Calling upon all men everywhere to join with us in fulfilling the original cultural mandate given to mankind—which we may now undertake because of the redeeming work of Christ—is our joy each day.

The cultural mandate is to be fulfilled in our handling of the facts or events of our environment. Men must subdue, to the service of Christ, the earth and all that is therein. As the Christian constantly does so, he is constantly conscious of the fact that he is working on God’s estate. He is not himself the owner of anything, least of all of himself. He is the bondservant of God through Christ. Therein lies his freedom. Those who still think of themselves as owners of themselves and think of the world as a grab-bag cannot properly evaluate the situation as it really is. Unbeknown to them, they too are working on God’s estate. As they construct their temples to themselves God looks down from heaven and watches them; he yet cares for them. He has infinite patience with them. Will they not finally understand that neither they nor the world belongs to them? Will they not repent? Can they not observe the fact that the wisdom of this world is but foolishness in the sight of God? Has not the whole of the history of human philosophy shown that if the “facts” of the world were not created and controlled by the redemptive providence of God, they would be utterly discrete and therefore undiscoverable? Has not the whole history of philosophy also shown that when man regards his logical powers as positively legislative for Reality, he winds himself into a knot of contradiction? Has not the history of thought displayed the fact that if man takes the laws of logic as negatively legislative with respect to the facts with which they deal, then his logic and his reality stand over against one another in an absolute contrast, or else, when they do come into contact, they immediately destroy one another?
In other words, it is the Christian’s task to point out to the scientist that science needs to stand on Christ and his redeeming work if it is not to fall to pieces. Without Christ he has no foundation on which to stand while he makes his contradictions. A scientific method not based on the presupposition of the truth of the Christian story is like an effort to string an infinite number of beads, no two of which have holes in them, by means of a string of infinite length, neither end of which can be found.

How awesome then the responsibility of the Christian. He must proclaim the Christ as the only name given under heaven by which man, the whole man, by which mankind, with its cultural task, must be saved from sin unto God. What a joy to tell the scientist and the philosopher that they may labor for eternity if only they will labor for the Christ. But when the Christian does thus witness to the promise of great joy that is in the Christ who saves the whole man with the whole of his culture, then inevitably what is a “promise” to some becomes a “curse” to others. Paul says:

“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life” (2 Cor 2:14–16).

Even as some accept, so also others reject the word of God’s grace. To them the Word becomes a savour of death. Then they, with their culture, are lost. The work of their hands, their science, their art, their philosophy, their theology, in short their culture, will ultimately profit, not themselves, but those who have obeyed the word of grace in Christ. To be sure none of the cultural efforts of any man will be lost, for all things are Christ’s and Christ is God’s. But there are men who will lose their cultural efforts. They will lose the fruit of their labors because they have refused to labor unto Christ. They will reap the reward of Baal who sought to curse Israel and, most of all, Israel’s God. They will seek in vain, to die the death of the righteous.

It is therefore the same God who reveals himself both in nature and in Scripture. It is this God and only he who is “infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection, all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, every where present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.” It is, to be sure, from Scripture rather than from nature that this description of God is drawn. Yet it is this same God, to the extent that he is revealed at all, that is revealed in nature.

Contemplation of this fact seems at once to plunge us into great difficulty. Are we not told that nature reveals nothing of the grace of God? Does not the Westminster Confession insist that men cannot be saved except through the knowledge of God, “be they ever so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature; and the law of that religion they do profess”? Saving grace is not manifest in nature; yet it is the God of saving grace who manifests himself by means of nature. How can these two be harmonized?

The answer to this problem must be found in the fact that God is “eternal, incomprehensible, most free, most absolute.” Any revelation that God gives of himself is therefore absolutely voluntary. Precisely here lies the union of the various forms of God’s
revelation with one another. God’s revelation in nature, together with God’s revelation in Scripture, form God’s one grand scheme of covenant-revelation of himself to man.  

1. The Necessity Of Natural Revelation

To bring out the interrelatedness of God’s revelation in Scripture with his revelation in nature, we speak first of the necessity of natural revelation. It is customary to speak of the necessity of supernatural revelation because of the fact that there is no revelation of grace in nature. However, it is equally true that the revelation of grace would operate in a vacuum if it did not operate in nature as revealing God. The supernatural can never be recognized for what it is unless the natural is recognized for what it is: both must be recognized in the light of God’s supernatural revelation. Everything that man does with respect to nature, he does either as keeping or as breaking the covenant of grace that God has made with man. Thus the scientist in the laboratory and the philosopher in his study are both dealing with their materials either as a covenant-keeper or as a covenant-breaker. All of man’s acts, all of man’s questionings, all of man’s affirmations, indeed all of his denials in any dimension of his interests, are covenantally conditioned.

2. The Authority Of Natural Revelation

Naturally, if all of man’s acts with respect to nature, as well as with respect to Scripture, are covenantally conditioned, this is because everywhere Christ speaks to him, and speaks always with absolute authority. The scientist, may or may not recognize this fact. If he is not a Christian, he will argue that any such thing as Christ having authority an absolute authority—with respect to his scientific procedure, is utterly destructive of the very idea of science. The idea of science, he will argue, presupposes freedom on the part of the scientist to make any hypothesis that he thinks may fit the facts. Any such absolute authority also excludes, he will continue, the idea that the words of Christ may and must be tested by facts and the order of facts, i.e., by natural laws already known to man from his earlier experience and experimentation. Suppose, he may say, that I had to work under the absolute restriction of the idea of an all-controlling redemptive providence of God such as the Bible teaches. That would be against the idea of an absolutely open universe. My hypothesis would then have to be of such a nature as to be in accordance with, and even subordinate to, the idea of this all-controlling Providence. This would exclude all newness in science. All would be already fixed. On the other hand, the idea of an all over-arching and redemptive providence would require me to allow that God could arbitrarily come into the “unity” of nature which science has discovered through many toiling efforts, and destroy this “unity” with miraculous insertions. We would then have to allow for the arbitrary createdness of every fact with which we deal. We would have to interpret the idea of scientific “law” as being subservient to that of the biblical account of sin and of redemption controlled by the fiat of the sovereign God. This cannot be, and we will not have it!

Put in other words, the methodology of science which is not definitely based upon the redemptive story of the Bible is based upon the assumption that on the one hand the

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1 Cf. my article “Nature and Scripture” in The Infallible Word.
If man does not own the authority of Christ in the field of science, he assumes his own ultimate authority as back of his effort. The argument between the covenant-keeper and the covenant-breaker is never exclusively about any particular fact or about any number of facts. It is always, at the same time, about the nature of facts. And back of the argument about the nature of facts, there is the argument about the nature of man. However restricted the debate between the believer and the non-believer may be at any one time, there are always two world views ultimately at odds with one another. On the one side is a man who regards himself as being unable to find an intelligible interpretation of experience without reference to God as his Creator and to Christ as his Redeemer. On the other side is the man who is certain that he cannot find any such an interpretation. He assumes that there resides with him the power to make a universal negative statement about the nature of all reality.

The scientist who is a Christian therefore has the task of pointing out to his friend and colleague, who is not a Christian, that unless he is willing to stand upon the Christian story with respect to the world which has been redeemed through Christ, there is nothing but failure for him. Scientific effort is utterly unintelligible unless it is frankly based upon the order placed in the universe of created facts by Christ the Redeemer.

### 3. The Sufficiency Of Natural Revelation

Christ tells us in his word that nature was never meant to function by itself apart from the direct word-revelation of God. From the beginning, it was insufficient without its supernatural concomitant. It was inherently a limiting notion. It was but the presupposition of historical action on the part of man as covenant personality with respect to supernaturally conveyed communication. But for that specific purpose it was wholly sufficient. It was historically sufficient.

After the fall of man natural revelation is still historically sufficient. It is sufficient for such as have in Adam brought the curse of God upon nature. It is sufficient to render them without excuse. Those who are in prison and cannot clearly see the light of the sun receive their due insomuch as they have first abused that light. If nature groans in pain and travail because of man’s abuse of it, this very fact—that is, the very curse of God on nature—should be instrumental anew in making men accuse or excuse themselves. Nature as it were yearns to be released from her imprisonment in order once more to be united to her Lord in fruitful union. When nature is abused by man she cries out to her creator for vengeance and through it for redemption.

It was in the mother promise that God gave the answer to nature’s cry (Gn 3:15). In this promise there was a twofold aspect. There was first the aspect of vengeance. He that should come was to bruise the head of the serpent, the one that led man in setting up nature as independent of the supernatural revelation of God. Thus nature was once more to be given the opportunity of serving as the proper field of exercise for the direct

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2 Cf. my syllabus *Christian Evidences*. 
supernatural communication of God to man. But this time this service came at a more advanced point in history. Nature was now the bearer of God’s curse as well as of his general mercy. The “good,” that is, the believers, are, generally, hedged about by God. Yet they must not expect that always and in every respect this will be the case. They must learn to say with Job, be it after much trial, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Jb 13:15). The “evil,” that is, the unbelievers, will generally be rewarded with the natural consequences of their deeds. But this too is not always and without qualification the case. The wicked sometimes prosper. Nature only shows tendencies. And tendencies point forward to the time when tendencies shall have become the rules without exception. The tendency itself is meaningless without the certainty of the climax. The present regularity of nature is therefore once again to be looked upon as a limiting notion. At every stage in history God’s revelation in nature is sufficient for the purpose it was meant to serve, that of being the playground for the process of differentiation between those who would and those who would not serve God.

4. The Perspicuity Of Natural Revelation

Finally we turn to the perspicuity of nature which corresponds to the perspicuity of Scripture. We have stressed the fact that God’s revelation in nature was from the outset of history meant to be taken conjointly with God’s supernatural communication. This might seem to indicate that natural revelation is not inherently perspicuous. Then too it has been pointed out that back of both kinds of revelation is the incomprehensible God. And this fact again might, on first glance, seem to militate strongly against the claim that nature clearly reveals God. Yet these very facts themselves are the best guarantee of the genuine perspicuity of natural revelation. The perspicuity of God’s revelation in nature depends for its very meaning upon the fact that it is an aspect of the total and totally voluntary revelation of a God who is self-contained. God’s incomprehensibility to man is due to the fact that he is exhaustively comprehensible to himself. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. As such; he cannot deny himself. This God naturally has an all-comprehensive plan for the created universe. He has planned all the relationships between all the aspects of created being. He has planned the end from the beginning. All created reality therefore actually displays this plan. It is, in consequence, inherently rational.

It is quite true, of course, that created man is unable to penetrate to the very bottom of this inherently clear revelation. But this does not mean that on this account the revelation of God is not clear, even for him. Created man may see clearly what is revealed clearly even if he cannot see exhaustively. Man does not need to know exhaustively in order to know truly and certainly. When on the created level of existence man thinks God’s thoughts after him, that is, when man thinks in self-conscious submission to the voluntary revelation of the self-sufficient God, he has therewith the only possible ground of certainty for his knowledge. When man thinks thus he thinks as a covenant creature should wish to think. That is to say, man normally thinks in analogical fashion. He realizes that God’s thoughts are self-contained. He knows that his own interpretation of nature must therefore be a re-interpretation of what is already fully interpreted by God.

3 The Infallible Word, pp. 267, 268.
The concept of analogical thinking is of especial significance here. Soon we shall meet with a notion of analogy that is based upon the very denial of the concept of the incomprehensible God. It is therefore of the utmost import that the Confession’s concept of analogical thinking be seen to be the direct implication of its doctrine of God.

One further point must here be noted. We have seen that since the fall of man God’s curse rests upon nature. This has brought great complexity into the picture. All this, however, in no wise detracts from the historical and objective perspicuity of nature. Nature can and does reveal nothing but the one comprehensive plan of God. The psalmist does not say that the heavens possibly or probably declare the glory of God. Nor does the apostle assert that the wrath of God is probably revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Scripture takes the clarity of God’s revelation for granted at every stage of human history. Even when man, as it were, takes out his own eyes, this act itself turns revelational in his wicked hands, testifying to him that his sin is a sin against the light that lighteth every man coming into the world. Even to the very bottom of the most complex historical situations, involving sin and all its consequences, God’s revelation shines with unmistakable clarity. “If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there” (Ps 139:8). Creatures have no private chambers.

Both the perspicuity of Scripture and the perspicuity of natural revelation, then, may be said to have their foundation in the doctrine of the God who “hideth himself,” whose thoughts are higher than man’s thoughts and whose ways are higher than man’s ways. There is no discrepancy between the idea of mystery and that of perspicuity with respect either to revelation in Scripture or to revelation in nature. On the contrary the two ideas are involved in one another. The central unifying concept of the entire Confession is the doctrine of God and his one unified comprehensive plan for the world. The contention consequently is that at no point is there any excuse for man’s not seeing all things as happening according to this plan.

In considering man’s acceptance of natural revelation, we again take our clue from the Confession and what it says about the acceptance of Scripture. Its teaching on man’s acceptance of Scriptural revelation is in accord with its teachings on the necessity, authority, sufficiency and perspicuity of Scripture. The Scriptures as the finished product of God’s supernatural and saving revelation to man have their own evidence in themselves. The God who speaks in Scripture cannot refer to anything that is not already authoritatively revelational of himself for the evidence of his own existence. There is no thing that does not exist by his creation. All things take their meaning from him. Every witness to him is a “prejudiced” witness. For any fact to be a fact at all, it must be a revelational fact.

It is accordingly no easier for sinners to accept God’s Revelation in Scripture. They are no more ready of themselves to do the one than to do the other. From the point of view of the sinner, theism is as objectionable as is Christianity. Theism that is worthy of the name is Christian theism. Christ said that no man can come to the Father but by him. No one can become a theist unless he becomes a Christian. Any God that is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not God but an idol.

It is therefore the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts that alone effects the required Copernican revolution and makes us at the same time both Christians and theists. Before the fall, man also needed the witness of the Holy Spirit. Even then the third person of the Holy Trinity was operative in and through the naturally
revelational consciousness of man so that it might react fittingly and properly to the works of God’s creation. But then that operation was so natural that man himself needed not at all or scarcely to be aware of its existence. When man fell, he denied the naturally revelatory character of every fact including that of his own consciousness. He assumed that he was autonomous; he assumed that his consciousness was not revelational of God but only of himself. He assumed himself to be non-created. He assumed that the work of interpretation, as by the force of his natural powers he was engaged in it, was an original instead of a derivative procedure. He would not think God’s thoughts after him; he would instead think only his own original thoughts.

Now if anything is obvious from Scripture it is that man is not regarded as a proper judge of God’s revelation to him. Man is said or assumed from the first page to the last to be a creature of God. God’s consciousness is therefore taken to be naturally original as man’s is naturally derivative. Man’s natural attitude in all self-conscious activities was therefore meant to be that of obedience. It is to this deeper depth, deeper than the sinner’s consciousness can ever reach by itself, that Scripture appeals when it says, “Come let us reason together.” It appeals to covenant-breakers and argues with them about the unreasonableness of covenant-breaking. And it is only when the Holy Spirit gives man a new heart that he will accept the evidence of Scripture about itself and about nature for what it really is. The Holy Spirit’s regenerating power enables man to place all things in true perspective.

Man the sinner, as Calvin puts it, through the testimony of the Spirit receives a new power of sight by which he can appreciate the new light that has been given in Scripture. The new light and the new power of sight imply one another. The one is fruitless for salvation without the other. It is by grace, then, by the gift of the Holy Spirit alone, that sinners are able to observe the fact that all nature, including even their own negative attitude toward God, is revelational of God, the God of Scripture. The wrath of God is revealed, Paul says, on all those who keep down the truth. Man’s sinful nature has become his second nature. This sinful nature of man must now be included in nature as a whole. And through it God is revealed. He is revealed as the just one, as the one who hates iniquity and punishes it. Yet he must also be seen as the one who does not yet punish to the full degree of their ill dessert the wicked deeds of sinful men.

All this is simply to say that one must be a believing Christian to study nature in the proper frame of mind and with proper procedure. It is only the Christian consciousness that is ready and willing to regard all nature, including man’s own interpretative reactions, as revelational of God. But this very fact requires that the Christian consciousness make a sharp distinction between what is revelational in this broad and basic sense and what is revelational in the restricted sense. When man had not sinned, he was naturally anxious constantly to seek contact with the supernatural positive revelation of God. But it is a quite different matter when we think of the redeemed sinner. He is restored to the right relationship. But he is restored in principle only. There is a drag upon him. His “old man” wants him to interpret nature apart from the supernatural revelation in which he operates. The only safeguard he has against this historical drag is to test his interpretations constantly by the principles of the written Word. And if theology succeeds in bringing forth ever more clearly the depth of the riches of the biblical revelation of God in Scripture, the Christian philosopher or scientist will be glad to make use of this clearer and fuller interpretation in order that his own interpretation of nature may be all
the fuller and clearer too, and thus more truly revelational of God. No subordination of philosophy or science to theology is intended here. The theologian is simply a specialist in the field of biblical interpretation taken in the more restricted sense. The philosopher is directly subject to the Bible and must in the last analysis rest upon his own interpretation of the Word. But he may accept the help of those who are more constantly and sore exclusively engaged in biblical study than he himself an be.  

It is this stress—that from the beginning, revelation both in the facts of the created universe and by means of direct thought communication to man from God with respect to those very facts and man’s task with respect to those acts—that marks the particularity of the Reformed outlook on Christianity. It is the idea of the interrelatedness of every aspect of the revelation of God to man that is all important. It is only when this interrelatedness is stressed that, as Christians, we can effectively challenge the wisdom of the world and show that it has been made foolish by God. Only thus can the total interpretation of life and the world, as given by Christ in Scripture, be that on which alone every aspect of human experience must be based in order to have significance.

5. Analogical Thinking As Scripture Teaches It

According to Christ speaking in the Scripture, man has sinned against him by declaring his independence. When man listened to the temptation of Satan it was, in effect, to deny his own creaturehood. Adam was no longer willing to love his Creator and to show this love by obedience to his voice. He wanted to make himself the center of his own interpretative effort.

Involved in this was the idea that man rejected God’s prediction with respect to what we now, after Kant, call the phenomenal realm. He said in his heart that God did not know that death would be the consequence of eating the forbidden fruit. Why did Adam think that God did not know? There were no records of what had happened to people who had eaten this fruit in the past. Could not Satan’s hypothesis be as good as God’s? Does not the scientific method require that, at the outset of any investigation of the facts of the physical universe, any hypothesis be placed on a par with any other hypothesis? Surely any hypothesis that anyone makes with respect to the future configuration of facts must be tested by those future facts themselves. And these future facts must not be interpreted in advance.

Here then, are the marks of the natural man in his attitude toward the interpretation of the facts (events) of the world:

1. He thinks of himself as the ultimate judge of what can or cannot be. He will not allow any authority to stand above him revealing to him what may or may not have happened in the past or what may or may not happen in the future.

2. This assertion or assumption of autonomy on the part of man makes a covert, if not an overt assertion about the nature of God. God (it is assumed if not asserted) cannot be of such a nature as to control any and all phenomena.

3. These two assertions or assumptions imply a third: that man’s thought is, in the final analysis, absolutely original. Whatever his ultimate environment may be, the area of

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interpretation that man makes for himself will be true for him because his thought is in effect legislative with respect to that environment.

(4) The facts of man’s environment are not created or controlled by the providence of God. They are brute facts, uninterpreted and ultimately irrational. The universe is a Chance controlled universe. It is a wholly open universe. Yet, at the same time, it is a closed universe. It is so in this sense: it cannot be what. Christ says it is, namely, created, governed, and redeemed by him. In this one respect the cosmos is closed—there can be no such God as the Bible reveals. This is the universal negative of the openminded men of philosophy and science.

Herbert Feigl seems to see this great gulf fixed between the men of science and philosophy and the people of God when he says: If by religion one refers to an explanation of the universe and a derivation of moral norms from theological premises, then indeed there is logical incompatibility with the results, methods, and general outlook of science. 5

The basically important point about all this is that the scientist as well as the philosopher and the theologian, unless he be converted to Christ by his Spirit, follows the method that was introduced into the world by Adam when he listened to Satan. The essence of this method is that man starts and finishes his interpretation about any and every aspect of life with the assumption of his own autonomy, with the assumption of the brute factuality of the material with which he deals; and with the assumption of abstract formality of the logic which he uses to relate the brute facts to one another.

The Christian, on the other hand, has been saved by the blood and tears of Christ from this God-insulting and self-destroying methodology.

The two positions can be well illustrated by Descartes on the one hand and by Calvin on the other. Descartes starts with man as though he were sufficient unto himself and could make himself the final reference point in his interpretation of himself and the world. Descartes thought he had a clear and distinct idea of himself apart from his relation to God. It was after he had determined who he himself was that he sought to place himself in relation to the world and to God. These relations were therefore secondary relations.

In complete contrast with this approach is that of Calvin who also started with man—and who can help but do so?—but who started with man as set, from the beginning, in relation to his Creator and his Redeemer. After this establishment of a primary and immediate relation, Calvin proceeds to interpret himself and his world in detail. Seeing himself as redeemed by the blood of Christ, he knows that sin still remains within him. He still tends to fall back into his naturally autonomous ways. Calvin keeps telling himself and us, that all things (of nature as well as grace) must, from the outset, be seen in their relation to the story of God’s creation and redemption of the world. Since the Redeemer speaks to him, not through individual mystical insight but by the word that his Savior has given to his church in the form of Scripture, the believer will go to the record of that redemptive work which Christ has accomplished for the world. That record will shed light on every fact in every relation in the world. The record of the redemptive work of Christ is the record given by the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the prophets and apostles. God has not left man alone with the event of redemption, leaving it to man’s own sinful heart to interpret it. On the contrary, God has with the facts given the

interpretation of the facts. It is the triune God that is active in saving the world. The Father sent his Son to secure objective redemption for it. Then the Father, with the Son, sent the Spirit to inspire his servants to interpret the facts of redemption. The one without the other is meaningless. It is the triune God who tells us what he has done for sinful man’s redemption. The final aspect of this redemption is that, by the regenerating power of the Spirit, sinful man learns to submit his own interpretation, once based on the idea of human autonomy, to the interpretation which the God of grace has provided for him in the Word through the inspiration of the Scripture. This is a truly biblical and therefore a truly analogical methodology.
Chapter 2:
The Roman Catholic View Of Analogy And The Doctrine Of Scripture

We have quoted Calvin to indicate that he thinks concretely about the relation of God’s interpretation to man’s response Calvin makes the revelation of God in Christ through Scripture his starting point with respect to every interpretation of any fact in the universe. As he did so, he set his view squarely over against that of Roman Catholicism.

Roman Catholicism also speaks of the idea of analogy. In fact, this idea is central to all its thinking. Its idea of analogy, however, starts with man as autonomous. Following the Apostle Paul, Calvin makes the Creator-creature distinction basic to his thinking. Paul teaches that every man is created in the image of God. Being thus created, in the image of God, man cannot help but know God as his Creator. But having become a sinner, he does not want to own God as his Creator. He therefore makes his interpretations of life in terms of a principle of abstract rational continuity, i.e., of abstract logic, which is above both God and man to “being in general.” Parmenides says that reality must be that which rational thought, that is, divine-human thought, can, without contradiction, say that it must be. Applying this principle to the facts of the world, he says that there can be no reality to what appear to us as changing facts of experience. Yet on the basis of fallen man, the idea of absolute change has as good a right to be thought of as ultimate as has the idea of the changeless. Heraclitus had as good a right to say that all things change as Parmenides had to say that nothing changes. When others at later times said that all things are both wholly changeless and wholly changing, they had as much right to do so as did either Parmenides or Heraclitus to say what they said. Those who hold that everything changes can be refuted negatively up to a point by those who hold that nothing changes. It is obvious that if everything changes, predication ceases. Again, those who hold that nothing changes can be refuted negatively up to a point by those who say that all things change. It is obvious that if nothing changes, predication again ceases. Moreover, it is obvious that any modus vivendi between the two extreme views has as much right as any other modus vivendi or as either the idea of pure staticism or the idea of pure flux.

All non-Christian positions have equal rights with respect to one another just because none of them have any right to their views. If any of them are going to say anything definite about any fact in this world in relation to any other fact in this world, they must flatly contradict themselves in every sentence which they utter. They must use a static principle of continuity and a purely contingent principle of discontinuity in everything that they say about anything. If they say anything about any fact in the space-time world, they must say how the one fact differs from the other fact in terms of the space-time relations that both occupy. But to say how one fact differs from another fact in terms of the space-time continuum requires one to have some intelligible conception of this space-time continuum as a whole. Immanuel Kant was quite right in demanding this. But Kant himself was unable to say anything intelligible about the space-time continuum as a whole. The reason for this inability lay in the fact that he sought to do so in terms of man as the final reference point in predication. For all the advances that he may be said to
have made upon Descartes in certain respects, Kant’s view of man, as well as that of Descartes,’ is that of autonomy. It is this idea of autonomy that brings internal discord into the very nature of man. On the one hand he must, on this view, interpret himself in terms of a system of changeless laws, and therefore must know himself exhaustively. On the other hand he must regard himself as wholly free from the laws he has himself imposed upon the field of knowledge, and therefore must be unable to know himself at all. According to Kant, therefore, man must be at the same time both wholly known and wholly unknown to himself.

If then, on Kant’s basis; science is to be saved from having to do with, on the one hand, an infinite number of unrelated particulars—like beads that have no holes in them and, on the other hand, having to do with pure abstract logic—like an infinitely long string which has no ends and certainly no end that can be found by man—then science must be saved by this very same man who does not understand himself and who never will understand himself. If then, in desperation, a god is brought into the picture, it must be said that science is saved by a god who is the construct of man and who has, therefore, the same problem as man—of wholly knowing and wholly not knowing either himself or the world that he has and has not created.

But, it may be said that the position of Kant and his followers is admittedly subjective. The Roman Catholic apologist tells us to turn to Greek thought. We will find, he maintains, a truly objective approach to this problem by adoption of the Aristotelian methodology of interpretation.

Let us examine the truth of this claim. Is not Greek philosophy a philosophy of those who, just as well as Kant, are descendants of Adam? Is not their covenant-breaking attitude expressed in their various systems of natural theology? There is obviously no room for the Creator-creature distinction in any of the Greek thinkers. They all assume that “Being” and its “laws” are the same for God and for man; that “thought” and its “laws” are the same for God and for man; that ethical problems are the same for God and for man. On the Greek view, God is not man’s Creator. Man does not, need not and must not live by the revelation of God. Man must not obey the voice of God his Creator.

This monistic assumption characterizes Aristotle as much as any of the other Greek philosophers. When he speaks of “Being” as inherently analogical he merely means that “Being” has in it an element that is wholly static and also an element that is wholly contingent.

If this Greek view of reality, of knowledge, and of ethics were true, then the Christian story could not be true. There is, on the basis of the Greek story, no room for creation and no room for redemption. The Greek view covers all of reality. It covers God as well as the world. It is impossible to add the Christian view to the Greek view. The Greek view of the emanation of the world from God cannot intelligently be twisted to become anything like the Christian view of the creation of the world by God. The Greek view of evil cannot intelligently be twisted so as to become anything like the Christian view of sin. The Greek view of redemption cannot in any intelligible way be twisted so as to become anything like the Christian view of redemption. It is clear, then, that the Greek view cannot be made the foundation of a house of which Christianity is to be the upper floor.

Yet it is this very type of building, composed of a Greek foundation and a Christian upper story which is the essence of Roman Catholicism.
Rome’s natural theology starts from the Greek notion that man can interpret the natural realm in terms of the wisdom that is in man without reference to God his Creator and Redeemer. This interpretation of the natural realm carries with it a view of God. God is one God, that is, God is one god so long as he, or it, is thought of as an abstract principle of unity which stands correlative over against an equally abstract world of pure potentiality. The God of natural theology, therefore, is both unknown and unknowable by man so long as he differs from man. Moreover this God is unknown and unknowable to himself because he is no self.

This is the kind of god that comes out of Rome’s natural theology. No other kind of God could. Natural theology starts from man and then seeks to find, and does find, a god who is like man. That is to say, natural theology uses the idea of analogy but sets it on its head. The Christian religion says that God is self-contained; that he can say “I” without needing to relate himself to anything over against himself while doing so. The God of Christianity makes man in God’s image; the god of Greek, as well as of all other apostate thinking, has man make god in man’s image.

Thomas Aquinas, the great Roman Catholic theologian, thought he had succeeded in making a proper synthesis between the natural theology of the Greeks and the mysteries of the Christian faith. The mysteries of the Christian faith, he said, are not against but above reason. Reason such as that of the Greeks is given its opportunity to go as far as it can in interpreting reality and then, when it has reached its limit, Christian faith takes over.

The result of this procedure has been a toning down of the mysteries of the faith to the requirements of autonomous reason. Rome’s theology is permeated with the idea of human autonomy simply because its philosophy is. There is this much consistency in the Roman Catholic synthesis: that at every point man as autonomous has his say. This is true as much with respect to the question of authority as with any other question. In the Romanist synthesis, there cannot be a Christ who speaks with absolute authority in Scripture. The final authority to which Romanism appeals is that of the church and, in particular, that of the Pope speaking ex cathedra. The Pope is said to derive his authority from the Holy Spirit and therefore from Christ, but the Christ to which appeal is made has no final authority to give. If he had, then he could not make it known except through sinful man who infallibly tells man what he must mean.

Bishop Butler’s approach to the question of interpretation is to all intents and purposes the same as that of Aquinas. It was an evil hour when the Roman Catholic notion of analogy was taken over into Protestant apologetics. This point has been discussed at length by the present writer in his syllabus Christian Theistic Evidences, and in his “Introduction” to B. B. Warfield’s book, The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible. The main point of Butler’s approach, which is representative of the essentially Romanist approach popular in Protestant circles, is that it is once more taken for granted that sinful man can and does give an essentially true interpretation of the natural world; that all he needs is some additional information about God.
Chapter 3:  
The Reformed Doctrine Of Inspiration

From the general discussion given above with respect to the Protestant doctrine of Scripture we turn now to the more particular problem of its inspiration. We do this with the help of Reformed scholars who have dealt at length with the subject. But has there been a common view of Inspiration among Protestants?

1. B. B. Warfield

On this question we first turn to B. B. Warfield. Certainly he, if any one, deserves a hearing. A number of his writings on revelation and inspiration were collected by Dr. Samuel G. Craig in a book entitled *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia, 1948).

Warfield wrote about the “church-doctrine” of inspiration. “Surely the seeker after the truth in the matter of the inspiration of the Bible, says Warfield, may well take this church-doctrine as his starting point.”

What then is this “church-doctrine” of inspiration? It is to the effect that the Bible is an “oracular book.” It is “the Word of God in such a sense that whatever it says God says.” Children of Christian parents learn to look upon it this way. They have, and properly have, an “attitude of entire trust in every word of the Scriptures.” This has been the attitude of Christendom throughout the centuries of the Christian era. “Christendom has always reposed upon the belief that the utterances of this book are properly oracles of God. The whole body of Christian literature bears witness to this fact. We may trace its stream to its source, and everywhere it is vocal with a living faith in the divine trustworthiness of the Scriptures of God in every one of their affirmations.”

Augustine “affirms that he defers to the canonical Scriptures alone among books with such reverence and honor that he most firmly believes that no one of their authors has erred in anything, in writing.” As for the Reformers, they held the same view that Augustine did. “Luther adopts these words of Augustine’s as his own, and declares that the whole of the Scriptures are to be ascribed to the Holy Ghost, and therefore cannot err. Calvin demands that whatever is propounded in Scripture, ‘without exception,’ shall be humbly received by us—that the Scriptures as a whole shall be received by us with the same reverence which we give to God, ‘because they have emanated from him alone, and are mixed with nothing human.’”

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2 Idem.  
3 Ibid., p. 107.  
4 Idem.  
5 Ibid., p. 108.  
6 Idem.  
7 Ibid., pp. 108, 109.
A. The Commentators

“Now look,” says Warfield, “at those who, coming after the Reformers, have laboured to exegete the text of Scripture for the benefit of the people of God. Watch the saintly Bengel at his work. Others, too, count no labor wasted in their efforts to distill from the very words of Holy Writ the honey which the Spirit has hidden in them for the comfort and the delight of the saints. Watch B. M. Westcott as through the ‘closest attention to the subtleties and minute variations of words and order’ he seeks for the meaning of the Spirit. Is not this, as Wistar Hodge says, ‘a high testimony to verbal inspiration’”? 8

How will we account for the fact that such a high view of the Bible in general and of inspiration in particular was held through the history of the church? “The account is simple enough,” says Warfield, “and capable of inclusion in a single sentence; this is the doctrine of inspiration which was held by the writers of the New Testament and by Jesus as reported in the Gospels. It is this simple fact that has commended it to the church of all ages as the true doctrine.” The church-doctrine was the “Bible doctrine before it was the church-doctrine, and it is the church-doctrine only because it is the Bible doctrine.” 9

We are then to speak of the verbal inspiration of Scripture. We may also speak of “plenary” inspiration. 10 In the Bible we have, says Warfield, “the very Word of God itself, spoken by God himself through human lips and pens.” 11 To a “plenarily inspired Bible, humbly trusted as such, we actually, and as a matter of fact, owe all that has blessed our lives with hopes of immortality of bliss, and with the present fruition of the love of God in Christ.” 12

B. The Biblical Idea Of Inspiration

In his article, “The Biblical Idea of Inspiration,” Warfield shows, with all possible fullness, that plenary or verbal inspiration is actually taught in the Scripture.

Jesus himself taught this fact with respect to the Old Testament. When he reasoned with the Pharisees, it was on the assumption that they, with him, stood on the Scripture as the word of God. “Scripture was common ground with Jesus and His opponents.” 13 When the Pharisees did not own him as the Messiah, it was because they had not known the Scriptures. 14 According to Jesus, Scripture cannot be broken. Its whole meaning is centered on him.

The apostles appointed by Christ to be the teachers of the Church took the Scriptures in precisely the same way that Christ took them. The Scriptures were to them the oracles of God. Warfield exegetes such passages as 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20, 21 in great detail, showing that such is the case.

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8 Ibid., p. 110.
9 Ibid., p. 114.
10 Ibid., p. 117.
11 Ibid., p. 125.
12 Ibid., p. 126.
13 Ibid., p. 140.
14 Ibid., p. 143.
C. The Instrumentality Of Men

Of course, the fact that the Bible is the Word of God does not mean that it has dropped from heaven. It was given through the service of men. In the view of the writers of the New Testament, the Scriptures are the Word of God. This is true “in all its parts and in all its elements, down to the least minutiae, in form of expression as well as in substance of teaching.” Yet “the whole of it has been given by God through the instrumentality of men.” This does not mean that some portions of Scripture are human and some are divine. It means rather that in all of the Scripture there is a human side as well as a divine. "The Biblical writers do not conceive of the Scriptures as a human product breathed into by the Divine Spirit, and thus heightened in its qualities or endowed with new qualities; but as a divine product produced through the instrumentality of men.” The Spirit carried along the spirits of men so that they spontaneously spoke and wrote what they did.

It would, therefore, be a complete misunderstanding of the relation of the divine and the human in Scripture if it were conceived of in a manner other than exhaustively personal. To be sure, God through Christ revealed what had not entered into the hearts of sinful man. There were heights to be scaled which were beyond the reach of human imagination. Sinners will surely repress that which God, in his grace, would reveal to them for their salvation. To reach sinners in spite of themselves Christ spoke to them by speaking through them. Borne by the Spirit they spoke spontaneously. Prepared by his providence, they had all the gifts that they needed to do this. Thus God’s general purpose of saving the world, of saving the whole man with the whole of his culture, was being accomplished by God through Christ as in turn Christ through his Spirit directed and controlled his chosen instruments. The Word of life was given to the whole world.

Thus Scripture is not merely a record of revelation. It is itself revelational. “Scripture is conceived, from the point of view of the writers of the New Testament, not merely as the record of revelation, but as itself a part of the redemptive revelation of God; not merely as the record of the redemptive acts by which God is saving the world, but as itself one of these redemptive acts, having its own part to play in the great work of establishing and building up the kingdom of God. What gives it a place among the redemptive acts of God is its Divine origination, taken in its widest sense, as inclusive of all the divine operations, providential, gracious and expressly supernatural, by which it has been made just what it is—a body of writings able to make wise unto salvation, and profitable for making the man of God perfect. What gives it its place among the modes of revelation is, however, specifically the culminating one of these Divine operations, which we call ‘Inspiration’; that is to say, the action of the Spirit of God in so ‘bearing’ its human authors in their work of producing Scripture, as that in these Scriptures they speak, not out of themselves, but ‘from God.’ It is this act by virtue of which the Scriptures may properly be called ‘God-breathed.’”

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15 Ibid., p. 150.
16 Ibid., p. 153.
17 Ibid., p. 162.
It is apparent from looking at the whole presentation of Warfield’s argument that no Roman Catholic, no Arminian, no liberal, nor neo-orthodox theologian could agree with it. For Warfield, the inspiration of Scripture is the climax of a process of redemption in a history which is what it is because at every point it is directed by the redemptive providence of God. Of course, those who hold the Roman Catholic or the Arminian concept of God and the world also believe in the “providence” of God, but they have a view of providence which makes room for man as at least to some extent autonomous, a man who can, in the last analysis, initiate historical events from his own resources independent of the plan of God. Surely there could be no inspiration in the sense in which Warfield describes it unless God’s providence is what he thinks of it as being, i.e., that which controls all of history, and of each man as a particular contribution to history.

D. The Organic View Of Inspiration

Further, Warfield, and other Reformed theologians with him, have spoken of their view of inspiration as the organic view. They do so because they stress the fact that the Holy Spirit, in employing the instrumentality of men, takes these men as they are in virtue of the general providence and common grace of God which has prepared them at every point for the event of inspiration. The words that men speak can, on this basis, be at the same time, the words of God. These men are, in the first place, wholly subject to the will of God. From the point of view of neo-orthodoxy and liberalism, and even from the point of view of the Arminian theology and Roman Catholicism, this involves a mechanical or determinist view of the relation of the divine personality to the human subject. The Reformed theologians, on the other hand, maintain that only if one places man, as the Scriptures do, in the context of total dependence on God, in whom alone they can live and move and have their being, can man be truly spontaneous in what he says and does.

From the non-Reformed point of view man can be spontaneous only if he is, to some extent, free from the determinative counsel of God. From the Reformed point of view man is not spontaneous or free except as he acts within the counsel of God. From the Reformed point of view the notion of freedom independent from the plan of God is freedom in a vacuum. With such freedom man is free only negatively—he may go in any direction he pleases but there can be for him no difference between east and west or north or south; he cannot find himself because he has no self.

All attacks against this view of Warfield are based on the common presupposition of human autonomy. But, we ask, will they attempt to stand on a foundation of pure contingency to attack this view of God and Christ speaking in his word to sinful men? It is clear that they will either stand upon the foundation of a sovereign God and his providential revelatory word or they will stand on air. Rather, they will operate in a vacuum.

On the other hand, the only way in which Warfield’s view of the Bible and its inspiration can be defended is by pointing out that it is and has to be presupposed in order that there be any intelligible human predication—whether for or against the truth of it. It is therefore futile when men seek to attack this view and it is equally futile when men seek to defend this view by means of argumentation which assumes its negation—human dependence or autonomy. When men argue about the phenomena of Scripture as though
these phenomena were intelligible in terms of themselves, apart from the revelation of
God, before they approach the problem of its divinity or inspiration, then their attack or
defense is nothing but a beating in the air. To assume autonomous self-interpretation is to
negate the necessity of special revelation. The phenomena of Scripture are what they are
because they are a part of the redemptive work of God in the world. Again, when men
start their discussion of Scripture as a whole and of its inspiration in particular after
studying the phenomena outside Scripture, they may defend or they may attack but to no
avail because the whole battle is a battle in a vacuum. The phenomena outside, as well as
the phenomena inside the Scripture are what they are as part of the plan of history in
which God has ordered his work of redemption.

2. Herman Bavinck

We turn now to the work of Herman Bavinck, another Reformed theologian.
Bavinck holds to essentially the same view as that of Warfield. In short, Bavinck, as
well as Warfield, holds to an organic view of Scripture.
For Bavinck the Scripture constitutes the climax of the redemptive work of God
through Christ and his Spirit. The purpose of this redemptive work of Christ is that the
world which has fallen into sin may be cleansed from sin and in spite of that sin reveal
the glory of God. Mankind is not an aggregate of individuals. Mankind is an organism.
Revelation, in redeeming mankind, works organically.
Working organically in accordance with the laws of creation, God’s redemption in
Christ may also be said to be through and through “personal.” “The center of revelation is
the person of Christ.” All revelation is historical and not merely an insertion of
teaching or doctrine and all history has its center in Christ. There is an “orthodox
intellectualism” but Bavinck will have none of it. He shows that it does not spring from
anything that is taught in the Reformed Confessions.

A. Inscripturation

The inscripturation of the redemptive revelation of God through the person and work
of Christ could not possibly involve anything mechanical. On the contrary, inspiration is
“an element in revelation” and this revelation is personal and living throughout.
So far from seeking access to the person of Christ in spite of Scripture, it is
impossible to hear Christ except in Scripture. Instead of depreciating the Scripture we
should magnify it as the “last act in which the revelation of God in Christ for this
dispensation is completed.” The redemptive revelation of God has now reached its
climax in the appearance of Christ and in his finished work. What he was and what he did
redemptively for the world, he himself has explained to us by giving his Spirit to the
apostles so that they should write down the meaning of his work. Herewith the objective
work of redemption has been finished. The Event of Christ has taken place and the
meaning of the event has been given to us by Christ himself in his Word. Henceforth the

18 Gereformeerde Dogmatiek, Kampen 1918, Vol. 1, p. 399.
19 Idem.
20 Ibid., p. 402.
dispensation of the New Testament church appears upon the scene. In it the Spirit works in the hearts of men so that they may believe the Word.

Thus the Scripture is the always “living youthful word, which God in our time through His people gives to us.” 21 In the Scripture “God comes daily to his people.” 22 “The Scripture is the daily contact between heaven and earth, between Christ and his church, between God and his children.” 23 The Scripture binds us not only to the past but also to the living Lord in heaven who determined that past as well as the present and future.

When Bavinck has thus in general terms described the Church doctrine of Scripture and its inspiration he goes on, in the way that Warfield does, to speak of the Reformers. He says, “the Reformers took the Scriptures and its theopneusty in the way that it had been transmitted to them by the church.” 24

In this connection Bavinck refers to an article by Francis Pieper on Luther’s Doctrine of Inspiration published in the Presbyterian and Reformed Review. 25 In this article Dr. Pieper proved that the liberal theologians had no factual foundation in Luther’s writing with which to support their claim that Luther’s view of Scripture was similar to their own. Luther is far from admitting that “inaccuracies in historical details” can be found in Scripture. 26 It was Dr. Tholuck who started the fiction that Luther had a loose view of Scripture and many a liberal theologian has simply taken what Tholuck said at face value without investigating Luther’s writings for themselves. 27 Summing up his whole argument Pieper says that Luther “regards the Scripture in their every word as the very word of God.” 28

As for Reformed theologians, they have generally followed Calvin in holding to the same high view of Scripture which he held. 29 Calvin regards Scripture to be in the full and literal sense the Word of God. 30 Bavinck admits that some Reformed theologians had a more or less mechanical view of inspiration 31 and then sets forth his own view. It is, he argues, essentially the same as that of the Reformers. If we believe the Bible when it speaks of the Trinity and the incarnation, why should we not believe it when it speaks of its own inspiration? Only God knows God and only God can tell us about God. 32 This has nothing to do with a priorism. It is simply to believe God at his word. Bavinck prefers not to speak of a theory of inspiration. It is the Holy Spirit of God who is everywhere operative in the cosmos. All knowledge and art, all talent and genius, come from the Spirit of God. He regenerates

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21 Ibid., p. 405.
22 Idem.
23 Idem.
24 Ibid., p. 435.
25 April, 1893, p. 435 ff.
26 Ibid., p. 264.
27 Ibid., p. 261.
28 Ibid., p. 266.
29 Ibid., p. 436.
30 Ibid., p. 436.
31 Ibid., p. 436–437.
32 Ibid., p. 446.
men so that they may believe and trust in him. He is back of the predictions that the prophets of the Old Testament made. So also in the formation of Scripture he is the Spirit of its inspiration. Thus the inspiration of the Scripture is organically related to all the work of the Spirit in the world, both in providence and in redemption. The Holy Spirit completes the work of the Father and of the Son in the world. 33 “In inspiration, revelation completes itself, obtains its purpose and reaches its end.” 34 We are therefore to think of inspiration not mechanically but organically, as merely another aspect of the Spirit’s providential and redemptive work in the whole of history.

We have now heard two of the greatest of modern Reformed theologians set forth the Scriptural teaching with respect to itself. The doctrine of Scripture is intricately interwoven with all the main teaching of Scripture. This doctrine is interwoven with the idea of the world’s creation and its all comprehensive providential control by God the Father. We may say that the doctrine of creation and of providence form the foundation of the idea of Scripture. But on the other hand we should know nothing about the truth of creation and providence if it were not the Scripture as God’s Word that tells us of them. Then, secondly, the doctrine of inspiration is interwoven with that of the historic redemption of the world through Christ as the Son of God. The work of redemption through Christ is also the foundation of the idea of Scripture. But again, it is true that we should know nothing about the work of redemption through the Son unless the Scripture as the Word of the Spirit tells us of it. Finally, the work of the Father and the work of the Son and the work of the Spirit constitute the one work of the triune God. This we hold to be true because by the regenerating power of the Spirit the saving work of Christ that he wrought for us in history is applied to our hearts so that now we trust in him.

33 Ibid., p. 450.
34 Ibid., p. 451.
Chapter 4:
The Roman Catholic View Of Scripture

But to say that all this is the case is to say that the Protestant view of God and his relation to man rather than the Roman Catholic one is true. As earlier noted, the Roman Catholic view of theology is based upon the idea that man is to some extent free in the sense of operating independently of the counsel of God. The Roman Catholic seeks to establish the existence of God by proofs that are based upon the assumption of human autonomy. By the method of Aristotle he reaches a god like the god of Aristotle, namely, an abstract principle that stands, of necessity, in correlative relationship to the world. When such a god has any contact with the world that god itself becomes an aspect of the process of that world. Therefore the Roman Catholic establishes the divinity of Christ, the second person of the Trinity, by a process of reasoning that again starts from human autonomy. The consequence is that Romanism obtains a Christ who cannot identify himself in history. When the Christ of Romanism becomes incarnate, he does so by a process that continues in the church. The church is, for Romanism, the continuation of the incarnation. This Christ cannot, in the nature of the case, give to man a final interpretation of the meaning of his work. He could not authorize the Holy Spirit to inspire the apostles in order to give a once-for-all revelation of the redemptive work of the triune God. For Romanism the Holy Spirit too is a process; it is the process that begins with Christ and continues in the interpretative work of the church and more particularly in the infallible words of the Pope.

It is this Romish view of God taken partly from Scripture but at every point reduced from its absoluteness by an admixture with it of Aristotelian philosophy that underlies the Reformation argument with respect to the necessity, the authority, the clarity and the sufficiency of redemptive revelation. It is man’s finitude more than his sin that is, for Rome, the reason for the necessity of special revelation and for the necessity of the Scriptures in which that special redemptive revelation comes to man. So far as this revelation comes to man in Christ and then in the Bible, this revelation cannot, on this view, be clear because Christ does not know in any absolute way who he is and what was the meaning of his work. So the church starts from what it thinks of as the historic fact of Christ’s appointment of Peter as head of the church. But this is an argument that is admittedly based upon facts of history which have not themselves first been interpreted by the revelation of God. So the authority thus founded is no greater than the foundation on which it rests and this foundation is history, as interpreted by man apart from God. It is history composed of chance produced material organized by would-be autonomous man. And finally, on this view the revelation of Scripture cannot be sufficient in the sense that nothing more is needed. God himself cannot tell us what is and what is not enough for the needs of man.

1. The Formal Authority Of Scripture

In consequence of what has been said in the preceding paragraphs, it will be necessary to conclude that the doctrine of Scripture and of its inspiration is only formally the doctrine of the church of Rome. Bavinck says that the Bible has from the beginning
been recognized as the Word of God by all Christian churches. “There is,” he says, “no dogma on which there is greater unity than that which pertains to the Scripture.”¹ But both Warfield and Bavinck have shown us in the clearest possible way that the dogma of Scripture is what it is because Christ is what he is and Christ is the center of Scripture. One’s theology of Scripture is organically related to and is but the expression of one’s theology as a whole. The inspiration of Scripture, as both Warfield and Bavinck have stressed, is the climax of a process of redemptive revelation, and this redemptive revelation is organically interwoven with revelation in the world as a whole. Therefore one who does not believe this theology cannot consistently believe the Bible of this theology.

2. The Pharisees

The necessity of speaking of formal rather than material agreement on the question of Scripture can be readily made clear by unmasking the Pharisees as to what the Scripture means to them. To the Pharisees of Jesus’ day the Scripture did not mean a finished revelation. With all their elevation of Moses to virtual divinity their basic allegiance was to the “living” Torah. It is precisely because this is the case that they could not find Jesus Christ in Moses and the Prophets. Jesus tells them that Moses and the Prophets clearly spoke of him. But they did not thus exegete the Scripture. Therefore their exegesis virtually made their claim to being followers of Moses and the Prophets meaningless. Their real allegiance was to what the “living” voice of their church taught them. And this living voice was, to all intents and purposes, giving expression to the ethical ideas and ideals that the apostate man had wrought out for itself.

3. Interpretation Of Scripture

Bavinck points out that the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture was held from the beginning in the Christian Church. Among others, Origen held to it. Origen, says Bavinck, held that there was not a jot or a tittle in Scripture that was in vain. ² But Origen was a notorious heretic. He did not actually get his ideas of God, of man and of Christ exclusively from Scripture. They are more in accord with Greek philosophy than they are with biblical truth. So in Origen we have an illustration of the same sort of thing that we saw was the case with the Pharisees. There was a theoretical adherence to a very high view of Scripture but a practical denial of it.

The theology of the Middle Ages, says Bavinck, accepted the doctrine of the Bible handed down to it from the early church and added nothing new.

4. Thomas Aquinas

Naturally it is of special interest to see what Thomas Aquinas, the great teacher of the Roman Catholic Church, has to say about Scripture. He deals with it in his teaching with

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² Ibid., p. 424.
respect to prophecy. According to Thomas no “error or untruth can be found in Scripture.”

However, what was said with respect to the Pharisees applies, mutatis mutandis, also to Thomas and to the medieval position in general. It is the “living” voice of the church that constitutes the final authority for Thomas. It is Aristotle plus Christ who together are called upon to construe the truth with respect to God and man. Thus allegiance to Scripture and its authority again becomes a formal matter.

5. The Council Of Trent

If we want a formally fine view with respect to the inspiration of Scripture, we may well listen to the Council of Trent. This Council extends the idea of the inspiration of the Bible so as to include tradition. Says Bavinck: “Inspiration is here indeed extended to tradition but at any rate it is also clearly asserted of Scripture.” But surely we can take little comfort from this fact. Is it a great comfort to a husband when his wife says that she loves him too—as well as the man across the street?

When the infallible church accords infallibility to the Scripture, the church stands above the Scripture. Says Charles Hodge, “Making tradition a part of the rule of faith subverts the authority of Scripture.”

6. G. C. Berkouwer On Romanism And Scripture

A more recent discussion of the Roman Catholic view of Scripture by Dr. G. C. Berkouwer corroborates anew the fact that this view includes nothing more than a formal recognition of the Scripture as the very Word of God.

The Bible and the church, are, says Berkouwer, according to the Council of Trent, coordinate. This at once excludes the Protestant idea of the exclusive authority of Scripture. The Roman Church found it to be obviously impossible to find any justification in Scripture for many of its teachings and practices. It therefore needed a second source of divine revelation next to the Bible. Thus, for instance, the church’s teaching with respect to purgatory is frankly traced back to tradition rather than to Scripture.

Involved in the idea of tradition is that of Papal infallibility. The Church could not and did not give any clear declaration with respect to the material content of tradition. The idea of tradition necessitated the idea of the “living” voice of the church in order to indicate from moment to moment both the content and the meaning of tradition. And herewith the authority of Scripture is again reduced to formality in the way that the Pharisees reduced their adherence to the Law to a formality.

Roman Catholics therefore find their final norm of objectivity in the declaration of the teaching living church, while Protestants find their norm in the final revelation of

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4 Ibid., p. 428.
6 Het Probleem der Schrifkritiek, p. 222.
7 Idem.
Christ through the Scripture. The church claims that to have genuinely objective truth available to man there must be the voice of the living Church. The Protestant holds that if one’s final appeal is to such a living voice we have to all intents and purposes fallen back on the wisdom of man; the natural man is dead in trespasses and sins.

7. The Place Of The Holy Spirit In Roman Catholicism

To be sure, the church constantly speaks of the Holy Spirit as assisting the church, and in particular the Pope, in giving expression to infallible truth. But in thus appealing to the special guidance of the Holy Spirit, this Spirit must first be denied as being the Spirit of the Christ who has finished and explained his work of atonement for men. The Spirit of Christ guided the Apostles of Christ in giving final expression to the meaning of his person and work. But if there is no finished work of Christ, i.e., if the sacrifice of Christ is continued in the mass, then, of course, the Spirit of Christ himself becomes a part of the process of redemption. There is then no qualitative difference between the inspiration which the writers of Scripture enjoyed, as they were preparing the deposit of Scripture, and the illumination that all believers enjoy as they read this revelation given them by the servants of Christ. But more than that, this guidance of the Spirit is then itself relativized so that it is nothing more than some form of assistance to men who are, apart from redemption through Christ, already able properly to seek for truth and righteousness in and of themselves. At the end of the process, says Berkouwer, we have a Christ-mysticism which cuts itself loose from the Word of Christ.
Chapter 5:
Neo-orthodoxy And Christ Mysticism

Of even more pressing significance for Protestantism is the fact that Christ-mysticism, more definitely exclusive of the authority of Christ and the Scripture than that of Romanism, has arisen in its own midst. We refer to the Act theology of Neo-Orthodoxy. The great exponent of neo-orthodox theology is Karl Barth. Through many years he has claimed to set forth a true theology of the Word in the way that the reformers did and for that reason he has, for many years, opposed the “and-theology” of Rome. Barth wants no natural and revealed theology. He wants a theology that springs exclusively from the Bible. His is a theology of the Word. Over against the older Liberals, Barth would hold, not that the Bible contains, but that it is the Word of God.

For all this seeming return to the position of the Reformers, it is clear that Barth’s position is a theology of the living voice of the church. Barth interprets the Bible in a modern activist sense just as Origen interpreted the Bible in accord with principles borrowed from Greek philosophy. When therefore Barth says that the Bible is the Word of God he means nothing like what either Luther or Calvin meant when they said the same thing. In Barth’s case we have the purest of formal adherence to the Protestant principle of a once for all revelation of God in Christ. For if there is anything that is true of Barth’s theology as a whole it is that it is the diametrical opposite of a theology that is based on a finished revelation of God in history. The Christ of Barth on which his whole theology rests is identical with the idea of Event. God is the Event of his revelation to man in Christ and man is the event of being taken up into this great Christ Event. The whole of Barth’s theology is therefore process theology with a vengeance. If for Romanism the church is the continuation of the incarnation, this is even more obviously the case with the theology of Barth. God is the Event of revelation in Christ and Christ is the work of saving men and the work of saving men is not finished till all men are saved. Even when men are lost it is that they are lost by virtue of their non-being in this process Christ. If Romanism deserves to be called Christ Mysticism, then neo-orthodox theology also deserves to be thus called, but doubly so. Surely then when Barth says that the Bible is the Word of God, he is not reacting against liberalism’s progress idea. He is going beyond it in terms of a modern activist philosophy of which liberalism never dreamed.

1. The Isolation Of The Reformed View Of Scripture

The conclusion of the matter is that we are compelled to speak with Berkouwer of the isolation of the Reformed view of Scripture. If we are to avoid having a merely formal adherence to the idea of the Scriptures as the very Word of God, we must have such a God as the Scriptures reveal. The God whom the Scriptures reveal is the God of whom no man knows anything unless this God himself reveals himself.

This means first that the world itself and all that is in it is revelational of God. In particular it means that man as created in the image of God is revelational. It means that all revelation is personal. Even before man became a sinner God was already speaking to him personally. This indicates that revelation in the world of nature was at no time sufficient or clear in itself apart from the Word revelation of God to man.
It is this conception that all the facts of the world, man as fact along with every fact of his environment, is revelational in connection with and in subordination to the Word communication of God that underlies what Bavinck and Warfield speak of as the organic view of revelation and inspiration.

We may call this view of God and his relation to the world the covenantal view. As such it is exhaustively personal. There is no area in which man finds himself confronted with impersonal fact or law. All so-called impersonal laws and all so-called uninterpreted facts are what they are because they are expressive of the revelation of God’s will and purpose.

**A. The Cosmic Extent Of Revelation**

In the nature of the case, the purpose of redemptive revelation is cosmic in extent. It is not as though there were any area of life about which God’s revelation given in Scripture does not say anything. Scripture speaks of ever the fact in the universe. It says of all these facts that they are what they are either consciously or unconsciously because of their relation to Christ the Redeemer of the world.

Such an interpretation of all the facts of the world as related negatively or positively, consciously or unconsciously to the Christ who died and rose again from the dead in Jerusalem can, in the nature of the case, at no point be thought of by man apart from this revelation. Man must accept this interpretation of the whole of the cosmos on the authority of Christ or he must reject it *in toto*. If he rejects it he then accepts himself as the final reference point in all predication.

Now it is only in the Reformed Confessions that such a view of God and of his relation to man through Christ finds expression. In all other Confessions there is a measure of compromise with the idea that man is free, i.e., independent to some extent, of control by the will and counsel of God. In all other Confessions there is a toning down of the fact that man is, as a sinner, unwilling to submit himself wholly in all his interpretation of life to the authority of Christ speaking in his Word.

The Reformed view of Scripture is that it might and would become the most formal view of all views unless it is held in burning personal conviction to be true and indispensable for life and for death. Abraham Kuyper believed strongly in the infallibility of Scripture because he was convinced that only in it do men have the living God speaking to them. This must imply that those who hold it must hold it because they are convinced that all the interpretation that man gives of life in any dimension is built on sinking sand unless it is built on God speaking through Christ in his Word. He who believes in the Scriptures as the Word in which God is speaking to man today must believe that God is speaking in it to the scientist and to the philosopher as well as to the theologian, requiring them, one and all, to bring their thought into obedience to him. “For this reason, no one,” says Berkouwer, “can be satisfied with a formal confession of the authority of Scripture. One’s whole theological thinking must constantly be seen to be in accord with it.” Submission to Scripture and criticism cannot go hand in hand.

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3 *Idem.*
To those who are committed to the position which interprets man in terms of a supposedly intelligent procedure not based on biblical principles, this Reformed view will seem to be hopelessly unscientific. The answer to this must be that the procedure of science and the procedure of philosophy cannot be shown to be intelligible unless they are carried on on the presupposition of the God who speaks to man in Scripture. He who holds to the Reformed view of Scripture does so because he has learned by means of it to see that he is blind to the situation in the world as it is without the light of Scripture. The world is actually created and controlled by God. Man is actually a fallen sinner who is blind to these facts unless he is born again by the Holy Spirit. When born again he sees all the truth at once. He sees the truth about himself and his spiritual blindness and he ascribes the fact that he now sees to the work of God through Christ as it is revealed to him in Scripture.

Of course, says Berkouwer, infallibility is never claimed for any translation. It is claimed only for the autographs. This is all the more reason for seeking a more and more accurate Bible translation. Those who rely finally, as does the Roman Church, on the Pope, need not concern themselves too much with seeking to approach ever more closely to the original.

Holding to the infallibility of the autographa also leads to a diligent search for better text of Scripture, a text that more clearly approaches the originals. Berkouwer here refers to A. Kuyper’s work, Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid. Berkouwer does not in this connection discuss the charge frequently made that lost autographa are useless. But the answer often given is quite sufficient. The important point is not whether or not we now possess the autographa but whether they have actually existed. Without them there is no Christ who has spoken anywhere in history. With them we have such a Christ. With them we have many problems of text and translation but no ultimate meaningless mystery, such as we would have without them.

The most important point with respect to the Reformed view of Scripture is that it unreservedly interprets the phenomena of Scripture in terms of the claims that it makes for itself. This point has already been referred to when we were setting forth the views of Warfield and Bavinck. On any but the Reformed view of theology there is an area of life which man may interpret correctly before he even as much as looks into Scripture. And this is fatal for the idea of a truly Protestant view of Scripture. As the Word of God, Scripture is like the sun in the light of which all things are seen and without the light of which nothing is seen for what it is. When they who attack or when they who defend the Bible as the infallible Word of God engage in an argument not based upon the presupposition of the Bible as the infallible Word of God, the Reformed Christian will not join either side. However much his sympathy will be with the party defending the Scripture as against those who attack it, he simply must not join the fray. To join the fray is to admit that the Word of God is not the Word of God. If it is the Word of God, it alone is the final light and only source of light with respect to any fact in the world. In the Scripture, divine inspiration takes that which is human into its service, with the result that the infallible Word of God appears.

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4 Ibid., p. 300.
5 Vol. 3, 1 p. 64.
6 Ibid., p. 326.
Chapter 6:
Modern Attacks On Scripture

We turn now to a brief discussion of the modern debate about the Bible and its inspiration. The story of this debate has often been told. We look only at certain important aspects of it.

First we look at the attack made on Scripture and then we note the defense of Scripture made by believers in it as the Word of God against those who attack it.

1. The Natural Man

Basic to an understanding of the whole attack on Scripture is the fact that the natural man hates Christ and therefore hates Christ’s Word as it makes its claims upon him in Scripture. Both Bavinck and Warfield bring out this point. Speaking of the Scripture Bavinck says: “Because it is the inscripturation of the revelation of God in Christ, it must arouse the same opposition as Christ himself.”¹ Christ has come to separate light from darkness. He has come to reveal the thoughts of men to themselves. Through his Word he brings men to a consciousness of their sin and evil. And the sinner, still under the control of the prince of the power of darkness, rebels against this Word of Christ as it challenges him to repentance from sin. The natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit. They are discerned only by those who, through the Holy Spirit, are born again from their spiritual death.

2. Two Classes Of Men

It is to be expected then that the natural man does not agree with what has just been said about him. He does not for a moment admit that believers in the Bible and in the Christ of the Bible can and do see anything that they themselves are not equally able to see. The natural man is blind to his own blindness. What do these people think of themselves? Do they think that they are better than we are? As for their claims that they are born again, our psychologists can explain that this rebirth of theirs is a natural phenomenon. When they appeal to the Holy Spirit as the source of this rebirth our philosophers can show that many who are not believers in Christ have had visions of the Holy Spirit as influencing them to sudden conversions. Further, if they go back of this to speak of Christ as the Son of God and of his resurrection, our theologians can explain this faith too as being similar to what men of other religions believe.

The whole of the so called Higher Criticism of Scripture springs from this background in modern science, philosophy and theology as it is based upon the assumption of human self-sufficiency. Of course the opposition to the Scriptures did not begin in modern times. All men are and have been apostate from God since the fall of Adam. All men of themselves therefore resist the light of the gospel till, by the Spirit of

God, this light overpowers them. Then, like the Apostle Paul, they become “apostles” instead of persecutors.

3. Common Grace And Bernard Ramm

The Roman Catholic and the Arminian think that in thus insisting on the idea of the total blindness of the natural man we do the natural man an injustice. Is there not much in the way of high morality and of intellectual accomplishment among those who are not Christians? What of all the modern scientific enterprise? Are you not going beyond your own great theologians when you speak in such absolutist terms? Did not Calvin have great appreciation for the truths discovered by the Greeks and for the works of consummate artistic power that they produced? Dr. Bernard Ramm says that we cannot be “hyperorthodox and ignore the enormous accumulations of valid information by modern science.”

And what about the position of Dr. Francis L. Patton who was president of Princeton Theological Seminary in the day when it was unreservedly Reformed in its theology? Patton opposes the idea of separating the people of, this world into two classes the way you did above. If you say what you have said about the natural man, namely, that he is blind, there is no further use to present the claims of the gospel to him. The blind man cannot read. Are we to conclude that all men are blind? “Does it satisfy the requirements of duty to divide the world into two classes consisting of those who are blind and cannot read and those who can see and need not read?” Patton sums up his estimate of a two-class theory of the human race by saying: “I confess that after a lifetime of belief in the Calvinistic theology as the most rational and the most Scriptural of all systems of religious thought, I am not prepared to accept this interpretation of it.”

Speaking in similar vein, Ramm says, “But a pedantic hyperorthodoxy must not be allowed to speak for evangelical Christians as such a position as it holds is impossible of credible defense.”

What shall we say to this? Our answer must be that we are simply following Scripture in our analysis of the natural man. The Roman Catholic and the Arminian are unwilling to do this. Moreover, as for the cultural products of those who are not Christians, we would follow Calvin in ascribing this to the common grace of God that works in them. True, the natural man is not blind in every sense. True, he is not as bad as he could be and as he will one day be. Modern science, so far as it has been carried on by those who are not Christians, has made marvelous discoveries of the true state of affairs in the phenomenal world. But the whole point—which even Patton and Ramm seem to overlook in a moment of forgetfulness—is that unless it were for the common grace of God there would be no discovery of any truth and no practice of any goodness among those who are not born again.

A further point needs to be made. Patton argues as though he who holds to what he calls an extreme view on the blindness of the natural man is presuming to enter into the

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3 Ibid., p. 160.
hidden things of God, as though those who believe in total depravity were presuming to judge the hearts of men.  

Still further Patton thinks that all apologetic discussion must stop if we think of the natural man as wholly blind. He says that if we hold such a low view of the non-Christian we should be taking “Christianity outside the sphere of inquiry.”

Positively, this last point means that Patton’s view of Scripture, and of its place in the Christian’s responsibility for the conversion of his fellow men, is a part of his general view of apologetics. This general view of apologetics is the same as that of Bishop Butler. Patton is outspokenly a follower of Butler in his probability view of apologetics. Says Patton: “Probability is the guide of life, said Bishop Butler. The best ships afloat may be sunk at sea, but on that account do you take one known not to be seaworthy?”

So the “real problem is whether the Bible is true, not whether it is inspired.”

Having gone this far Patton is driven to go further. How shall the truthfulness of Scripture be established? Patton answers this by asking some rhetorical questions: “Have we lost all faith in inductive logic? Have we abandoned human testimony as a source of information? Is there no longer a place for the common sense of mankind?”

We are, according to Patton, to determine the historical credibility of the Scriptures apart from the question of their inspiration. Then, when we have established their credibility, we can add the idea of inspiration. “I like to feel that this historicity and the inspiration of the Bible cooperate and help to strengthen the Christian faith, so that if either is sufficient how much better will both be.”

Moreover, when we follow the Butler method of apologetic, according to Patton, we can escape the charge of assuming what we prove. And when finally we note the Protestant view of Scripture (and especially Calvin’s view which implies the internal witness of the Holy Spirit as the final source of the certainty of its divinity) we need not deny that “something like it is found among the Hegelian thinkers and the Mystics.”

We need only to say then that what is taught by the Hegelian and the mystic is “better taught and authoritatively taught in Holy Scripture.”

We shall be concerned with this Butler type of defense of the idea of Scripture below. For the moment a general objection must be made with respect to it. Butler was Arminian in his theology. He was, therefore, quite consistent in advocating the sort of apologetics that he did. Holding an Arminian view of theology involves holding a basically formal view of the Scripture and its inspiration. We have seen earlier what this means in the case of Roman Catholicism. It involves the idea of what Ramm calls a “pattern of authority”

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6 Ibid., p. 165.
7 Ibid., p. 147.
8 Ibid., p. 147.
9 Ibid., p. 166.
10 Ibid., p. 168.
11 Ibid., p. 158.
12 Idem.
in his book on the subject. 13 Such a pattern of authority steers, we are told, a wise course between subjectivism and authoritarianism. 14

The idea of the Pattern of Authority, says Ramm, does not “deny the right to test the truthfulness of various options.” 15 “Reason lays bare the grounds of authority.” 16 Christianity is “capable of univocal definition.” 17

In the pattern of authority, we are told, is “Authority which is objective and subjective” and “which combines the imperial majesty of God, the sovereign right of truth, and the dignity of man.” 18

We shall see later how it is this idea of a pattern of authority by which Ramm seeks to defend both the Bible and the rightful claims we must make for scientific procedure. For the moment it must suffice to call attention to the fact that Butler’s approach, as followed by both Patton and Ramm, does not have the organic view of Scripture set forth in the works of Warfield and Bavinck. Now there is no doubt that both Patton and Ramm basically hold to the same organic view of Scripture that Warfield and Bavinck hold It is also true that Warfield, as well as Patton and Ramm, holds to a form of the Butler type of argument for the defense of Scripture and its teachings. But the moral of all this is that by their use of Butler’s method, they who hold to the Reformed or organic view of Scripture bring this view into jeopardy. They bring it into jeopardy because they appeal to a common ground of interpretation between the believer and unbeliever of the facts of nature and of history.

In concluding this section we should be remiss if we did not refer to other writings of Ramm. There is his book, Special Revelation And The Word Of God. There is too, his book, The Witness Of The Holy Spirit. The approach taken in these works, particularly in the latter, is quite different from that taken in the works above discussed. Reviewing the last-named book professor John Murray says: “It is indicative of Ramm’s perspective that the three theologians to whom he yields particular esteem are John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper and B. B. Warfield.” 19

In speaking of Ramm’s point of view as expressed in this book Murray adds: “The keynote of the thesis is enunciated when we read as follows: ‘The conclusion, then, is that in the Christian certainty is not derived from the rational powers of the human mind, nor from the word of the imperial church, nor from the direct delivery of a revelation within the hearts. Rather, it comes only from the testimonium Spiritus sancti.’ ” 20

With this evaluation of Murray’s we concur. And we believe that what Ramm says in this book is far more true to Scripture than what he says in The Pattern of Authority.

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14 Ibid., p. 18.
15 Ibid., p. 42.
16 Ibid., p. 44.
17 Ibid., p. 57.
18 Ibid., p. 62.
20 Idem.
4. Non-Christian Science

We shall now look very briefly at modern science, modern philosophy and modern theology in order to see what their objection is to the Bible with its teaching, and therefore to the doctrine of biblical inspiration as discussed above.

Dealing first with science, we accept the distinction made by Dr. Enno Wolthuis between science “as no more than a technique” and science as “an interpretation of nature.” “For example,” says Wolthuis, “anyone who studies the behavior of electrons must conclude, simply on the basis of experimental data, that they possess wave properties similar to those of light.”\(^{21}\) Surely, no Christian, says Wolthuis, should have a quarrel with science in this sense. With this we can of course have hearty agreement. Everybody must use legs in order to walk. Everyone must follow the rule of formal logic if he is going to reason straight. When a man is born again he does not get a new set of brains with which to think. He has all the gifts of nature in common with his friend the unbeliever.

However, when we speak of modern science we are not speaking of a technique but rather of an interpretation of nature and of man’s relation to nature. Wolthuis himself has a chapter headed “Science Shapes the Modern Mind.” In this chapter he speaks of “the scientific method.” Of it he says that in modern times this has meant the giving of a large place to experiment. But this at once led to the formulation of natural law. The object of the scientific method is to uncover the relationships existing among the things observed and to express these relationships in the form of natural laws. Generally there has been no other motive than to explain nature in terms of nature. That is to say, man is surrounded by, and is part of, nature which is assumed to contain an orderly arrangement of cause-effect relations and it is his function to discover this order and leave it at that. “Ulterior motives have no place in such a science for they distort the voice of nature and make it impossible to see it for what it really is.”\(^{22}\)

These words are enough to indicate that when we speak of science we are not speaking merely of a technique of experimentation as such but rather of an attempt to understand nature for what it really is, there are two mutually exclusive interpretations. Wolthuis himself contrasts the two positions by speaking of the position of modern science as being the product of man’s “own reason” and of the position of the Christian as that which is given him by the authority of Scripture. Says Wolthuis, “Man of himself cannot find God through science, but neither can he know nature for what it really is, namely, a revelation of God. The word, revelation, is not properly in his vocabulary for, as we mean the term, it is the conscious, wilful and purposeful act of the personal God, and expression of His being and purpose. A complete and proper interpretation of nature must see it as the product of the creative act of God, as upheld by His providential concern for it, and as existing to fulfil His purpose through it.”\(^{23}\)

For our purpose nothing more need be said on this point. The Christian knows from Scripture that the created world shows forth clearly the power and divinity of God. Calvin has laid all possible stress on this point in his *Institutes*. Man, says Calvin, has no

excuse if he does not see the hand of the Creator in the created world. To be sure, nature is not and never was sufficient by itself to give man a thorough knowledge of it in relation to God. Even before sin entered into the world God the Creator spoke to Adam, the creature made in his image, with respect to nature and what man should do with it. Man was told, in effect, to be religiously engaged when he was making his experimentation in the laboratory as well as when he is singing psalms in the church on Sunday. If then science deals with the laws of nature it does give an interpretation of the facts. If the scientist does not see the laws of nature as manifesting the Creator redeemer, he is guilty before God.

As a sinner man seeks to suppress the revelation of God that speaks to him through the created world. He holds under the truth in unrighteousness. And when modern science is trying to understand nature without placing it, from the outset, in relation to its creator and redeemer it is engaged in the sinful enterprise of repression. The world is God’s estate. You do not make experiments and then formulate laws with respect to the facts and relations of facts on a section of a man’s estate and yet ignore the fact that every fact and every relation between facts on that estate is precisely what it is because of the plan and governance of the owner and creator of the estate. To be sure you may hold back the truth that it is indeed an estate and thus organized by its owner, but is it possible to understand and know truly the facts in the estate while yet resisting the knowledge about the owner and creator? You will only know the facts “truly” in such a case insofar as you have not thought out ultimate relations. However, if this ultimate relation is denied and/or supplanted by some other ultimate relation, the whole “system” of facts and laws is misconceived and therefore ultimately false. You may indeed represent one section of the estate correctly, but this is in spite of your misconception of the ultimate relation, and indeed, “true” only when considered separate from such ultimate postulates.

Modern science as a whole assumes that what Christianity teaches with respect to nature cannot be true. Experimentation, we are told, needs or presupposes the idea of an open universe. Immanuel Kant’s position with respect to the idea of pure contingency underlies the method of the average non-Christian scientist today. The ideas of creation and of providence as controlling all that comes to pass is therefore assumed to be intolerable. The idea of experiment, we are told, assumes that at the beginning of one’s research one hypothesis is as good as another. If the Christian therefore wants to get a hearing for his ideas of creation and providence he must present them as one hypothesis among many. But how can the Christian do this without betraying his own most basic conviction? His own conviction is to the effect that the possibility of successful scientific procedure depends upon the idea that God through Christ controls whatsoever comes to pass. Nature is orderly because it is the order of God that appears in it. He who does not hold this to be true has not seen nature for what it is. Nature apart from God is, for the Christian, a meaningless term. The non-Christian must tell us how he will make it meaningful apart from God in Christ.

Again, modern science holds not only to the idea of pure contingency or indeterminacy, but also to that of pure determinism. Modern science insists that the order which it discovers cannot be that of a God who wills it to be a certain way. The order of nature, we are told, is what it is because of an impersonal unchangeable regularity.  

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5. A Christian Philosophy Of Nature

When therefore Ramm finds it necessary to discover a Christian philosophy of nature we can only agree with him. When he adds that it is particularly needful for Protestant Christians to have a philosophy of nature that accords with their own religious convictions, we again concur. When, however, we watch him in his pioneering effort to find such a philosophy of nature we are disappointed. He offers nothing in the way of a philosophy of nature that is basically different from a Roman Catholic philosophy of nature. “By a Christian philosophy of nature we mean,” says Ramm, “a broad, comprehensive method and system of the interpretation of Nature receiving its orientation from Christian theology.” But Ramm does not use the Protestant or more particularly the Reformed doctrines of God’s revelation in nature and in man as the presupposition for the possibility of scientific procedure. Ramm does not challenge the modern scientific method based as it is upon the Kantian assumptions of pure contingency and pure formal rationality by means of the Christian scheme of things at all.

Ramm looks back with longing eyes to the synthesis scheme that Thomas Aquinas effects between nature and grace. When Thomas talks about the will of God as being the cause of all things Ramm does not see that in saying this Thomas is still under the control of the potentiality-actuality scheme of Aristotle. God’s will as the cause of all things means for Thomas nothing more than that God’s being participates in the realm of temporal being. Soon Ramm works out an idea of “progressive creation” which does not in any significant sense differ from the Thomistic synthesis of Aristotelian and Christian thought. As he wants a pattern of revelation which has two loci, the objective and the subjective, so Ramm wants a pattern of progressive creation, in which God is the world ground and his spirit, the Holy Spirit, the “innermost thought on Nature.” “Progressive creation is the means whereby God as world ground and the Spirit of God as World Entelechy bring to pass the divine will in Nature.”

Ramm does not clearly set the Christian position with respect to nature as the theater of the revelation of God’s creative and redemptive work over against the position of nature as composed of brute facts ordered by the mind of man as autonomous. Ramm speaks vaguely of “scientists as have a prejudice against teleological thinking.” But the natural man need have no prejudice against teleological thinking such as Aristotle offers him and such as underlies the Roman Catholic philosophy of nature. Wolthuis has no leanings toward the Roman Catholic synthesis. But he too fails to see the basic character of the struggle between modern science and Christianity. He overlooks the all-important fact that God’s revelation in nature was, from the outset, supplemented by Word revelation. Then further he fails to note that the non-believer, as well as the believer, is confronted with the revelation of God. All the facts of this world, says Wolthuis, “are God’s creation and exist for His purpose.” But then, unfortunately, he adds “this is

26 Ibid., p. 102.
28 Ibid., p. 115, 116.
29 Ibid., p. 56.
important information only available to, and recognized by, the Christian, who is required to reckon with it in his science.” If it is available only to the Christian, then the non-Christian cannot be held accountable for not recognizing it.

Of course it is true that the fact that nature is wholly revelational of God is not recognized by the non-believer. But this is because he does not want to recognize it. The fact that nature reveals God is there to be seen as surely as the sun is in the sky. The availability of this fact is present for all men equally. But the sinner resists the truth about himself and nature as created and directed toward God. He resists the truth, which presses in on him, in unrighteousness. He does so when he assumes that the scientific enterprise requires a universe both of change and of determinism.

It is only when we look at nature as actually revealing God and at the sinner as unwilling to see this fact, that the real problem of the relation between science and the Bible appears. The battle is not one primarily of this fact or of that fact. The battle is basically with respect to a philosophy of facts. The non-believer virtually makes a universal negative proposition about God every time he engages in his scientific effort. Even when he thinks teleologically in the way that Aristotle did and proves the existence of a God, he is still assuming that God is not and cannot be the Creator and Redeemer of the world.

6. Modern Philosophy

In all this we have already been dealing with philosophy as well as with science. No one can be a scientist in any intelligible way without at the same time having a philosophy of reality as a whole. Christian apologists often speak of scientism as being objectionable but of science as being innocent with respect to the claims of Christianity. But surely this cannot be the case. Anyone who has a philosophy of nature that is not based upon the presupposition of what the Bible says about nature at the same time has a view of God that is hostile to that which Christianity proclaims. Frequently Christian apologists plead with the scientists for a hearing by saying that they are merely offering something additional to what the scientist himself offers. Science, say these apologists, gives us truth as far as it goes, but it does not include the spiritual aspect of reality in its vision. So Christianity merely asks men to see that they must add the person-to-person or spiritual dimension to that of the impersonal and mechanical. After all, these apologists say, science deals and can deal only with the quantitative aspects of reality. It is faith and faith only that has a vision for spiritual things. And then it is added that science, too, needs to build itself on faith. Did not Aristotle show how all first principles are adopted by faith? The fact that logic applies to reality is something that all men must believe, is it not? So then Christians are only doing what non-Christians do. Both put faith in something.

In this whole approach it is forgotten that the question is not one of having or not having faith but of having the proper faith. Of course all men start from faith. But the point is that the non-Christian starts from faith in man as not a creature of God and as not a sinner before God, while the Christian starts with his faith in Christ. It is the object of faith that gives meaning to the faith one professes. There are only two alternatives. The object of the non-Christian’s faith is man as autonomous, while the object of the Christian’s faith is God as revealed in Christ and in Christ as revealed in Scripture.
“There is no person on earth,” says Wolthuis, “who lives without faith of some sort.”

This is true, but it is not true that therefore the Christian’s faith stands on a par with the non-Christian’s faith as far as validity is concerned. It is the Christian’s faith in God as revealed in Christ that is true faith. It alone gives an intelligible foundation to scientific procedure. The Christian and the non-Christian position are never to be thought of as intellectually on a par with one another. The Christian’s faith is not a blind faith, as is the faith of the non-Christian. The non-Christian scientist may and does believe in the presence of order, but he has no warrant for doing so: His assumed philosophy of chance points to the opposite. The Christian’s position is not merely just as good as the non-Christian’s position. Christianity is the only position that does not per se take away the very foundation for intelligible scientific and philosophical procedure. Christianity is the only “rational” faith! Modern philosophy, like modern science, is based upon the man-centered approach of Kant, and Kant’s philosophy is merely a good modern philosophical expression of the self-dependence exhibited in Paradise in the Fall. For Kant the world offers man an infinite, indeterminate manifold of possible experience. That is to say, the world must not be thought of as created by God, as controlled by the Spirit of Providence and as redeemed by Christ. Then, secondly, man is assumed not to be a creature made in God’s image but to be self-existing. This self-existing and therefore self-sufficient and self-defining man imposes the categories of his understanding on the raw stuff of experience. By thinking of the human mind as the source of the ordering of the universe Kant thinks he has saved science and made room for religion. According to Kant science was impossible on either an empiricist or a rationalist basis. On an empiricist basis there was nothing but an infinity of unrelated facts, of things in themselves. The mind had to think of order as being operative in these things in themselves but could not account for this order. Man’s mind just received what came to it and could not in any sense control the nature of what it received. For empiricism the world about man was like an infinity of beads no two of which could be strung as far as man’s knowledge of the world was concerned. On the other hand, in rationalism the world was conceived of as one absolute being in which all the facts are rationally related but as rationally related in independence of the knowledge or activity of man. So the world was again unknown to man. Besides, how could there be any rational order unless all were reduced to order in the way that Parmenides had reduced all to order? That is to say, the assumption of the rationalist procedure was like the assumption of Parmenides, namely, that there had to be individuation by complete description. But man cannot individuate by complete description, only God can do that but a God who individuates by complete description is wholly beyond the understanding of man. Man could have no univocal knowledge of such a God at all.

Kant himself says that on the basis of empiricism we can have only brute facts and more brute facts but no systematic relation between them. He adds that on the basis of rationalism we would have only order, but it would be merely the idea of order without any ordering of facts. Kant sought to remedy the situation by means of his Copernican revolution. No one had ever conceived the idea that the mind itself was doing the ordering even as it was doing the observing. Facts cannot be observed, argues Kant, except they are observed as being incorporated into systemic arrangement. So it is the

mind itself that imposes its categories of substance and causality upon nature even as it observes nature. Nature means causally related facts. And causally related facts are brute facts observed and arranged by the mind of man.

Thus the whole knowledge transaction with respect to nature is complete without any reference to God. More than that, God must not interfere with this knowledge process. If he does interfere, there is no more knowledge, properly speaking.

Yes, indeed, Kant thinks that he has made room for faith even as he has limited science. For by thinking of man as the source of the ordering process of nature, man’s knowledge is limited to what he does thus order. Through the intuition of time and space man gets the stuff of his experience. By the imposition of his categories man supplies the order in this stuff. Therefore the knowledge that results as the product of this activity of the mind upon the raw stuff of experience by definition excludes knowledge of God and of anything that God might do directly in relation to nature. A God who has created and who by his providence controls nature, and a Christ who as the Son of God redeems nature, may be believed in if people wish. But they must not say that they know or can know any such thing. For knowledge is, by definition, limited to the field of science, to the field of phenomena. The world of religion is the world of the wholly other, of the wholly unknown and unknowable.

To be sure, Kant does speak of having a practical knowledge of God. But this practical knowledge is a faith-construct. It is a limiting notion. As men we have no theoretical, that is, real conceptual knowledge of God. Such real knowledge is, argues Kant, limited to the space-time world. For that very reason everybody is free to believe what he wishes about that other world. Nobody can interfere with him in that field. All religious statements are in principle non-cognitive statements.

The point to note now is that Kant does interfere with the Christian’s claim to have knowledge of God and of his relation to the world. The presupposition of the Christian view of men and things is that the world is created by the triune God and redeemed by him. Man is, on this view, nothing like what Kant says he is. Man is, on this view, a creature made in the image of God. The world is created by God. The order in this world is there primarily because of the activity of God in relation to it. Thus, as created, every fact of the world is what it is as a revelation of the activity of the triune God. Man, in the nature of the case, knows God, the world, and himself, in the very first and in every succeeding act of his consciousness.

Moreover, as earlier noted, from the beginning God was in communication with man with respect to his place and duty in the world. Nature was revelational. However, for nature to be effectively revelational, supernatural thought communication was conjoined with it from the start. This need for thought communication did not spell a defect in nature. It only indicated that it was not by itself complete. A hand cannot operate efficiently except there be an eye.

According to Christianity, mankind remains responsible for the revelation of God as given to man from the beginning. Nature is, even after the fall, clearly revelational of God. God’s eternal power and divinity should be seen in nature by all men. The revelation of God in roan and in the world is objectively clear. As such it is available to all men. All men are morally bound to react properly to this revelation of God. The fact that man never could, even before the fall, read nature properly, without supernatural thought communication, does not reduce man’s responsibility for reacting in the way of
love and obedience to God’s revelation. Fallen man is still responsible for that original supernatural revelation given in conjunction with God’s revelation in the facts of nature surrounding man; and in conjunction with God’s revelation in the consciousness of man.

Still further, Paul says that because of man’s original sin the curse of God rests upon nature. Therefore every man has displayed clearly before him the fact that nature is created and directed by God and writhing under the curse of God for the sin of man. Every man, though sinful, has in his own constitution the revelation of God, in the fact that he is made in the image of God. And every man has in his own constitution the revelation of the wrath of God for his sin (Rom 5:12 ff).

7. No Natural Theology

It is of basic importance that what has just been said about God’s revelation in the world of nature and of man be not confused with what is called natural theology. Natural theology is the result of the interpretative reaction that sinful man has given to the revelation of God to him in the created world. When we speak of revelation in nature we speak of an act of God directed manward. When we speak of natural theology we speak of a reaction on the part of man directed Godward. This distinction is all important for a proper exegesis of Romans one.
Chapter 7: Evangelical Approaches To The Defense Of Scripture

If then the Christian is to fulfill his calling he must set the Christian approach to men and things over against that of modern science, philosophy, and theology. If he does not do so in all three fields he cannot effectively do so in any, one of these fields. We have seen how the Roman Catholic and the Arminian interpretation of the triune God and his relation to the word is unable to offer a basic challenge to modern science, modern philosophy and modern theology. Both Romanists and Arminians ascribe a measure of autonomy to man. They think of man as, to some extent, metaphysically free. They think that man does not always and in every sense act within the counsel of God as this counsel controls whatsoever comes to pass in the world. It goes without saying that on a Roman Catholic and Arminian foundation, no justice can be done to the idea of Christ speaking in Scripture as the absolutely authoritative and primary revelation of God to sinful man. We have earlier seen that Roman Catholicism asserts the infallibility of Scripture but that it also asserts belief in the infallibility of tradition and of the church in declaring the meaning of Scripture. Placing tradition and the church on a par with Scripture, in the nature of the case, cancels out the authority of Scripture in the proper sense of the term. The Arminian position too, to the extent that it holds to human autonomy, can give only a formal adherence to the authority of Christ speaking in Scripture.

1. B. B. Warfield

Neither the Roman Catholic nor the Arminian therefore holds to an organic view of Scripture such as was set forth earlier on the basis of Bavinck and Warfield’s works. Unfortunately, however, even Warfield himself, after having perhaps done more than anyone else in modern times to set forth the true view of Scripture, reverts to what is virtually an Arminian view of its defense.

Warfield says that even though the Bible teaches its own infallible and plenary inspiration, he does not want to start the truth of Christian teaching and the foundations of the faith upon the doctrine of plenary inspiration, or upon any doctrine of inspiration whatever.¹

“These rest,” says Warfield, “upon the previous-fact of revelation.” And, “it is important to keep ourselves reminded that the supernatural origin and contents of Christianity, not only may be vindicated apart from any question of inspiration of the record but, in point of fact, always are vindicated prior to any question as to the inspiration of their record. We cannot raise the question whether God has given us an absolutely trustworthy record of the supernatural facts and teachings of Christianity, before we are assured that there are supernatural facts and teachings to be recorded. The fact that Christianity is a supernatural religion and the nature of Christianity as a

supernatural religion, are matters of history; and are independent of any, and every, theory of inspiration.”

We stop here to remark that this appeal to revelation as previous to inspiration is out of accord with Warfield’s own contention that inspiration is an aspect of revelation. Warfield, as well as Bavinck has been at pains to interrelate the idea of inspiration with that of revelation. It is therefore quite impossible to take the organism of revelation apart and to defend one part of it before the other.

Moreover, according to Warfield himself, we could not know the Christ for what he is except he himself tell us. It is the Word of Christ, as the Word of God, that lies before us in Scripture. Says Warfield, “The Biblical writers do not conceive of the Scriptures as a human product breathed into by the Divine Spirit, and thus heightened in its qualities or endowed with new qualities; but as a Divine product produced through the instrumentality of men.” These two points of view, argues Warfield, “look at the production of Scripture from distinct points of view—the human and the Divine; and the involved mental attitudes toward the origin of Scripture are very diverse.”

Thus the Scripture is a Divine book, created by the divine energy and speaking in its every part with Divine authority directly to the heart of the readers. This fact is witnessed by Christ and the sacred writers to whom we owe the New Testament.

If then the whole of Scripture in all its parts and in all its elements, down to the least minutiae, in form of expression as well as in substance of teaching, is from God, why are we to start our claim with respect to it by speaking of it as at first blush being merely words of men? Is it because the doctrine of inspiration, as itself the climax of the redemptive revelation of God, is now in straits because of modern investigation and scholarship? This cannot be. Warfield will have none of concessive methods such as Charles Gore advocated in his day. Warfield refuses to listen to those who would reject the “whole Reformed doctrine of the Scripture in favor of a more ‘Catholic’ view which will look upon some of the history recorded in the Bible as only ‘fairly trustworthy’ …” A concessionalistic view with respect to the Reformed or organic view of Scripture results, argues Warfield, in the “proclamation of an indefinite gospel eked out by an appeal to the Church and a scholastic hierarchy.…”

How can we avoid losing what the Reformation won for the Church of Christ if we return to a view of Scripture that is similar to Romanism? “What, indeed, would the church be—what would we, as Christian men, be—without our inspired Bible?” “Let it suffice to say that to a plenarily inspired Bible, humbly trusted as such, we actually, and as a matter of fact, owe all that has blessed our lives with hopes of an immortality of bliss, and with the present fruition of the love of God in Christ.”

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2 Idem.
3 Ibid., p. 153.
5 Ibid., p. 169.
6 Ibid., p. 140.
7 Ibid., p. 171.
8 Ibid., p. 125.
9 Ibid., p. 126.
For all this stress upon the plenary inspiration of Scriptures as the work of the Holy Spirit making the Scriptures the very Word of God, Warfield wants the Christian apologist to start speaking of them at first as merely the records of men. Says Warfield, “Inspiration is not the most fundamental of Christian doctrines, nor even the first thing we prove about the Scriptures. It is the last and crowning fact as to the Scriptures. These we first prove authentic, historically credible, generally trustworthy, before we prove them inspired. And the proof of their authenticity … would give us a firm basis for Christianity prior to any knowledge on our part of their inspiration, and apart indeed from the existence of inspiration.”

Warfield’s purpose in thus falling back upon the general trustworthiness of the New Testament as historical records is, as noted, in the interest of convincing the unbeliever of the revelation and inspiration of God in Christ. The New Testament writers themselves bear witness to the fact of inspiration. They are the “prime witnesses of the fact and nature of their inspiration.” But in order to escape the charge that in saying this we are reasoning in a “vicious circle,” argues Warfield, “We do not assume inspiration in order to prove inspiration. We do not assume inspiration. We assume only honesty and sobriety. If a sober and honest writer claims to be inspired by God, then here, at least, is a phenomenon to be accounted for.”

It is a phenomenon, argues Warfield, that criticism cannot account for the New Testament writers who, being sober and honest men, claim inspiration. How can criticism disprove their claim? Warfield answers this by saying, “in order, therefore, to shake this doctrine, biblical criticism must show: either that the New Testament writers do not claim inspiration; or, that this claim was rejected by the contemporary church; or, that it is palpably negatived by the fact that the books containing it are forgeries; or, equally clearly negatived by the fact that they contain along with the claim, errors of fact or contradictions of statement. The important question before us today, then, is: Has biblical criticism proved any one of these positions?”

The flaw in this whole approach of Warfield’s to the defense of the Bible as the inspired Word of God is that its philosophy of history is the opposite of that which the Bible, according to Warfield himself, teaches. If history is not what it is because of its creation and redemption by the triune God, there could not be any foundation on which man could stand in order either to affirm or deny the truth about anything. The whole of Warfield’s conviction with respect to the Bible is to the effect that unless it is the Word of God there is no light or life for men. On Warfield’s view of the Bible all the phenomena within and about it are what they are because God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are what they are and have done what they have done. To be sure, we need not and must not say, “First the inspired Bible and secondly the divine Christ.” We must rather take the Bible simultaneously with Christ and with God as its author. It is God who is speaking through Christ and his Spirit in the Bible. When we have spoken to the President, we do not take a record of the voice of the President to those who have never

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11 Ibid., p. 423.
12 Ibid., p. 423.
heard the voice of the President, in order to have them judge whether it is the voice of the President!

How could unbelievers, unbelievers just because they have already rejected God’s revelation in the universe about them and within them by a philosophy of chance and of human autonomy, ever concede that the claims of the New Testament writers with respect to their inspiration by God is true? The criterion they employ will compel them to deny it. It is their criterion that must be shown to involve a metaphysics of chance. Then, if the Spirit opens their eyes, they will see the truth.

To be sure, if Warfield’s appeal to the natural man were of an *ad hominem* nature, then it would be well. Christ does ask the natural man to judge with respect to the truth of his claims. But then he asks them to admit that their own wisdom has been made foolishness with God. Only the Christian theory of knowledge, based as it is upon the absolute authority of the Word of God speaking in Scripture, makes communication of any sort possible anywhere between men. Without this presupposition men would have no integrated selves and the world would be a vacuum. Without this presupposition of the Christian theory of being there would be no defensible position with respect to the relation of men and things. Neither men nor things would have discernible identity. There would be no science and no philosophy or theology, for there would be no order. History would be utterly unintelligible. Finally, without the presupposition of the Christian theory of morality there would be no intelligible view of the difference between good and evil. Why should any action be thought to be better than any other except on the supposition that it is or is not what God approves or disapproves? Except on the Christian basis there is no intelligible distinction between good and evil.

If Warfield had used this type of apologetic, he would have been able to defend his high view of Scripture against criticism. If science comes with facts that are supposedly inconsistent with such a high view, Warfield could ask his critics to show him the epistemological foundation on which they stand when they raise their objection. Can they, on their foundation, even have any such thing as an intelligible philosophy of fact? Why did Warfield allow that those who are in fact drowning next to the ship on which he is sailing can rightly determine whether the ship is seaworthy? If those who raise objection to his high view of Scripture speak of contradictions that are found in it, he should ask them to show him the foundation in reality on which their philosophy of logic rests. If they answer that logic is logic and has nothing to do with reality, he can ignore what they say. If they say that the law of contradiction is not merely a formal law but determines what is possible or impossible in reality, he can show that only the truth of Christianity furnishes a foundation for the laws of logic. On any non-Christian basis, logic, to be effective in relation to reality, must reduce this reality to blank identity. The philosophy of Parmenides illustrates this fact. Logic that does not rest upon the presupposition of the creation of the laws of reality in general and of human thought in particular is a pure form without content. To talk about the law of contradiction without asking with respect to the metaphysical foundation upon which it rests is to talk in the air.

We cease our discussion of Warfield’s view at this point. Its importance for us today lies in the fact that it has been the starting point for the approach to Scripture by many of its defenders today. Yet it is out of accord with the view of Scripture entertained by Warfield himself.
2. Gordon H. Clark

Dr. Gordon H. Clark is a firm believer in and a valiant defender of the theology of the Calvinistic Reformation and, more particularly, of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. For him truth is true and the good is good because God says that they are.

One would think then that Clark would have an organic view of the Scripture and its inspiration such as Warfield and Bavinck have. But this is not the case. Instead of integrating God’s general revelation in the created world with his supernatural revelation given by thought and word communication, Clark sets these over against one another.

That this is the case is apparent from his discussion of the “inadequacy of general revelation.” Reformed theologians have, of course, spoken of the inadequacy of general revelation. By this they meant first that it is inadequate for men as sinners. Sinners need God’s revelation of grace in Christ and only Christ himself reveals his work of grace in Scripture. By this they meant, secondly, that general revelation was inadequate even for men as creatures. God therefore spoke to Adam directly even before the Fall, to instruct him with respect to the use he should make of the facts of the created world. Man never knew anything without the interaction of fact and word revelation upon him. His self-awareness is unintelligible without this interaction. But both of these points with respect to the inadequacy of general revelation do not, for Reformed theologians such as Bavinck and Warfield, indicate any lack of clarity in this revelation. Quite the contrary. These theologians follow Calvin as Calvin follows Paul when he asserts that “the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity” (Rom 1:20).

Reflecting this teaching of the apostle Paul, Calvin says: “His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse.”

Men ought to see that God is the creator of the world. God did not leave himself without a witness in that he gave them “from heaven rain and fruitful seasons” (Acts 14:17).

Men ought to see that God displays his character in the created world even in malam partem. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold down the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). God cursed the ground because of the sin of man. Paul says that the whole creation “groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” Because of man’s sin creation is “under the bondage of corruption” (Rom 8:21–22). Men ought to see this too. It is clearly there to be seen. As time went on, after the fall of Adam, and sinful men became exceeding sinful, God revealed his wrath all the more by giving them up “unto vile passions” (Rom 1:26).

Men ought to read God’s general revelation in the light of the supernatural revelation originally given to Adam as their representative. General revelation from the beginning, says Paul, was meant to be read in the light of God’s word-communication to man. The fact that originally general revelation needed supernatural revelation does not mean that it lacked clarity. To do their work effectively your hands and feet need eyes to direct them and these eyes, in turn, need the light of day to do their work. But the need of light does

14 *Institutes*, Bk. 1, Ch. 5.1.
not spell any inherent defect in the eyes as the need of eyes does not spell any inherent
defect in hands and feet.

The whole teaching of Paul and of Calvin as well as of later Reformed theologians,
following Paul, is to the effect that all men, since the fall, ought to see the world as it
really is. The world, and therefore every fact in it, is actually created by God and directed
by his redemptive providence. All the world, and therefore every fact in it, is actually
under the curse of God because of the sin of man. Man was never expected to read his
mandate with respect to his created environment from this environment as such. Man was
never alone with natural or general revelation by itself. We cannot see the earth
producing its abundance apart from the heat and the light of the sun. But this fact does
not detract from the capacity of the earth to show its ability to do this thing. So with
respect to God’s general revelation. Man ought to see that it can and does function both
in bonam and in malam partem because of God’s supernatural thought communication to
man with respect to it.

Now Clark’s position with respect to Scripture and the defense of its teaching is
defective because he does not thus integrate general revelation with special revelation.

Clark does, indeed, relate original pre-redemptive supernatural revelation to general
revelation. But he fails to relate them in an organic, supplemental fashion.

“When Adam was created and placed in the Garden of Eden,” says Clark, “he did not
know what to do. Nor would a study of the Garden have led to any necessary conclusion.
His duty was imposed on him by a special divine revelation. Thus moral norms,
commands and prohibitions were established by a special and not a general revelation.”

It is thus that Clark destroys the organic, supplemental view of the relation of special
to general revelation. Here is Adam, as first created. He does not know what to do. He
looks about him. Adam does not see nature as God’s revelation to him. He looks within.
Though he is the image-bearer of God, Adam does not see himself as such. He does not
know what to do with respect to himself any more than with respect to the world about
him.

This entire approach of Clark’s overlooks the fact that from the beginning God spoke
to man. There never was a second of time when Adam did not know what to do. There
never was a time when he was confronted with the created universe by itself. It is true
that if Adam had, at any time, been left to react to God’s revelation in nature and to his
own constitution without the benefit of supernatural thought and word communication, he
would not have known what to do. But such a condition never did exist. God’s revelation
through man’s own constitution must therefore be said to speak of God’s attributes to
man, in conjunction with supernatural revelation. This was true from the beginning.

It is only if we thus maintain the original organic relation of natural to supernatural
revelation that we can maintain Paul’s teaching with respect to natural revelation after the
Fall. Paul says that nature and human nature do manifest the presence of God. To be sure,
nature and human nature do not manifest the grace of God. To be sure, nature and human
nature were never meant by themselves to be a sufficient revelation of God to man. For
all that, nature and human nature have always been clearly manifestory of God’s

15 “Special Divine Revelation as Rational” in Revelation and the Bible, ed. Carl F. H.
Henry, p. 29.
presence. It has been sufficient and clear when seen in relation to supernatural revelation, and it was, from the beginning, meant to be seen in this connection.

It is this view of nature and of human nature that is the necessary presupposition of redemptive-supernatural revelation as given in Scripture. The whole of supernatural redemptive revelation is given in conjunction with the revelation of God in nature and in human nature. Supernatural redemptive revelation is integrated with God’s revelation in nature and in human nature. Supernatural revelation is not seen for what it is unless it is seen as thus integrated with revelation in the created universe.

It is impossible to follow Paul’s teaching with respect to the guilt of sinners in respect to the revelation of God in the universe unless one begins his whole approach to the question of revelation by thinking of natural and supernatural revelation as thus organically related. Paul holds the sinner responsible for not seeing the presence of God’s attributes in nature and in himself. But Paul does this because he thinks of man as inherently a covenantal being. The sinner is a covenant breaker in and with Adam. Every fact that faces man, through his own constitution as well as through his environment, puts him face to face with God. He is therefore to handle every fact with which he deals to the glory of God. As a scientist he is to use such hypotheses and such only as are based upon the presupposition that every fact is what it is because of the place that it occupies in the plan of God. His scientific method is truly scientific and truly productive of the purpose for which it is robe used only if it is used on the presupposition that man knows nature properly now, and always knew nature properly, only in conjunction with God’s speech to him about it. Originally man’s very self-awareness required the organically revelational environment that comes from the interaction of word and fact revelation. After the fail, supernatural redemptive revelation must supply what the original word-revelation supplied to Adam.

Precisely here we discover the difference between the Reformed and the Roman Catholic-Arminian view of revelation in general. On the Reformed view, all created reality is covenantally revelational. The facts of man’s created environment are what they are as the field of operation for the covenantal reaction of man to God. Man, made in the image of God, is either covenantally obedient or covenantally disobedient in all of his reactions to all of the facts of God’s revelational material. The sinner is holding down the truth in unrighteousness when, in his “scientific method,” he assumes the pure non-relatedness of the facts with which he deals and when he applies hypotheses that assume that the facts could possibly be anything other than revelational of God.

God’s revelation which appears to all men in all the facts which they face is creative-redemptive. It is the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who is covenantally operative in all of the facts of the world. If man does not recognize this creative-redemptive character of all the facts of the universe, he resists the truth in unrighteousness. If man does not see that all the facts are what they are in relation to one another because of the creative-redemptive program of the triune God through them, he abides under the wrath of God.

The Roman Catholic holds to no such view. Because of its use of Aristotelian or Greek methodology, Roman Catholicism does not think of man’s self-awareness as covenantal and of “nature” as, from the beginning, revealing God, in conjunction with God’s word-revelation in paradise. The facts of nature are not then seen to be what they are as revelational of God.
It is also of the essence of the modern approach to the field of science that the facts are assumed to be non-revelational of God in the sense discussed. It is therefore the responsibility of Christians who are scientists to call other men who are also scientists, to repentance for their assumption of neutrality with respect to the facts with which they deal in the laboratory. The non-believing scientist is actively engaged in breaking God’s covenant requirements when he says that he is simply following the facts wheresoever they may lead him. This is as though someone would dig up a piece of ground on the White House lawn and then not only act greatly surprised when the guard taps him on the shoulder and asks him for his permit to do what he is doing, but insist on his right to do what he is doing without any permit at all. If I find a red heifer with the letters LBJ on it, on the LBJ ranch in Texas, I will grant that I need a permit to move it about. If I enter through the gate of the ranch at all, I already know that every fact I will meet within the confines of the ranch belongs to LBJ.

Now Clark, frankly and outspokenly committed to the Reformed faith though he is, fails to thus challenge the unbeliever to show his permit. He does not tell the unbelieving scientist that nature clearly reveals the ownership of God the creator-redeemer. Clark simply gives up asking the natural man to recognize the revelational character of the field of facts in which he makes his research. Clark says simply that science “must not be regarded as cognitive.”

Clark thinks that by thus speaking of science as non-cognitive he at least makes room for the Christian religion. But then he makes room for religion in the way that the White House guard might make room for LBJ by asking the intruder mentioned above to restrict his activity to a certain small corner of the rose garden. Graciously accepting this arrangement, the illegitimate ground-digger soon digs tunnels underneath the White House itself, its collapse being the inevitable issue. After all, if the ground-digger claims to have the right to dig at one point on the White House lawn, he will at last claim the right to dig wherever he pleases, he will not only claim the right to dig wherever he pleases, but he will claim that he simply must dig up the whole ground to accomplish his purpose. After all, he wants to replace the White House with a building of his own.

Having granted this sort of thing, Clark is driven to the position of having to beg for permission to have a place alongside the ground-digger’s present operations for his own religious structure of Calvinism. He thinks he is very bold in claiming the right to build his Calvinistic structure alongside that of the anti-Christian ground-digger. He argues vigorously against those who claim that “all truth is to be obtained by one method, the method of science.”

And this is precisely what the modern neo-Protestant does when in the name of Kant, he claims room for faith as a necessary supplement to an autonomous science. Clark certainly does not want thus to beg for mercy and for permission to add his Calvinism to modern phenomenalist science. Yet he cannot, without retracing his steps, escape falling into the trap of the ethical dualism of modern religious thought.

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16 The Philosophy Of Science And Belief In God, Nutley, 1964, p. 93.
A. Can I Trust My Bible?

We ask now what implication Clark’s view of the non-cognitive character of science has on his way of defending the Bible and what the Bible teaches about the triune God and his relation to the world.

“How May I Know the Bible Is Inspired?” is the title of a chapter Clark contributes to a Symposium under the title, *Can I Trust My Bible?* In line with Warfield’s approach, Clark wants first to establish the question of the truth of the Bible before he discusses its inspiration. This in itself commits him, as it did Warfield, to a Roman Catholic-Arminian type of apologetics. It commits him to the idea that the natural man can quite correctly interpret nature and the nature of man up to a certain point in terms of his own principles. It commits him to holding some such position as Butler held when he said that the deists and he had in common their interpretation of the course and constitution of nature. The only difference there is between him and the deists, argues Butler, pertains to that which is beyond nature.

Now Clark shares the operational view of nature with the non-Christian scientist. Butler still claimed to be able to prove the possibility and probable truth of the Christian teaching with respect to Christ and his relation to nature. But Clark cannot rightfully claim anything in the way of superiority of the Christian teachings with respect to nature over other views. If science is non-cognitive, that is the end of all argument. For that is to say that nature does not clearly reveal the power and divinity of God.

Yet Clark claims that the truth of Christianity can, at least to some extent, be established by an appeal to the facts of nature. Says Clark: “Some of the evidence that the Bible is true is presented in other chapters of this book. Archaeological and historical research has corroborated Biblical history in numerous instances. This material will here be assumed.”

Clark himself deals with the “logical support” for the claim that the Bible is true. The “attempt to show the Bible’s logical consistency is,” says Clark, “the best method of defending inspiration.” “Is there then,” he adds, “any proposition which the believer and the unbeliever will both accept without proof?” “In times past,” Clark continues, “there have been areas of agreement. Non Christians would admit that God exists. During the Reformation the truthfulness of the Scripture was so widely taken for granted that the evidences seemed to furnish conclusive proof to any normal mind. But this situation no longer exists. Not only do most people reject the truthfulness of the Bible, but many reject also the belief in God.”

As the situation is now, “the doctrine of inspiration, like every other Christian doctrine, cannot be demonstrated to the satisfaction of a clear thinking unbeliever.” However, we can, as believers, show that the Bible “is logically consistent.” The unbeliever must needs regard this fact to be a “most remarkable accident.”

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19 Ibid., p. 10.
20 Ibid., p. 23.
21 Ibid., p. 23.
22 Ibid., pp. 23, 24.
23 Ibid., p. 24.
more likely that a single, superintending mind could produce this result than that it just
happened accidentally. Logical consistency therefore is evidence for inspiration; but it is
not demonstration. Strange accidents do indeed occur, and no proof is forthcoming that
the Bible is not such an accident, unlikely perhaps, but still possible.”

The following points must be noted with respect to this argument. We must (a)
remember that, according to Clark, the unbeliever does justice to nature if he says that its
laws are merely operational and not revelatory of God’s attributes at all. This excludes
the possibility of making any claim even for the more probable truthfulness for the claim
that nature is the work of God’s creative-redemptive act than for the view that it has come
into existence by chance.

Then (b) Clark asserts that non-believers have sometimes agreed with believers in
saying that God exists. But this is only formally true. The content of the word God, the
meaning of the word God always differs radically between the Christian and the non-
Christian. The same holds for the idea that unbelievers have sometimes held to the
“truthfulness of the Scripture.” When Clark agrees with the unbeliever on the merely
operational view of nature, he virtually asserts that the unbeliever and the believer may
still believe in the same God. But then this time the unbeliever is ahead in the game. He
has maneuvered Clark into a virtual admission that the triune God is not clearly operative
in the space-time world. How can Clark, in view of all this, consistently assert that the
Bible is “logically consistent” in what it teaches? Does the Bible teach what Clark, the
Calvinist, believes, namely, that God controls whatsoever comes to pass, and at the same
time teach that the Bible, teaching this very fact, might have appeared in the world as an
accident?

“To deny that God exists is as much a self-contradiction,” says Clark, “as to deny the
geometrical theorem.” Then with respect to the general content of biblical teaching,
Clark adds, “if the Biblical doctrines are self-consistent, they have met the only
legitimate test of reason. This test of logic is precisely the requirement that a set of
propositions be meaningful, whether spoken by God or man. And if propositions have no
meaning, obviously they reveal nothing.” “Logical consistency” is not an “external test
of Scripture.” It is, rather, “exemplified in the Scripture; and thus the Scripture can be a
meaningful revelation to the rational mind of man.” So then, it is “the rational mind of
man,” i.e., the rational mind of the unbeliever who determines what propositions made by
God in Christ, have meaning. If God wants to convey meaning to man, he must speak
according to the requirements of the law of contradiction as the natural man conceives of
this law. And the natural man conceives of this law as operating in a non-created, or
chance-controlled universe. The natural man today may follow Aristotle’s example and
think of logical law as somehow, quite incomprehensibly, operative in a universe of
chance. The natural man today may follow Kant, and assert that the laws of thought
constitute the a priori equipment of the mind of man, with which equipment he

24 Ibid., p. 24.
33.
26 Ibid., p. 37.
27 Ibid., p. 39.
constructs order in the purely contingent material that surrounds him. In any case it is the natural man who is virtually granted the right to settle what God can or cannot do.

In any case the natural man thinks of the laws of logic as constituting abstract principles which are operative in correlative relation to the pure, brute factual stuff of experience.

As a Christian thinker, Clark holds that the laws of logic are the equipment of man as made in the image of God. If Clark carried out his Christian conviction consistently he would contend that the law of contradiction can operate properly only in a universe that is what it is because of the plan of God with respect to it. In that case he would not say that the Bible and what it teaches could possibly have appeared as an accident. In that case he would rather have argued that the law of contradiction cannot function in a universe of chance. Then he would have said that the Bible and what it teaches must be presupposed as being what it claims to be, the inspired Word of God, or else there is no significant predication in science, in philosophy or in theology. Then he would not have said that the planets above and the plants below show some of the wisdom and power of God only “to those who already believe that God has created them.” 28 He would then rather have said, with Calvin, following Paul, that all men ought to see God in nature since he is clearly revealed there, but that only he who is given the regenerated heart actually does see this to be the case.

3. Dewey M. Beegle

We turn now to the book of Dewey M. Beegle, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Philadelphia—no date).

Beegle’s book deals directly with the “inspiration” of Scripture, but his discussion of the inspiration of Scripture involves him, as any such discussion must, in a view of God, of man and of the world.

A. The Inductive Method

“It is generally acknowledged that the findings and convictions of the past” says Beegle, “valid as they may have been, cannot be the answer for this generation unless they can withstand reexamination in the light of the new information gained during the last forty years or so. The purpose of this book is to make such a reexamination.” 29

In examining the “new information” of which Beegle speaks, “the most crucial factor is that of method.” 30 What method shall we follow as we examine “all the relevant data both of Biblical and non-Biblical.” 31 Well there are only two main methods available to us. “The human mind is capable of two basic processes of reasoning. One of these is the deductive method. It starts with an assumption or generalization from which are deduced details or particulars. The other approach is the inductive method. It begins with facts or

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28 Revelation and the Bible, p. 28.
29 Ibid., p. 11.
30 Ibid., p. 11.
31 Ibid., p. 9.
details from which a generalization or principle is formulated.” 32 And “if handled properly … the two methods are complementary.” 33 Even so priority must be given to the inductive method. “The history of archaeological activity makes this quite evident.” 34 “Order came out of chaos when priority was given to inductive reasoning, and the same can be said for other realms of science.” 35

How can we apply the inductive method to the question of Scripture? Well in the past Christians thought this was not possible. “In the twentieth century, however, the church has become increasingly aware of the fact that God is the author of all truth and, accordingly, that the priority of induction is equally valid in the study of Scripture.” 36

When Beegle speaks of the “priority of induction” he means that “induction is the first method of reasoning to be employed in the interpretation of the Bible.” 37 And this implies, he says, “the prior act of faith and commitment to God and his revelation.” 38 “Aside from the ultimate authority of the triune God, Scripture is our highest authority and to it we must defer in our search for God’s revelation and will for us. By the inductive method, then, we mean a reverent approach to Scripture that resolves at all costs to let God’s Word speak for itself.” 39

And how is God’s word to speak for itself? We listen to the biblical writers and “regard their statements as primary data for our consideration.” 40 “Every claim that they make for their inspiration is a relevant fact and so is every statement concerning the topic of inspiration.” 41

But if we are to apply the method of induction we must also “reckon with the facts (sometimes referred to as ‘phenomena’) of the Biblical record.” 42 This leads us further to see that we must correlate “historical details noted in Scripture with the non-Biblical data…. A truly Biblical formulation of inspiration must give equal weight to the teaching and to the facts of Scripture.” 43

It is only if we thus deal with the “whole body of Biblical data” and relate these to non-Biblical data that we can avoid onesidedness. 44 We have an extreme instance of onesidedness when men reason as follows: “God is perfect. God has revealed himself in the autographs, therefore the autographs have to be inerrant.” “A closely related reason or this doctrine was to guarantee the value and the authority of extant Bibles. According to this argument, without the presupposition of a perfect original text one could just as well

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32 Ibid., p. 11.
33 Ibid., p. 12.
34 Ibid., p. 12.
36 Ibid., p. 13.
37 Ibid., p. 13.
38 Idem.
39 Idem.
41 Idem.
42 Idem.
44 Idem.
turn to Buddhist or Hindu literature. In brief, even though our Bibles are an approximation of the original manuscripts, their value and authority are ensured, so it is claimed, by the assumption of inerrant autographs.”

But surely, argues Beegle, it is pointless to make any “abstract reference to the autographs,” in proclaiming and defending the ‘good news’ Jesus and the apostles took as their authority the available manuscripts of the Old Testament books. Their Jewish opponents shared this belief, and so the spiritual battle was waged and won on the common ground of the extant copies of Scripture, not on an abstract reference to the autographs.”

To sum up the main points of Beegle’s argument then we note the following:

- Beegle says that he “frankly acknowledges belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture.”
- Jesus, says Beegle, did not make an “abstract appeal” to non-extant autographs. On the contrary Jesus based his appeal on the extant manuscripts of Scripture. It did not trouble him in the least that these manuscripts had errors in them. “The inductive evidence of the New Testament indicates that Jesus taught a strong doctrine of inspiration and authority of Scripture, yet without claiming inerrancy. Once this is recognized, there is no need to discredit Jesus by considering him either a fanatic or a liar.”
- Whenever the Bible speaks of its inspiration we are to take such statements as data for our consideration. More than that we are to take them as primary data. But this does not mean that we must subject ourselves to such statements as finally authoritative. We are not to interpret the “phenomena” of Scripture in the light of such statements as spoken by God. On the contrary we must also reckon with these phenomena of the biblical record. As we look at the two kinds of biblical data, it is up to us to determine what inspiration can mean. It must mean something that is consistent with the errors that we find in the Bible, as it is available to us.
- Included in our consideration of the phenomena of Scripture is their correlation with “non-Biblical data.”
- It is only if we thus follow the inductive method that we can escape reasoning in a circle.
- Surely “… one cannot rule out a legitimate use of human reason aided by the Holy Spirit on the grounds that unaided reason leads to serious error and eventually considers the gospel as foolishness.”
- Reason does not need to appeal to the Holy Spirit for help in order to undertake its proper function in relation to the data of Scripture and their correlation with non-biblical

45 The reference is the present writer’s “Introduction” to B. B. Warfield’s The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, p. 46, note 22.
46 Ibid., p. 23.
47 Ibid., p. 22.
48 Ibid., p. 22.
49 Ibid., p. 13.
50 Ibid., p. 170.
51 Ibid., p. 24.
52 Ibid., p. 63.
53 Ibid., p. 63.
facts. Objectivity is guaranteed by the fact that “the human mind does not create the
evidence which is determinative in the separation of truth from error. All human reason
can do is to function properly with the data that are furnished it. Every human being has
the power and the right to observe the data. The factor of truth or error is settled before
human reason comes on the scene. While reason can function correctly with the evidence
and ascertain the true and the false, it is also possible for it to work improperly and to
come to inaccurate evaluation of the data. In neither case, however, is human reason the
real arbiter of truth or error.” 54

h. It is thus by the inductive method that we can determine “how far human reason
and logic can go in solving the problem of inspiration.” 55

(1) Having escaped the bonds of deductive reasoning we discover that “the Bible does
not teach that unless a thing is totally true it cannot be inspired.” 56

(2) Having escaped the bonds of deductive reasoning we are free to observe the fact
that not all the writers of Scripture “saw eye to eye” in all the doctrinal details related to
eschatology. 57

(3) And “this apparent diversity of doctrinal data is also evident in other areas of
teology, for example, the atonement. There are many views, but none of them
incorporates all the Biblical evidence in its systematic formulation. The clear meaning of
some passages does not fit in with the clear meaning of others.” 58

i. It is thus by following the inductive method that we, together with Jesus, can have a
strong doctrine of inspiration and authority of Scripture, “yet without claiming
inerrancy.” The fact that the clear meaning of some passages dealing with the atonement
does not fit in with the clear meaning of others does not mean that “the Biblical writers
are not trustworthy guides in the area of doctrine.” 59 Beegle agrees with Francis Landey
Patton that the “real question is whether the Bible is true, not whether it is inspired.” 60
With Patton he refuses to “make the in ter ro rem argument that unless you believe in the
inerrancy of the Bible, you have no right to believe in Christ.” 61

j. Our concern with the truth of the Bible refers to what it says with respect to faith
and practice. And “all of Scripture does not pertain to faith and practice.” 62

What the Bible says about faith and practice it says in human language. Human
language “cannot completely express or contain all the factors in human personality.
How much less can it do so with the wider scope of divine personality.” 63 Therefore
though “the Biblical writers shared unequivocally some doctrines that cluster around
Jesus, the incarnate Christ, and the way of salvation,” 64 this common sharing of meaning

54 Ibid., p. 64.
55 Ibid., p. 67.
56 Ibid., p. 67.
57 Ibid., p. 172.
58 Ibid., p. 173.
59 Idem.
60 Ibid., p. 66.
61 Ibid., p. 66.
63 Ibid., p. 174.
64 Ibid., p. 174.
cannot be clearly expressed in language. But this does not in the least interfere with our
sensing of truth in what together they say.

k. Our inductive method helps us to perform a great ecumenical service in our day. It
enables us to see that the difference between traditional and current neo-orthodox
technology “is really one of semantics.” Traditional conservative Christianity endeavors to
protect Scripture by equating revelation and doctrine. It contends that “revelation is a
series of eternal, timeless truths set in propositional form.” On the other hand the basic
assertion of contemporary theologians is that “eternal or propositional truths, like
doctrine, cannot be considered revelation because they cannot save.” We can avoid the
extremes of either position if we point out that “a minimal core of doctrine is basic to
genuine faith.” “God’s ultimate purpose is that all men should enter the realm where
grace, love, and truth become subjective realities.” To be assured of this we need the
minimal of propositional truth mentioned above. “Scripture states, in clear propositional
form, ‘God is love…’ It is in the interest of this universal love of God that Paul makes bold to say that Christ rose from the dead and that our faith is futile
unless we believe this resurrection.

We must therefore “steer a middle course between two extremes.” We do not, with
the extremely orthodox, maintain the need of believing in the inerrancy of Scripture. We
do not maintain with the extremely neo-orthodox theologians that we can maintain a
“genuine faith in Christ while doubting the truth and relevance of much that Scripture
declares.” It is no accident that among the extremists who hold to the necessity of
believing inerrancy there are some so bold as to say that: “It is only the followers of
Calvin who have a theology that fully fits in with this idea of Scripture. Could it be that
their doctrine of inspiration derives from this theology which is read back into
Scripture?”

B. A New View Of The Sovereignty Of God

The points enumerated above all direct our attention to the fact that the reason Beegle
does not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture springs from a philosophy of man and the
world that does not allow for the sovereignty of God as taught in the Reformed
Confessions. Beegle has not ventured on an inductive study of Scripture with respect to
its teachings on God and his relation to man. He might at least have taken a couple of
pages (of the many that he devoted to his expression of a large measure of agreement

65 Ibid., p. 148.
66 Idem.
67 Ibid., p. 151.
68 Ibid., p. 152.
69 Ibid., p. 150.
70 Ibid., p. 154.
71 Ibid., p. 164.
72 Ibid., p. 164.
73 Ibid., p. 165.
74 The last reference is to the present writer’s “Introduction” to Warfield’s work
mentioned earlier.
with the neo-orthodox view of the sovereignty of God rather than with a view such as is presented, e.g., by Charles Hodge in his *Systematic Theology*, in order to discover whether such a view is found in Scripture as the latter advocates. It is a foregone conclusion with Beegle that Scripture cannot teach any such view.

The inductive method as employed by Beegle is, unlike the inductive method of Hodge, based on the assumption that man is, at least to some extent, independent of God. Beegle is quite right in asserting that there is a “high correlation” between the Calvinistic doctrine of the sovereignty of God and the idea of inerrancy. Beegle speaks of the Calvinist or Reformed doctrine of God as being determinist. He does not reject the Reformed doctrine of God because he has inductively shown it to be unscriptural. He rejects it because he cannot logically penetrate the relation of the self-sufficient God who speaks in Scripture and human responsibility. One wonders what Beegle would do with the words of the apostle Peter when he says that the crucifixion of Christ happened by the determinate counsel of God and was, at the same time, performed by the wicked hands of sinful men (Acts 2:23). Beegle cannot do justice to the abundance of evidence in Scripture for the fact that man’s responsibility is always placed within the realm of God’s all-comprehending and overruling providence.

Beegle’s inductive method is therefore based on the assumption that man does not act finally within the providential control and direction of God but operates in a vacuum.

In addition Beegle has not ventured upon an actually inductive analysis of the teaching of Scripture with respect to the question of sin and its influence on the human mind. He has not even given a second look at the assertions of Scripture that the natural man receives not the things of God because they are discerned only by the enlightening of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that no one can come to him except the Father draw him. Jesus said that the Father quickeneth whom he will and that he has given power to the Son to quicken whom he will. Jesus says that we must be born again to see the kingdom of God. Jesus says that men would not come to him because their deeds were evil. Paul said that we are by our sinful nature dead in trespasses and sins. He says that we are by nature at enmity against God and do not want to see the truth about ourselves and our need of redemption.

Beegle ignores all this and many more biblical data and simply starts from the assumption that all men, whether born again or not, are ready to follow the truth so soon as it is presented to them. Beegle argues that the whole question of the blinding and hardening effect of sin upon the person of man, and therefore upon the use that the sinner makes of his intellect or reason, is quite irrelevant to the question as to where the criterion of truth is to be found. He asserts that “the fact of truth or error is settled before human reason comes upon the scene.” Therefore there is no need to fear that the use of the inductive method should lead to subjectivism.

For Beegle, objectivity is found in the facts as they exist, whether or not God controls them. After all, says Beegle, the human mind does not create the evidence. All that “human reason can do is to function properly with the data that are furnished it.” But then for Beegle the same thing is true for God, who has created the facts of the world.

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75 Ibid., p. 167.
76 Ibid., p. 64.
77 Ibid., p. 64.
According to Beegle man must not identify objectivity with anything that God says in the Bible. Man must not, at any point, identify “God says” with “the Bible says.” If the Bible is to be spoken of as the Word of God this means, for Beegle, that in it we have the opinion of God. So far as the “Biblical writers” expressed themselves on the matter of inspiration, their statements are merely data for consideration. Every claim the Bible writers make for “their inspiration is a relevant fact and so is every statement concerning the topic of inspiration.”

To be sure, Beegle adds that statements made by Biblical writers must be taken as primary data. But whatever Beegle may mean when he says that the statement of Scripture with respect to inspiration are primary data, this much is clear: in merely regarding these statements as data which must be correlated with other data, man, to all intents and purposes, becomes the arbiter of truth and error. In spite of what Beegle says about man finding objectivity rather than making it, his view makes man the final arbiter of truth.

**C. The Philosophy Of Methodology**

That such is the case may be readily seen from the following considerations:

(1) Nobody Knows

On such a view as Beegle offers nobody knows objectivity, nobody knows truth. Beegle starts with the idea of abstract truth in order to escape circular reasoning. The only way to escape the process of circular reasoning with respect to the authority of Jesus and the Scriptures, argues Beegle, “is to employ our reason objectively with respect to all the evidence, Biblical or otherwise.” Of course, says Beegle, even when we employ reason objectively with respect to all the evidence we cannot attain “perfect objectivity.” For “in spite of our sincere efforts we bring to the task of interpretation certain unconscious presuppositions that have become a part of us during our formative years.”

What these unconscious presuppositions are Beegle does not say. Certainly they are for him not due to original sin. Beegle has no room for the idea of original sin as understood by Luther or Calvin in his scheme of things.

Having made his concession with respect to the restricting influence of unconscious presuppositions on the interpretative activity of the human mind, Beegle goes on to say that “we are nonetheless dependent on reason; for we must use it to help isolate and set aside, as far as possible, even our restricting assumptions.”

We note now that all of this sorting activity of reason is supposed to pertain to an activity of reason which, as noted, has no effect on the question of objectivity at all for, as noted, “the factor of truth and error is settled before human reason comes on the scene.”

And yet reason must sift and sort in order to find objectivity.

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79 Ibid., p. 63.
80 Ibid., p. 63.
81 Idem.
82 Ibid., p. 64.
But let us forget Beegle’s appeal to an “objective” truth of which nobody knows. A truth that is settled before man meets it, and a truth that is settled before God meets it, is a truth that nobody is able to know. It is a noise in the woods where nobody is present to hear.

Yet we cannot forget this unless we are to stop speaking with Beegle at all. His whole inductive method presupposes such a view of truth. His inductive method is definitely not the inductive method used by such men as Hodge when, presupposing the authority of Scripture as the Word of God, he seeks to compare all the data of revelation in order to ascertain what God the Creator-Redeemer has to say to man. Beegle’s method is avowedly the same as that which modern men in general, whether Christian or not, may and do use for the interpretation of themselves in relation to their environment. This modern inductive method presupposes that facts are not created by God and are not directed by the providential and saving acts of God in Christ.

To be sure, Beegle speaks of “committed Christians” who make a “legitimate use of reason” and are aided by the “Holy Spirit” in doing so. And the inductive procedure of those who are thus led by the Holy Spirit is not, he assures us, to be compared with the idea of underlining and coloring certain passages of Scripture with one color and other passages of Scripture with another color in order to distinguish between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable to them.

We can agree at this point with Beegle when he says that his method does not distinguish between the acceptable and the unacceptable. On the inductive method used by Beegle nothing that God says is acceptable. God cannot be beforehand with man in interpreting any fact because he, as well as man, must discover truth already existent before he meets it. Beegle’s handling of the Scriptures according to his inductive method allows for no acceptance of any passage of Scripture as normative in any sense. On his basis, no man need even trouble to underscore the biblical data with one color and non-biblical data with another color. For all practical purposes he may as well drop his assertion to the effect that statements by biblical writers on any subject are to be used by reason as primary data. On his view, nobody knows truth.

(2) But You Are Wrong And I Am Right

As a matter of fact, of course, the one who asserts that nobody knows truth is thereby virtually asserting that he who claims to know the truth is wrong in thinking so. To say that statements by biblical writers are simply to be taken as data along with other data is to assume that he who makes such a statement knows that such biblical statements cannot be statements made by a God who controls and knows all things. The inductive method used by Beegle implies not only an open universe in which all minds, divine and human, are surrounded by impenetrable mystery but also at the same time, a universe in which the human mind knows that the divine mind must work under the same limitations as does the human mind. And in order to make such a statement the human mind must be beforehand with the divine mind in the claim as to what can and what cannot be known by any mind.

83 Ibid., p. 63.
84 Ibid., p. 63.
Suppose that a Christian believer and a non-Christian together use the inductive method such as Beegle employs: then the non-Christian in effect says to the Christian: Let us be open-minded. This means that we must start with the idea that nobody knows anything about truth as absolute truth. If we are to have a joint and impartial investigation as to whether the statements made by the writers of your Bible are in effect statements made by your God or the Son of your God (and thus the truth in the light of which all other claims to truth are to be judged), we must regard these statements as data available to reason as it seeks for objectivity. You have your hypothesis with respect to these data, and I allow that it may eventually prove to be the truth about them. And you will of course allow that my hypothesis with respect to them may eventually be proved true.

(3) The Open Universe

Let us now consider such statements as are given by the Apostle John as coming from Jesus. The Jews said that Jesus had blasphemed in claiming that he was the Son of God. Jesus said he was the Son of God and that for him to say so was the simple truth of the matter. Jesus appealed to the witness of John, to the witness of the Father and to the witness of the works he had done, the miracles which his Father had given him to do. And he appealed to Scripture. But in the last analysis he asks his listeners to believe his own witness to himself on his own authority. Though I witness of myself, said Jesus, my witness is true because I know whence I came and whither I go. When the apostle John tells us that Jesus is the Word, that the Word was with God and was God, that all things are made by him and consist by him, then he is only witnessing in the name of Christ himself. Jesus as the Son of God alone could identify himself as the Son of God and Son of man, and tell us what he came to do in the world.

If now we are to apply the inductive method to these statements in the way that Beegle applies it, we must accept this self-identification of Jesus as being merely a datum. We must accept it as a primary datum, to be sure, but no more than as a datum, the truth of which is still to be determined by reason.

And what is reason? Reason is an activity of man assumed to be able at least to discover truth and distinguish it from error by testing hypotheses with respect to the facts about the world and reason itself by resources that it has within itself.

Let us suppose then with Beegle that the matter of truth has already been settled before reason comes upon the scene, then the statements made by Jesus must be shown to be in accord with an already existent truth. But this is to deny the authority of Christ who said: I am the way, the truth and the life. Indeed the Christian is allowed to have his faith with respect to these religious matters but he cannot be permitted to give them intellectual standing until after reason has tested them for objectivity.

But they may acquire intellectual respectability. Surely you wish to stand on common ground with your fellowman in your scientific enterprise. If you do, then you must not demand a privileged position for your religious prejudices or, if you prefer, convictions. Immanuel Kant has shown us that we can know nothing about such Absolutes as the man Jesus talked about. Belief in an Absolute can at most be a faith construct.
If Beegle really intends to use the modern inductive method he must not expect that his beliefs with respect to Christ and Scripture can ever be proved to be true. Beegle says that he “acknowledges his genuine belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture.” He adds: “Aside from the ultimate authority of the triune God, Scripture is our highest authority and to it we must defer in our search for God’s revelation and will for us.”

These are the words of Beegle the evangelical believer. But there is also Beegle the would-be inductive scientist. And it is the latter who uses the inductive method in order to prohibit those who would carry on their search for knowledge in the light of the assertion that Christ makes about himself as the Son of God and as the Son of man through whom God reconciles the world unto himself, from proceeding with their work. But Beegle the scientist should then also be willing to give up his own religious convictions with respect to anything that goes beyond the power of inductive reasoning to establish any statement as being true. For the principle of the pure contingency of all spatial-temporal factuality is presupposed and involved in the inductive method to which Beegle makes his appeal.

Moreover, the pure contingency idea of modern inductive methodology requires for its correlative the idea of purely formal universality. Kant speaks of the space-time intuition of man as the potential knower of the facts of science as being the condition of their knowability. Man as knower does not, for Kant, create and control the facts of the world in the way that the God of the Bible creates and controls the facts, but he does supply the original relationships in terms of which the contingent factual continuum becomes differentiated. Kant’s scientist needs raw stuff as furnished to him at the outset of experience but by the time he can speak of any fact as distinguished from any other fact he finds that he himself has given them original differentiation. Kant’s scientist is the original Adam who gives not only to animals but to all things their original names. He forms himself out of the raw stuff of pure contingency and says: Here I am, my name is man. For Kant human self-identification takes the place of the self-identification of Jesus when he says that he knows whence he came and where he is going. Kant says, in effect, that no man can intelligently say any such thing as Jesus said. If Jesus wants us to take his claim seriously as an intellectual assertion, we must class him with the enthusiasts of which the world has had too many. If he merely wants us to consider his statement as a limiting concept, that is quite acceptable, but then we can all say the same thing about ourselves.

What all this amounts to is to say that Beegle the inductive scientist cannot communicate with Beegle the believer. Beegle the believer says that he believes in the authority of God, even of the triune God. Beegle the scientist says, in effect, that we must use the inductive method for all our search for knowledge and that therefore we cannot say anything about such a God. Beegle the believer says that he believes in Scripture as our “highest authority,” but Beegle the scientist says that any statement made by anyone claiming to be an absolute authority must be judged by the truth that appears in the data of the universe in general. Beegle the believer may then, as a last resort, seek to save something of his faith by claiming a privileged position for the data of Scripture, but

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85 Ibid., p. 13.
Beegle the scientist will soon sweep away this privilege with the idea of pure contingency.

Of course, Beegle the man urges us to use the inductive method in the interest of putting our faith with respect to the actuality of the absolute claims of Christianity on a solid and respectable basis. But he is deceiving himself in doing so. If he really wants to follow the modern inductive method he must give up his Christian faith. If on the other hand he wants to maintain his Christian faith, he must carry on his inductive research on the presupposition that it operates in a universe which has unity and diversity in it because it is what it is ultimately by virtue of the creative-redemptive work of Jesus as the Son of God and Son of man.

In particular Beegle the scientist must see that his inductivism presupposes a commitment to a closed universe as well as to an open universe. In fact his method commits him to a universe that is closed and open at the same time. Beegle the inductivist presupposes the absoluteness of a view of reality which, in advance, excludes even the possible truthfulness of the truth claimed by Jesus when he said that he was the Son of God. For Beegle the inductive scientist to say that he has at least from the beginning allowed that the Christian hypothesis may yet be proved to be true, is to be uncritical and is not to realize what is involved in his own methodology. According to modern inductivism there must always be room for new hypotheses. Therefore the claim of any man, say of Jesus, to the idea that his hypothesis is the last possible hypothesis and therewith absolute truth is to forsake the whole idea of the open universe. But by thus insisting that the universe must always be open, the modern inductive method says that this universe can never be shown to be what the Christian believer says that it is, namely, the work of God the Creator-Redeemer. Beegle the scientist is a rationalistic determinist in that by assumption, he in effect makes a universal negative statement to the effect that Jesus cannot be the Son of God. If Jesus were the Son of God in the way that Beegle the believer holds him to be, the world would not be a continuous interaction between a principle of ultimate contingency and a principle of ultimate formal rationality. Beegle the believer knows that the universe is what it is as manifesting the work of the Creator-Redeemer. All the facts of the universe must be seen to be what they are as speaking of this same Creator-Redeemer, or they are not seen for what they are.

Beegle cannot escape choosing between two mutually exclusive authorities. He must hold to the authority of man as ultimately self-understanding and as interpreting Jesus the Christ in terms of his self-understanding, or he must hold to the authority of Jesus as the Son of God as understanding and as interpreting himself and man in terms of his work as Creator- Redeemer.

D. Heilsgeschichte

The discussion just finished with respect to the modern inductive method as committing Christian believers who adopt it in their general search for truth to a denial of their own basic Christian religious convictions may finally be applied more specifically to the question of the authority of Christ and the Scripture, as in terms of Heilsgeschichte. The argument here is identical in nature to that which was carried on above. Beegle has failed to see that the “high correlation” which he finds between a belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and a “determinist” view of reality is a mirage. It is he who has committed
himself to a determinist and rationalist denial not only of inerrancy of, but of the
authority of Christ as speaking of himself as the Son of God and Son of man. In this he
has unwittingly followed the procedure of the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. To be sure, the
Pharisees believed in Moses and the prophets. Beegle believes in Christ and the
Scripture. The Pharisees believed in the authority of Moses. Beegle believes in the
authority of Christ. But believing also in the Living Torah, the Pharisees assumed that
their own growing moral consciousness was the final source of truth and errors. So
Beegle believes also in a method that springs from man as autonomous. The Pharisees
interpreted Moses in such a way that he could not possibly be speaking of Jesus as the
Son of God. Moses said to the Israelites: Behold the Lord your God is one Lord. To the
Pharisees these words of Moses could never refer to a direct manifestation of God in
history. In short, the monotheism of the Pharisees was in practice not different from the
monotheism of the Greeks, such as of Plato or of Aristotle. The monotheism of the
Pharisees did indeed hold that men were related to God but that they were related to God
by participation in the being of God. This was, on their view, inherently and equally true
of all men. There could therefore be no one man, as for instance, Jesus, who would in
distinction from all other men be the same in power and substance with the Father. No
man needed salvation by the work of such a Savior. Men were not sinners. Though they
were not all the children of Abraham according to the flesh, they would all be blessed
through Abraham. The Jews must bring this message of sovereign and universal grace to
all the nations. Thus the promises of God to Abraham, that in him should all the nations
of the world be blessed, would be fulfilled.

Over against this understanding that the Pharisees had of themselves and of the
oracles of God revealed in the Old Testament, Jesus asserts himself as being the one
through whose words alone the words and acts of God in the Old Testament have
meaning. In fact the words and deeds of the Old Testament are what they are because
they are the words of Jesus spoken through his servants the prophets.

Thus the Scripture of the Old Testament grew out of, as they were a part of, the
redemptive-revelation of God in history. And to believe them to be what Jesus believes
them to be is to believe that the world is what Jesus believes it to be. And Jesus knows
whence he came and whither he goes.

Luther’s statement to the effect that only that was Christum treibet has final authority
is true, but then we must realize that, in the widest sense of the term, all things manifest
or speak of Christ. All things are created by Christ. All things are brought to their
proper consummation through the work of Christ.

And what is true of the Old Testament is equally true of the New Testament. Christ
gave the apostles the promise of the Holy Spirit so that they would be enabled to speak
with his authority with respect to the meaning of his work after its completion on earth
revelatory and a part of redemptive history simply because God’s Spirit repeatedly brings
us into contact with the historical and present reality of God in Jesus Christ. The New
Testament is revelation, before everything else, because it itself also in its written form, is

86 Cf. H. N. Ridderbos, The Authority Of The New Testament Scriptures, Grand Rapids,
1963, p. 31.
the proclamation, prepared by the Holy Spirit, of the redemptive events that occurred in the fullness of time.\textsuperscript{87}

To say this is far from using an \textit{ad terrorem} argument to the effect that if you do not believe in Scripture you cannot believe in Christ. Apart from the question that we may not judge the heart of any man as to whether he truly believes in Christ even though he has radically mistaken views with respect to Scripture, there is the fact that the sort of estimation of Scripture that is given by Ridderbos involves primarily a commitment to Christ as Savior through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. He who separates belief in Christ from belief in Scripture loses Christ because Scripture is the word of Christ. “Faith in Christ, as he comes to us in the Scripture, teaches us correctly to distinguish the authority of Scripture in its redemptive historical significance.”\textsuperscript{88} “The words of the apostles are not only human word. They actually are and must be accepted as the very word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13).”\textsuperscript{89}

If Beegle had approached the question of the inerrancy of Scripture by relating it to the whole question of the historical process of redemption in history through the work of Christ, he would have saved himself the basic dualism of his present position. To be sure, he would not have been able to solve all problems. Ridderbos does not claim to have solved all problems. He does not want to close his eyes to any of the discrepancies that are found in the manuscripts of Scripture that we possess. No Reformed writer on the authority and inspiration of Scripture claims to have solved all problems of detail. But Reformed writers do offer, while Beegle does not offer, an intelligible view of the relation between the authority of God in Christ speaking through Scripture and a legitimate scientific methodology with respect to scientific research. This is true because they begin with Christ as the true light, from which all light in any field proceeds.

Says Ridderbos: “The New Testament can be correctly approached by science only when the latter recognizes that the witness of Scripture, in the historical sense that we have developed, is the witness of the Holy Spirit, and any infringement upon this aspect of this witness, on the part of science, results in a faulty appraisal of the object under study and the truly Scientific approach is thereby lost.”

A truly scientific approach to Scripture means, for Ridderbos, the acceptance of the words of Christ as spoken by himself or by his prophets and apostles; they are to be taken to be true on his unqualified authority. Unless we thus accept Christ as the way, the truth and the life, there is nothing but Chaos anywhere. If Beegle the believer had followed an inductive method in his study of Scripture in the way that Ridderbos and many Reform exegetes of Scripture before him have, he would have at the same time discovered a truly inductive method that may be used by science anywhere.

\section*{E. Activist Theology}

In that case Beegle, together with Ridderbos, would have challenged the activist theology of such men as Emil Brunner as not merely undermining belief in Scripture but also in the Christ of Scripture.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[87]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 60.
\item[88]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 61.
\item[89]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 23.
\end{footnotes}
In Christ, says Ridderbos, “is not only redemption, but also the trustworthy communication of redemption.” Again: “Marturia (witnessing) is not only to bear witness to facts, but it also to tell what these facts mean. It is not only a witness to their historicity, but it also tells the meaning, the truth of this historicity.”

The exact opposite of this point of view is represented by the current activist view of the revelation of God to man. To mention only Barth and Brunner; it is obvious that for them there is no directly identifiable revelation of God in history. The idea of a finished revelation of God through Jesus Christ and with it through his word, as is set forth by Ridderbos, is anathema to them. They have a view of reality as a whole in which the idea of contingency is basic and which, therefore, excludes in advance even the possibility of such a revelation of God through Christ in Scriptures as is set forth in the historic Christian creeds.

Ridderbos therefore rightly says that such an activist view of Heilsgeschichte is fatal to a true view of Heilsgeschichte as set forth in Scripture. Beegle, on the other hand, has no eye at all for the basically destructive nature not only of the idea of inerrancy, but of the idea of the historical reality of the finished work of Christ, that the modern activist view of the Christ-Event involves.

Beegle will eventually need to choose between the historic Protestant view of Christ and the Scripture, and the modern existentalist view of Christ and the Scripture. After he has done so, a discussion on the problem of inerrancy may have fruitful results.

4. Stuart Cornelius Hackett

It may prove useful if, at this point, we discuss a further effort on the part of an evangelical Christian to base his faith upon a methodology not involved in or based upon the creative—redemptive work of Christ.

We take for our purpose the book of Dr. Stuart Cornelius Hackett with the title, The Resurrection of Theism (Chicago, 1957).

Hackett’s problem is virtually the same as that of Beegle. He, like Beegle, wants to make Christianity respectable to its cultured despisers. As Beegle takes his inductive method from modern science so Hackett takes his method of Rational empiricism from modern philosophy. Beegle might well seek support for his inductivism from Hackett’s rational empiricism.

Hackett shares Beegle’s intense dislike of Calvinism. In particular Hackett shares Beegle’s intense dislike of the present writer’s extreme Calvinism. Hackett asserts that the sinner is able to “believe the Gospel” without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. Says Hackett: “Thus the presuppositionalist approach lands one ultimately in an extreme Calvinistic atmosphere. If one feels comfortable here let him remain with this God who has created rational men as mere puppets of His sovereignty. But if it seem to be the case that man is under obligation to believe the Gospel and that he must accept Christ as Saviour before the Spirit of God regenerates the heart—if, I say, man is a moral and rational agent confronted with a revelation for the acceptance of which he is morally

90 Ibid., p. 47.
91 Ibid., p. 68.
92 Ibid., p. 72.
and rationally responsible then let the presuppositionalist framework be consigned to the irrationalism that is written so plainly through its structure!" 93

Neither Hackett nor Beegle is directly concerned with an exegetical analysis of the biblical teaching on sin and salvation. Both men simply assume that the idea of man’s metaphysical independence of God and of his ethical ability to will the good as over against the evil is at once both biblical and intelligible. Both men are convinced that Calvinism is, on the one hand, determinist and is, on the other hand, irrationalist. If then we are to present the gospel to non-believers we must, according to both Hackett and Beegle, by all means avoid presenting it in its Calvinist form.

In presenting the gospel to unbelievers, Calvinists have, no way of meeting them on common ground. How could they? It is of the essence of Calvinism to insist that Christians and non-Christians begin all their reasonings from “opposing first principles.” This precludes all intelligible contact between Christians and non-Christians. Says Hackett: “Denial of common ground and the rejection of rational proof for God. It follows at once that if the Christian and the non-Christian part company with the espousal of opposing first principles, there can be no common ground, at the level of philosophical system, in terms of which the two can meet to accept the same implications of the facts with which they are both confronted: there is no area of agreement, therefore, in terms of which the Christian can prove the truth of the Christian God to an unbeliever.” 94 And, as if it were not enough to break off in advance all possible contact between the Christian and the non-Christian, Van Til pursues his enemies in their own field. Van Til says that “the natural man cannot reason correctly on any level of thought. Even logic is not the same for Christian and non-Christian, and the syllogistic process must be followed in frank subordination to the notion of a self-sufficient God! The Christian view may thus contain even what, from a human logical point of view, are self-contradictory propositions.” 95 Hackett grants that it is only Van Til who has shown himself so completely ready “thus to sacrifice reason.” 96 So, for instance, Dr. Gordon H. Clark and Dr. Edward J. Carnell, though they too are presuppositionalists, build their “whole system” “on the universality of logical laws and the rational categories.” 97

Whatever then may be the concessions to rationality on the part of some of the presuppositionalists, it remains true that its most consistent expression involves the complete rejection of all intelligible apologetics.

As over against this extreme or consistent determinism and irrationalism, we must, argues Hackett, start with “a common basis of rationality and experience in terms of which the validity of one’s metaphysical assertion is to be justified. Men—if Christian theism be correct—come to experience with a rational structure of mind which, when consistently applied to that experience, yields the conclusion that God exists as theism construes that existence. On the Christian view experience would be unintelligible if God did not exist: but it is the fact of God’s existence, not the original knowledge of it, which makes the intelligibility of experience possible. Unbelievers, after all, do, like Christians,

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93 Ibid., p. 174.
94 Ibid., p. 160.
95 Ibid., p. 163.
96 Ibid., p. 163.
97 Idem.
apprehend their experience as rational: what they fail to do is to carry through this apprehension to its highest explanation in the affirmation of God’s reality; or else they volitionally reject the conviction they may thus reach by a logical interpretation of the ultimate possibility of existence.”

On Van Til’s view “argument is impossible. Period!” If Christians are to engage in argument with unbelievers there must be a “true common ground.” And this means that “presuppositionalism is repudiated.” I therefore conclude that since metaphysical presuppositionalism is thus entangled in such a mass of self-contradictions, it forms no valid approach to the knowledge of God. And thus perishes the last principal alternative to rational empiricism as a basis for Christian—or any other—apology. With her opponents thus languishing in defeat, reason pushes on to consider experience itself to determine whether God is real!

A. Rational Empiricism

We turn now to look at the Rational Empiricism in terms of which we, as Christians, may, according to Hackett, escape the “mass of self-contradictions” of the most consistent presuppositionalists and establish a genuine apologetic for Christianity.

Turning our eyes away from the determinist-irrationalism of a man like Calvin we at once seek help from Immanuel Kant. “It was in the year 1781 that Immanuel Kant published the Critique Of Pure Reason. In that book, Kant came the first systematic champion of rational empiricism.” With Kant we hold that “knowledge would be impossible on either a purely rational or a purely empirical basis.” Stating his view positively Hackett says: “Rational Empiricism, as I profess it, is the doctrine that knowledge is possible only because it involves the combination of two elements: a mind that comes to experience with a structure of thought in terms of which it is necessarily disposed to understand that experience—this is the a priori or ‘before-experience’ element; data upon which this structure of thought terminates to gain specific knowledge of particulars—this is the a posteriori or ‘after-experience’ element.”

(1) Critical Alteration Of Kant’s Views

While Kant’s epistemology of rational empiricism is thus generally acceptable to Hackett, he proposes some alterations of detail.

We must first, argues Hackett, maintain against Kant that the categories of human thought need not be limited to sensuous content. We must maintain against Kant that

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98 Ibid., p. 167.
99 Ibid., p. 170.
100 Ibid., p. 175.
101 Ibid., p. 175.
102 Ibid., p. 39.
103 Ibid., p. 37.
104 Ibid., p. 37.
105 Ibid., p. 46.
106 Ibid., p. 52.
human knowledge need not be limited to the phenomenal realm. “The categories do give us a knowledge of things-in-themselves.”\textsuperscript{107} We must insist that “even God does not snatch the categories out of the blue.” If “the categories are actually preconditions of intelligibility they are just as essential for divine thought as for human.”\textsuperscript{109} Thus over against such a man as Van Til who urges “that in order to interpret reality correctly, man must work within the propositional revelation of Scripture” and who says that “for the human mind to know any fact truly, it must presuppose the existence of God,”\textsuperscript{109} our task is “simply to show that every knowledge experience does presuppose a synthetic \textit{a priori} factor: that even the opponent of rational empiricism can state his case only on the supposition that it is false.”\textsuperscript{110} “The denial of the synthetic \textit{a priori} is either self-contradictory or meaningless.”\textsuperscript{111}

Here Hackett has reached rock bottom. “Intelligible experience presupposes the synthetic \textit{a priori}.”\textsuperscript{112} “After all, either thought starts with some general principles with which the mind is initially equipped, or it cannot start at all. Thought consists of ideas and judgments, as we have seen: and the very first act of judging presupposes that the thinker has a structure of thought in terms of which subject and predicate may be united according to certain relations.”\textsuperscript{113}

Hackett sets his view over against the position which holds that “one must start with the assumption that the God who has spoken in Scripture is the true God.”\textsuperscript{114}

\section*{(2) “Men Do Build Garages, Don’t They?”}

With Kant, Hackett maintains that if we are to explain the fact of knowledge we must presuppose an “innate equipment” in man, “not as ideas of consciousness, but as forms by which thought operates.”\textsuperscript{115}

Suppose that I want to build a garage. To do so “presupposes a knowledge of my environment and the capacity to make judgments about that environment…. ”\textsuperscript{116}

So we conclude that “ultimately, it is just the faculty of judgment itself that is presupposed prior to experience, even for the simple task of building a garage. And men do build garages, don’t they?”\textsuperscript{117}

According to Hackett, then, rational empiricism is obviously the only position which can explain any simple empirical fact. He who thinks that he can build a garage on any other principle than that of rational empiricism finds himself in the unhappy position of standing upon the position he is seeking to deny. He looks like the man who is trying to

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Idem.}
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Idem.}
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 58, 59.
lift the cover off a man-hole while standing on it himself. And if Beegle should attempt to use his inductive method without presupposing the “general principles or categories which are presupposed in every act of thought,” he too would be in such a ridiculous position. But we may be sure that Beegle would do no such thing. Beegle has told us that induction is merely the first method to use. His induction is not complete in itself. It needs something in the way of deduction. “Sound results are obtained when induction precedes deduction.”\(^\text{118}\) Beegle is now in a position to see clearly that Hackett is his friend. Hackett has shown clearly that some “innate principle” is required in the way of furnishing the relationships between the facts of the inductive method. Hackett has also shown him that it is Kant who has first and best among modern men shown how, fact and law, particular and universal, are really brought together. Kant has shown how neither pure rationalism nor pure empiricism can account for the fact that men build garages. Thus Kant has saved science by bringing induction and deduction in proper relation to one another. Kant saved science by restricting knowledge to the phenomenal realm. Science can realize its ideal of universality and therefore of predictability if only it will realize that such universality and predictability are inherent in the equipment with which the faculty of judgment comes to the very first fact of experience. At the same time science can also realize its ambition to add what is genuinely new to what is already known at any given time. Kant has shown how synthetic \textit{a priori} judgments are possible. Kant has explained the methodology of science. Kant has thus shown how science is possible by his great discovery that it is man himself who is the ultimate and therefore active organizer back of scientific activity.

\textbf{(3) Der Seele Atmet Frei Aus}

Up to the time of Kant, man found himself in a sad predicament. He knew that he needed absolute freedom if he was to continue to think of himself as morally responsible. And he knew that he needed absolute determinism if he was to have scientific knowledge. How can one have both?

It was Kant who solved this problem and set man free. After Kant man could explain his scientific methodology and at the same time have his moral freedom. Kant proved that the goal of comprehensive and exhaustive rational understanding is the ideal of science but that it must be maintained only as an on-going goal. The laws of science are absolute but they are absolute as relational to the absolutely raw stuff of experience. The laws of science can therefore never reach out beyond the phenomenal realm. And this means further that knowledge, scientific knowledge, can never be attained about man himself as free. The old metaphysic is done with forever. There is no more knowledge of man as free, there is no more knowledge of a God who is not correlative to the world.

Of course man “knows” himself to be free but then this knowing is a wholly other sort of knowing than the knowing of which the scientist speaks. Once this fact is seen for what it is, it appears that now, for the first time, man is really able, without contradiction, to assert both his absolute freedom or autonomy and yet be absolutely true to the ideal of science as the realm of impersonal relations. Man has at last attained to true inwardness. He no longer fears any miraculous intrusions in the realm of science. Is he not the

absolute lawgiver there? The only law that manifests itself in the realm of science springs from the innate relationizing equipment found in man. Again man no longer fears any “supernatural” intrusions into his moral consciousness, when he bows in reverence before the moral law and when he worships God as the law-giver, he knows that he is bowing to an image of the ideal self. In particular, he now knows that when he pays homage to the Christ incarnate in history, he is bowing to the ideal of realizing, to some extent in the space-time world, something of the brotherhood of man that he has set before himself as an ideal. So also when he speaks of the Church of this Christ-ideal he thinks of it as a continuation of this ideal incarnation. Kant likes to see an increasing realization of the kingdom of God in which all human beings treat each other as persons. And this would, then, include all higher religions and the cause of ecumenism would be making ever-increasing progress.

All of this appears to be involved in the idea of building garages in terms of Kant’s philosophy.

**B. I Am The Way, The Truth And The Life**

But garages cannot be built in terms of Kant’s philosophy. Kant did not save science, and he did not make room for true religion.

In the first place Kant did not save science. His idea of science rests upon the idea of ultimate human autonomy. The *a priori* equipment which he employs in order to identify factuality would, if allowed to function unrestrained, reduce all factuality to one abstract universality. The only way Kant’s innate equipment can be kept from thus destroying newness in science is for pure contingency to act as a counteracting instance. But then to the extent that pure contingency acts as a correlative counteracting instance to pure, relational universality, to that extent universality is gone.

Then, too, Kant left no room for true religion. It has often enough been pointed out that on Kant’s view the world cannot in any sense manifest the presence and activity of God. This is too obviously true to need further elucidation. The space-time world is for Kant what it is because of the combination of pure contingency and pure rationality, and it is the universal human mind that is presupposed as the source of this interrelation. For Kant the heavens cannot declare the glory of God. The divine original of nature appears to be man. Man has taken the place of the God of historic Christianity. Man is the one whose action makes nature into what it is. Yet Hackett speaks of the resurrection of “theism” in terms of Kantian Philosophy.

To be sure Hackett has, as noted, sought to alter Kant’s philosophy so as to make room for the knowledge of a God who is beyond the world of nature. But this alteration cannot be adjudged successful. Hackett assures us that his alteration of the Kantian categories does not deny that the "synthetic *a priori* element in knowledge is strictly categorical and relational." But if this is true, Hackett’s attempt to make the categories apply beyond the realm of sense must fail. For it is this very relational nature of the categories that makes them interdependent with sensuous experience. It is their relational character that guarantees their purely formal nature. It is this purely formal nature that is required if there is to be the possibility of their applicability to space-time factuality at

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any point. If, with Spinoza, or with Parmenides, Hackett wants speculative knowledge, he
must, with them, lose his identity in a world of determinist, timeless being and thought.
We may well urge Hackett, then, to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Kant has set him
free.

Hackett argues that to accept the Kantian principle of rational empiricism we need
not, with him, limit the categories to the phenomenal world. “... the categories are forms
of things-in-themselves (noumena) as well as forms of thought, or of things as they
appear to us (phenomena).”

But, on Kant’s view, the idea of things-in-themselves would make the genuinely
scientific knowledge of even one fact impossible. For Kant, genuine scientific knowledge
means systematic knowledge. For any finite human “subject” to know itself at all or for
any finite “object” to be known at all, their relationships of interdependence and teraction
must be exhaustively displayed or predictable. They must be exhaustively rationalizable.
“Things-in-themselves” are anything but that. They are like pockets of independent
qualities that will never submit to generalization. If, together with such men as Locke and
his empiricist descendants, Hackett wants to retain things-in-themselves, he must be
ready, with them, to sink back into the pool of ultimate irrationality, or to subside into the
dogmatic slumber from which Kant was aroused by Hume.

A more basic issue now faces Hackett. He has failed to see that in his attempt to
combine the pre-Kantian Dogmatism of the Empiricists and Rationalists and Kantian
Criticism, he has not attained the freedom and rationality that he seeks. Hackett thinks
that he has found a theory of knowledge on the basis of which he can make a genuine
choice between mutually exclusive systems of metaphysics. Apparently he does not see
that his epistemology involves a metaphysics. And the metaphysics involved in his
epistemology is such as to reduce man to an abstract focus of interaction between an
abstract eternal form that would set man free from absorption into pure temporal being by
absorption into itself and an abyss of ultimate contingency that would set man free from
such an absorption into timeless being by means of its absorption into a bottomless and
shoreless ocean of flux.

It scarcely needs to be indicated that Hackett the evangelical believer has been tricked
by Hackett the philosopher into paying too great a price for his escape from the
determinism and irrationalism of Calvinism which he so dreads.

Hackett the believing Christian bows before the authority of Christ when he says that
his witness to himself as the Son of God and Son of man must be accepted at his
authority. Christ says that through him all things are made and that by him all things
consist. Christ says that no one can come to him except the Father draw him. Christ
said that all men are by virtue of their sin spiritually dead, and, as such, hostile to God their
Creator, and that knowing God, by virtue of their being created in his image, they hold
under the truth in unrighteousness. Christ said that, sent by the Father, he came to save
the world through his being made a a curse, through his being made sin for man. Christ
said that all the facts of the universe, the facts of creation and the facts of redemption, can
be seen for what they are only if they are seen thus in the light of what he is and what he
has done.

120 Ibid., p. 46.
As noted earlier, in Jesus’ day the Pharisees told Jesus that he blasphemed when, in saying such things, he made himself one with God. They made their own sinful moral consciousness the ultimate source and standard by which they judged Jesus’ claims. This is precisely what Kant has done in modern times. The whole of Kant’s epistemology presupposes the absolutely free or autonomous moral self as the source of law both for the phenomenal and for the noumenal realm. Kant’s own work, *Religion Within the Limits of Pure Reason*, shows that he will accept the claims of Christ only on condition that he can reinterpret them, reducing them to nothing more than means by which self-sufficient moral man may lift himself up by his own bootstraps toward the realization of his own humanized ethical ideal. Why then does Hackett the philosopher virtually take sides with the Pharisees against the Christ of the Scriptures, and therefore against Hackett the believer, on this all-important point?

The Pharisees argued, in effect, that Jesus could not be the promised Messiah. Their position was, in effect, that there never could be a discernible appearance of any Absolute in the phenomenal realm. To maintain the honor of God, they argued, one must honor an absolutely formal unity that is above space-time being. How then could Jesus, a spatio-temporally conditioned man, claim to be one with the Father? If any finite man claims identity with God, all men are in jeopardy every hour. They must then bow before him as Lord. They must then be made free by him. But are not the Jews the sons of Abraham?

“We have never been in bondage.”

In similar fashion the position of Kant denies both man’s creation and his fall into sin. Kant, as well as the Pharisees, refuses to allow that Jesus of Nazareth can possibly have been the Son of God except in the sense that all men are potentially the sons of God or participant in the being of God.

Why then does Hackett the philosopher virtually take sides with Kant in denying the possibility of the knowledge of Christ as the Redeemer-God, and therefore against Hackett the believer?

In the second place, Hackett argues that Calvinists, and in particular such extreme Calvinists as C. Van Til, allow for no common ground for discussion between believer and unbeliever. Hackett the philosopher now provides a common ground by means of the epistemology of Kant. But if such an epistemology provides a common ground it does so by destroying the believer altogether. To be sure, the believer is allowed to retain, not merely some, but all, of the major teachings of Christianity, but then all of these teachings must be reinterpreted as being symbols or pointers (*Hinweise*) forward some far off unknown, unknowable and unrealizable ideal that apostate man sets for himself in order thereby to resist the ever-present pressure of the claims of Christ upon him.

Modern ecumenical theology has fallen for this trap of Satan. In The Confession Of 1967, the United Presbyterian Church, the historic defender of the unqualified sovereign claims of Christ, has capitulated to the demands of Kant’s free man. The composers of this Confession have synthesized all true science, all true philosophy and all true theology by following the Pharisees and Kant—thereby virtually denying the Christ of the Scriptures. Hackett the believer surely does not want to follow this lead. Why then does he allow Hackett the philosopher to make him believe that Kant can set man free?

Finally Hackett says that according to Calvinists, and especially according to that extreme Calvinist, Van Til, “man, while he ought to do so, nevertheless cannot distill
God from the general revelation…. “121 How then, he asks, “is any apologetics possible?”

Hackett disagrees with Van Til who says that “it is only when the Holy Spirit gives man a new heart that he will accept the evidence of Scripture about itself and about nature for what it really is…. ” 122 Kant again appears as savior. And this in spite of the fact that for Kant nature is exclusively revelational of man rather than of God. Or if we accept the alteration of Kant’s doctrine of the categories, then we may allow that God and man together may find themselves in the nature they are jointly engaged in confronting and creating.

It is thus that Hackett the philosopher attains to the “resurrection of theism.” But the God of this theism cannot be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The “theism” thus resurrected is destructive of the possibility of intelligent human predication whether with respect to the “phenomenal” or “noumenal” sphere.

C. Heilsgeschichte Again

Looking back we recall that we started our discussion of the Protestant doctrine of Scripture by an analysis of the views of Warfield and of Bavinck. Both men view the place of Scripture as imbedded in their total outlook on life. They do not build the first story of their house by reason in order then to add a second story built by faith. Their outlook on life is a living whole. For convenience we speak of this total outlook on reality as a world and life view.

Warfield and Bavinck take this world and life view from the Scripture as the revelation of God through Christ and his Apostles to sinful man. The Holy Spirit gives them the conviction that what confronts them in Scripture is the Word of Christ.

According to the teaching of Scripture, in all that happens in the world of “men and things” Christ is establishing his kingdom as he destroys the kingdom of Satan. Man was originally created in the image of God. As such he was perfect. The world about him was perfect. All the facts about him as well as his own constitution within him spoke of God the Creator to Adam and Eve. From the beginning God supplemented the revelation of himself in the facts of the created world by verbal communication. By means of this thought-communication God gave man the task of subduing the world. Quite properly this task has been called man’s “cultural mandate.”

Man listened to Satan who told him he should strive to be like God. In Adam’s fall all men sinned (Rom 5:12). Born, since the fall with an evil nature, all men continue all their life to hate God and their fellow man. Fallen man makes his own supposed welfare instead of the kingdom of God the goal of all his cultural striving. He uses the inductive method in order to collect facts which, he assumes, do not reveal God. He uses the deductive method which, he assumes, rests on an abstract principle of rationality that envelopes God and man alike. He can never get his “logic” and his “facts” together in any intelligible way. Like a drowning man in desperation draws his savior down with him into the bottomless deep, so the sinner seeks to draw his Creator down with him into pure contingency. Whether he eats or drinks or does anything else, apostate man does it all for

121 Ibid., p. 164.
122 Ibid., p. 163, 164.
his own glory. At last he finds himself at the swine-trough, unable to fill his belly with
the husks of swine, and unwilling to return to the father’s house.

But God sent his Son into the world to save the world. He who knew no sin was made
sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. God the Father
quickens, God the Son quickens and God the Spirit regenerates men so that they believe
and accept Jesus Christ and all his benefits. Now men undertake their cultural mandate
anew. Their image renewed in Christ in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily,
they would now, instead of following Satan, destroy him and his kingdom. As they do so,
they establish the kingdom of Christ. Whether they eat or drink or do anything else, they
would to it to the glory of Christ.

Through Christ all things were made, in him all things consist, to him all things
belong. Every effort on the part of Satan to retain men for his service will, ultimately,
fail. Satan has already been defeated. Christ’s work is finished. Yet it is finished in
principle only. Not till Christ comes again will the restitution of all things take place.

Accordingly the struggle between those who are for and those who are against Christ
goes on till the end of time. The warfare between Christ and Satan is a global warfare. It
is carried on in the field of science and philosophy as well as in the field of theology.

Every fact in the universe is in dispute. Every fact belongs to Christ. To him all
authority was given. A proper inductive method works on this assumption. Every
principle of logic is given the image-bearer of God so that by it he may relate all the facts
of Christ’s estate in “systematic” order so as thereby the better to manipulate them to the
 glory of Christ.

D. The Other Heilsgeschichte

But Satan continues to control the hearts of many men.

He blinds their minds so that they cannot see the clear light of the sun. As at the
beginning, so throughout history, Satan insinuates into the hearts of men the idea that
their true freedom lies in their independence from the creative-redemptive work of Christ.
With Sartre, man would rather be free in a vacuum than free in Christ. He would rather
assume that facts are not created and that logic is an abstraction and fail ever to get them
together, than to presuppose their unity in Christ. He would rather work out his own
salvation by setting his own ideals, by following the standard of his own moral
consciousness, by the strength of his own will power rather than be saved by grace
through Christ.

When confronted with the offer of salvation through Christ, he makes over,
refashions, reinterprets this Christ, so as to make him conform to his own ideals. And
these ideals continue to change forever.

And in transforming the Christ of Paul into a Christ ´la Kant, modern churchmen, at
the same time, transform the Word of the Apostles into a symbol pointing to the unknown
and unknowable Christ they have made for themselves.

Upon those who, by the grace of God, have been given the vision of the cultural
mandate (undertaken afresh through the finished work of Christ) falls the task of
beseeching all men everywhere to give up their vain search for freedom and meaning
which they look for in the abyss of the unrelated.
Believers in Christ have been saved by grace. They use, they must use, their powers of logical reasoning and of factual observation in order to point out to those who reject the overtures of grace through Christ, that unless they repent they are lost and their culture gone to ruin.

It is in every instance the failure to see clearly that the “problem of the Bible” is an aspect of this global struggle, that causes evangelical Christians to fall into difficulty. Of course, even they who do relate their view of Scripture to their total outlook of life as taken from Scripture cannot solve every problem. But they do have the means wherewith they can see all “problems” whether with respect to biblical data or other data in the proper light. They can set all problems in the light of the creative-redemptive work of Christ. Without this light no true problem can even be differentiated from a pseudo-problem. Without this light we have nothing but the darkness of the night in which all cows are black.

In conclusion we return briefly to the pronouncements of Vatican 2.

In his book The Second Vatican Council And The New Catholicism, Dr. G. C. Berkouwer has a fairly optimistic view with respect to the changes that are taking place in the Roman Catholic church. In earlier works Berkouwer stressed the fact that according to Romanism the church is the continuation of the incarnation, and that, therefore, there was a basic contrast between her views of sin and grace and those entertained by the Reformers. And this contrast was particularly acute with respect to the Reformation idea of sola Scriptura. In this Berkouwer followed Herman Bavinck.

In his latest work, however, Berkouwer seems to think that the gulf between the Mother church and the churches of the Reformation may possibly be crossed. And Berkouwer finds some measure of support for this hope, he thinks, in the new theology.

Berkouwer speaks of a “new climate of life and thought in the Catholic Church” today. 123

Through the influence of such men as Yves Congar and others, there has come about, says Berkouwer, “a more open-mindedness toward the Reformation which in turn has created a far better possibility for dialogue than has been known since the sixteenth century.” 124 “Roman Catholics are putting increasing emphasis on the new possibility of an existential encounter between Rome and the Reformation.” 125 “Van de Pol, for example … rejects the traditional black-white picture and speaks of the providential task that the Reformation shall one day fulfill.” 126 There is, says Berkouwer, in, the church, “a more inclusive vision of the truth” than was formerly present there, and adds that “obviously, to speak of a simple ‘return’ to the Mother Church does not fit well with this. Rather, we hear of a ‘growing together toward the fulness of Christ.’ ” 127 “Catholic theologians are insisting urgently that Catholic theology refuses to sacrifice sola fide-sola

123 The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism tr. Lewis B. Sinedes, Grand Rapids, 1965, p. 34.
124 Ibid., p. 39.
125 Ibid., p. 40.
126 Idem.
127 Ibid., p. 40.
gratia to the Reformation, that Catholicism too seeks to preserve the truth of the
complete gratuity of grace.” 128 Was not this the “deepest intent of Trent?” they say. 129

The new theologians, says Berkouwer, are bringing into the arena of discussion new
insights into the Catholic doctrines of justification, Scripture and tradition, the
infallibility of the Church, and so forth. “We contend that we are observing a new
interpretative phase of Roman Catholicism.” 130 A basic question facing Protestants is
whether the new theology aims merely at “new forms of expression” of the old faith or at
radical revision of the Confession of the Church. 131

In our estimation of the nature of the tensions within the Mother Church the question
of Scripture is, says Berkouwer, all important. The new theologians argue that Trent
“leaves Catholics free to identify themselves with the notion that tradition is not a source
of revelation on the same level with Scripture, but is only an interpretative source. Trent,
it is argued, leaves Catholics free to identify themselves with the very ancient tradition of
the Church according to which all the truth of salvation is contained in Scripture.” 132

Reflecting on this new view of Scripture, Berkouwer says: “All kinds of questions
rise out of the new situation, foremost of which in our minds is whether a new outlook is
now possible in regard to the Reformation doctrine of sola Scriptura which, until now,
has always been considered, along with sola fide, sola gratia and solo Christo, an
exclusive Reformation credo.” 133

Our question now is whether Mother Church is calling us to a common presentation
of the gospel of salvation by grace as set forth in Scripture to the modern world.

The change in Berkouwer’s attitude toward Roman Catholicism follows upon and
resembles his change of attitude toward Barth. In an early work Berkouwer rejected
Barth’s views as “more nominalistic than those of Occam.” More recently he wrote a
book, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth. In this work, he speaks of
Barth’s basic desire to carry on the principles of the Reformation. And the “new
theologians” are pictured as possibly leading the church into a better appreciation of
salvation by grace alone. Says Berkouwer: “Many writers among Roman Catholics
witness strongly to the idea that there is a Catholic sola fide-sola gratia.” 134 Are not
“Catholics continually reminding us that Rome has rejected synergism?” 135

We cannot here discuss this new theology. It will be the responsibility of Berkouwer
to show where, in the works of these new theologians, the basically dynamic categories
which the church originally borrowed from the philosophy of Aristotle have been
renounced in favor of the truly biblical or religious-ethical categories which the
Reformers took from Scripture. These “new theologians” may have been influenced by
the activist principles of modern existentialism, but why should that lead them toward a
favorable view of the Reformation view of theology and of Scripture? Barth’s activism

128 Ibid., p. 41.
129 Ibid., p. 43.
130 Ibid., p. 53.
131 Ibid., p. 54.
132 Ibid., p. 97.
133 Idem.
135 Idem.
does, indeed, enable him to say that Jesus is God and that the Bible is the Word of God. But this fact is no indication of any sympathy with the views of Luther and of Calvin either with respect to the doctrine of the person of Christ or with respect to the doctrine of the Scripture. Barth’s activism even more obviously than Rome’s dynamism, is based on a realist nominalist denial of the Creator-creature distinction on which the whole structure of Reformation theology is built.

The Documents of Vatican 2 reveal clearly that there has been no change in Roman Catholic teaching with respect to salvation by grace alone and with respect to the view of Scripture at all. The anathema sit has disappeared, but the teaching authority of the church, centered in the Pope, remains as absolute as ever. “The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of the bishops and of the multitude of the faithful.”

Whatever the “new theologians” may discover about the oneness of Scripture and tradition as the source of doctrine, and whatever they may say about the priority of Scripture over tradition, it is all to none effect. Always and without fail it is the infallible teaching authority of the church that ultimately determines the meaning of what Scripture says in words. And it is this interpretation of Scripture given by the final teaching authority of the church that, to all intents, taken to be identical with revelation. “But when either the Roman Pontiff or the body of bishops together with him defines a judgment, they pronounce it in accordance with revelation itself. All are obliged to maintain and be ruled by this revelation, which, as written or preserved by tradition, is transmitted in its entirety through the legitimate succession of bishops and especially through the care of the Roman Pontiff himself.”

To all intents and purposes the effect of thus maintaining the virtual identity of the church’s interpretation of Scripture teaching at any particular stage of history presupposes the priority of tradition over Scripture. “Sacred tradition” and “sacred Scripture” are said to flow “from the same divine well-spring” and they are said “in a certain way” to “merge into a unity and tend toward the same end.” “Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God.” To interpret this “word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the church.”

Thus these three, the tradition, Scripture and the infallible teaching office of the church “are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in his own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectually to the salvation of souls.”

It is the moment-by-moment teaching of the church that thus forms to all intents and purposes the revelation of God and his Holy Spirit by which the faithful must live. People who live in the city no doubt have a theoretical knowledge of the fact that milk comes from cows. In practice, they get their milk in bottles from the A and P store.

But what a poor illustration this may appear to be. The A and P stores merely distribute the milk. Certainly they do no harm to it. And those who have pasteurized,

136 Chapter 3, p. 44.
137 Ibid., p. 49.
138 Ibid., pp. 117, 118.
139 Ibid., p. 118.
homogenized and bottled the milk before it stands waiting for you in the A and P cooler have done only that which is good for you. How could you go to a farm and get two quarts of fresh milk every morning? And how could you expect to pasteurize and homogenize your own milk? Surely the faithful must be thankful for what it has done and is doing so that you may have the pure milk of the Word!

But then precisely here the Reformers come in. They tell us that the natural man will not preserve, and hand down the deposit of God’s revelation through Christ in the Scripture without polluting it in the process.

This is not to suggest that the Popes and bishops are worse sinners than are other sinners. It is merely to suggest that they are not basically holier than are other men. Christ has therefore not given the final interpretation of his person and work into the hands of men beyond those whom by his Spirit he qualified to be the authors of the Scripture. Sola Scriptura et Solus Christos.

So long as the “living” church has the final teaching authority, so long does some form of dynamic or actualistic philosophy lead men to misinterpret the Scripture. Vatican 2 speaks of the Scriptures as “teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.” But when “the living tradition of the whole church” is used to enlighten the church as to the meaning of Scripture, “the most sacred mystery of the cross is seen to have been instituted by Christ in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until he should come again. . . .”

Thus it is that a process philosophy at least basically similar to that which was introduced into the church when, in the Middle Ages, the potentiality-act scheme of Aristotle began to dominate the church’s theology, continues now. Vatican 2 insists that the Mass is a continuation of the sacrifice of Christ. The once-for-all finished work of Christ, together with the once-for-all finished revelation of God through Christ in Scripture is anew and afresh given over to the tender mercies of a dynamic theory of reality in which the Creator-creature relationship so clearly taught in Scripture is given up.

The reader may turn to an article by Dr. C. Trimp in Lucerna (June, 1966) for a fuller discussion of the Vatican 2 Constitution with respect to revelation. In this article Trimp points out that there has been nothing like a return to the Reformation view of Scripture. Those who would truly follow Reformation principles, says Trimp, will need to continue to insist on the Sola Scriptura against, not with Rome.

The struggle to which, in effect, Trimp refers, is made more difficult than ever now that new theologians like Hans Urs Van Balthasar and Hans Küng seek for ecumenical contact with the followers of Barth. The new alliance is that of the Rome-Barth axis as over against the Luther-Calvin axis.

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\[140\] Ibid., Chapter 3, p. 119; reference is here made to 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Greek text.

\[141\] Ibid., p. 120.

\[142\] Ibid., p. 154.

\[143\] Ibid., p. 142.

Appendix 1: General And Special Revelation

In this appendix we are concerned to discuss the relation between general and special revelation in Reformed theology. The Reformed view of both general and special revelation underlies and is implied in everything that has been said thus far about the Protestant, and in particular, about the Reformed view of Scripture.

1. Roman Catholicism

This total outlook has historically developed in relation to Roman Catholicism. A good deal of light is therefore likely to be shed on the Reformed view of revelation by comparing it with the Roman Catholic view.

In making this comparison we are interested in learning how various Reformed theologians conceive of it. Our question is: How did Reformed theology, or how does Reformed theology, think of its own position in contrast with that of Romanism, with reference to the problem of revelation?

We need for our purposes to take only two typical statements of contemporary Reformed theologians. Says Dr. G. C. Berkouwer: “According to Rome, the two sources of knowledge—reason and faith—correspond to the two modes of revelation—natural and supernatural. In the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church, in speaking out emphatically against all kinds of heresies, condemned all who say that man with his natural reason is unable to know the Creator through the created world. There are, however, also truths which can be known only by way of supernatural special revelation.”¹ The first Vatican Council stressed the fact that natural revelation, revelation in and through the facts of the universe, results in natural theology and natural morality. Romanism distinguishes sharply between knowledge thus obtained by reason and knowledge of such mysteries as the Trinity which are received by faith.

Of special interest is the fact that by thus speaking of two sources and two kinds of knowledge, Roman Catholicism seeks to do justice to the knowledge of unbelievers. “Only in this way, it is said, is one able to do justice to the ‘varieties of knowledge’ of God (no matter how distorted) outside of Christianity and special revelation, as well as to the conceptions of morality and the sense of duty which we still meet everywhere in life.”²

Not only does Romanism seek to do justice to the knowledge and morality of unbelievers, it also has a definite apologetic purpose in mind. It is by maintaining that reason can, by itself, apart from supernatural (special) revelation, attain to a measure of true knowledge of God, that it seeks to answer all forms of agnosticism, anti-intellectualism and irrationalism.³

Berkouwer calls attention to the fact that the Romanist conception of natural theology is based upon and consonant with the Romanist conception of the fall of man. “What is the background of this conception in which natural reason is considered capable of such knowledge? It is clear that a specific anthropology is involved here, an anthropology or

¹ De Voorzienigheid Gods, Kampen, 1950, p. 43.
² Berkouwer, De Algemeene Openbaring, Kampen, 1951, p. 48.
³ Ibid., p. 50.
view of man which lifts the so-called rational soul out of the sin-depraved life of man, and then by way of this non-crupt reason considers man capable of true knowledge of God.... It is true that Rome admits that sin has wounded human nature by the loss of special supernatural gifts, but the physical ability of human reason was neither destroyed nor disturbed, so that the way of this reason to God remains open. The nature of the intellect remained intact and so in a certain sense human nature is still open for the knowledge of God. This reason now operates in the world of created reality and arrives in this manner at true, though incomplete, knowledge of God.”

Still more generally, there lies back of the Romanist notion of the natural light of reason, the idea of *analogia entis*. The Romanist anthropology of which Berkouwer speaks is what it is because of this notion of the *analogia entis*.

“This ‘self-existent being’ is the central point of the natural knowledge of God. This divine being can be known by the natural light of reason because there is an ‘analogy of being’ between God and man. This analogy of being makes an argument from created reality to the existence of God both possible and meaningful.”

Romanist theologians readily grant that natural theology has only relative value. Man needs supernatural revelation to know and profit from the mysteries of the Christian faith. Even so, for Romanism it is of the greatest importance to maintain the independence of natural theology. “All these reservations do not erase the fact that the natural theology of Rome involves ‘the possibility which the fallen man still possesses’ to know God as Creator. Rome engages in a bitter fight for this ontic ability of reason.”

There are two main points here that are of immediate and basic importance for our purpose. The one is ethical and the other is metaphysical. Reformed theology cannot agree with Romanism in its contention that the “reason” of fallen man is not radically depraved. Similarly Reformed theology cannot agree with Romanism in its assumption that man is inherently and properly in possession of a measure of ultimacy.

The first point presupposes the second. The Romanist notion of analogy of being involves the idea of man’s sharing with God in Being. This idea virtually denies the biblical doctrine of creation.

But without making the distinction between God as Creator basic to all thinking, one cannot hold that all things, and particularly man in his own constitution, are inherently revelational of God. Revelation, on the Romanist view, is no longer exclusively the communication of meaning from the self-contained God to his creature. It becomes rather the communication of meaning on the part of a more ultimate being to a less ultimate being, both within or on a scale of Being. Thus the meaning of meaning also changes. Meaning no longer is determined exclusively by revelation. Some meaning may exist and be obtained by man independently of revelation. Man may investigate reality apart from the idea of revelation. For to him the reality that he investigates is not exclusively what it is because it is a revelation of God.

Berkouwer therefore asks the question whether Romanism really means what it says when it speaks of a revelation of God in created reality. For the idea of revelation plays only a minor role in its conception of natural theology. “In summary, we can say that

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Roman Catholic theology involves the relation between man’s rational nature and ‘reality.’ The road to a knowledge of God is by way of logical conclusion. This brings us, finally, to the question whether Rome really acknowledges a revelation of God in this created reality. The answer to this question must be in the affirmative. Reference is frequently made to a revelation of God in nature in distinction from supernatural revelation. Nevertheless, one is always amazed that this revelation plays but a very small role in the expositions of natural theology.”

2. Calvin

How then, we ask, does the Reformed Faith conceive of the relation of general and special revelation to one another? In particular, in what way does the conception of Reformed theology on this matter differ from that of Romanism?

When one reads the second article of the Belgic Confession there is, it must be conceded, on the surface a similarity between it and the position of Romanism. Berkouwer points out that Karl Barth simply takes for granted that article two of the Confession virtually carries on the Roman Catholic idea of natural theology into the Reformed churches. The second article speaks of two means by which we may learn of God. The first is that of the creation, maintenance and government of the world. In this world all the creatures are like so many letters which make manifest to us the invisible things of God. Reference is made to Romans 1:20. This revelation is sufficient to render man without excuse. Then there is the second means, namely, that of Scripture, in which God has revealed himself “yet more clearly and more fully.” From it we may learn what it is needful to know for our salvation and to live to God’s glory.

It is the phrase “yet more clearly and more fully” that seems to indicate the main point of connection between the two kinds of revelation. Could this not be taken to mean that the revelation of God in nature is thought of as not being very clear? True, it says that the revelation through Scripture is “yet more clear” than is the revelation in nature. Thus it has in effect said that the revelation of God in nature is also clear. Yet the impression might be given that one could do full justice to the situation by coming to the conclusion that the revelation in nature is not very clear. God is said to make himself known to us (plus manifestement et evidemment pas sa sainte et divine Parole) more clearly and more evidently in the Word than he does in the facts of the world.

But it appears on second thought that such is not at all the intent of the article. Its meaning may best be ascertained if it is read in the light of Calvin’s theology. In his work, Onze Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis, Dr. A. D. R. Polman gives a summary of Calvin’s teaching as a background for his explanation of article two of the Confession of Faith. I shall briefly summarize his statement for our immediate purpose.

(1) The revelation of God in his works

Calvin, says Polman, lays great stress upon the clarity of God’s revelation in his words. “He always assumes the evident character of this revelation.” These words include not only nature in the narrower sense of the world but also the maintenance and

7 Ibid., p. 60.
8 Ibid., p. 221.
government of the world. “In history He shows His grace, deliverance and judgments—in short, the words of God are an ocean and an abyss of wisdom.” 10 The fact of God’s providence is patent in the world.

(2) The effect of this revelation of God

If Adam had not fallen, man would have known God as Creator and Governor of the world. But Adam did fall, and with him the whole human race. Even so God has continued to reveal himself to man. In particular man has by nature a sense of deity which cannot be obliterated. Polman here naturally paraphrases Calvin’s thought of chapter three, Book One. Says Calvin: “Men of sound judgment will always be sure that a sense of divinity which can never be effaced is engraven upon men’s minds.” 11

It is not only in man himself but also in his environment that God continues clearly to manifest himself. Polman here refers to the Institutes, 1:5:10: “We must therefore admit in God’s individual works—but especially in them as a whole—that God’s powers are actually represented as in a painting. Thereby the whole of mankind is invited and attracted to recognition of him, and from this to true and complete happiness.”

But though God manifests himself so clearly to men, “they do not therefore apprehend God as he offers himself, but imagine him as they have fashioned him in their own presumption. When this gulf opens, in whatever direction they move their feet, they cannot but plunge headlong into ruin. Indeed, whatever they afterward attempt by way of worship or service of God, they cannot bring as tribute to him, for they are worshipping not God but a figment and a dream of their own heart.” 12

Polman also refers to the Institutes 2:2:18, where Calvin says: “Certainly I do not deny that one can read competent and apt statements about God here and there in the philosophers, but these always show a certain giddy imagination. As was stated above, the Lord indeed gave them a slight taste of his divinity that they might not hide their impiety under a cloak of ignorance. And sometimes he impelled them to make certain utterances by the confession of which they would themselves be corrected. But they saw things in such a way that their seeing did not direct them to the truth, much less enable them to attain it! They are like a traveler passing through a field at night who in a momentary lightning flash sees far and wide, but the sight vanishes so swiftly that he is plunged again into the darkness of the night before he can take even a step—let alone be directed on his way by its help.” “So great is his blindness that, standing in the midst of light, he sees nothing…. God’s goodness feeds the unbelievers and feeds them richly, but they gobble it up like pigs for whom acorns fall from the trees, their snouts always pointed toward the ground.” 13 No one can plead excuse inasmuch as God’s revelation extends to all men and is fully clear. “God’s revelation engages us a in such close range that we cannot escape it. We consequently get some idea of God and reason that this God, however defined, must be honored. But our intellect falls short of the exact who and how. This world is like a theater in which God gives us a clear picture of His glory. But we are blind to it; not because the revelation is dark, but because of our constitutional estrangement. We lack not only the will but also

10 Ibid., p. 146.
11 Institutes, trans. by F. L. Battles, Bk. 1:3:3.
the ability. For even though God reveals Himself clearly, we can only see Him with the eye of faith. However, the vague taste we have of divinity robs us of every excuse.”  

(3) Proof from Scripture

In the third place Polman takes up the fact that Calvin finds this evaluation about the revelation of God in his works and man’s response to it in Scripture. “Unregenerated men do not even come close to God by way of reason, as is proven by everyday experience. The two most important aspects of the remnant light consist in the seed of religion and the distinction between good and evil which remains in their conscience. But neither one bears fruit—it dies in a thousand superstitions. The natural reason of man will never be able to direct itself to God.” But no matter how much men may try, under the instigation of Satan, to suppress the revelation of God in the world, they cannot fully succeed. Calvin refers to John 1:1–5, to Acts 14 and Acts 17. He constantly refers to Romans 1. In his commentary on Romans, Calvin says that the revelation of God in his works is altogether clear. “But man is so blinded that he can see nothing.” Commenting on 1 Corinthians 1:21 he says that men ought to have known God through wisdom, through their study of the works of God. “If man had but a spark of healthy intellect, he would bow down for this in admiration. But the fall of man has spoiled the original order. His spirit is estranged from God: standing in the midst of light, man sees nothing.” In Hebrews 11:3 we are told that it is only through faith that we see that the world has been made by God. Is this to contradict what Paul says in Romans? Does he not there say that all men recognize God to be their Creator? Is it not because men know God as their Creator and yet do not worship him that they stand condemned?

Truly, says Calvin, the fact that all men know God as their Creator accounts for the fact of worship throughout the world. But the worship they have given is false worship. And this false worship is the concomitant of false ideas about God. At the same time that they thought of a God, men became vain in their imaginations. “So that rather than grasping the true God they grope after the shadow of a certain majesty. And this groping is after a vague opinion, far removed from understanding. They speak of luck instead of providence. In respect of this light of nature which lights every creature, the spirit of man is blinded until, by the Spirit of God, they learn to understand through faith what they never would have understood any other way.”

(4) The revelation in God’s holy and divine word

Polman then turns to the familiar discussion of Calvin on Scripture. Scripture is, since the sinner reads nature so wrongly, the only means by which he may learn of God effectively. He calls attention to the fact that Calvin uses expressions very similar to the one used in the Confession to the effect that Scripture yet more clearly and more fully reveals God than does nature. It makes man to see God as the Creator of nature. And in addition it gives his revelation of grace.

14 Idem.
15 Ibid., p. 151.
16 Idem.
17 Idem.
18 Ibid., p. 152.
19 Idem.
20 Ibid., p. 153.
(5) Twofold revelation, twofold order, twofold means

Only he who keeps in mind those points discussed by Calvin, says Polman, understands the second article of the Confession. The two forms of revelation have back of them the one incomprehensible being of God. It is he who voluntarily reveals himself both in his works and in his Word. We are therefore to live by this revelation of God alone. We are not to seek to pry into God’s essence by some other way. The first revelation of God through his works is clear and continues to be clear even after the fall.  

“IT is revelation in the strict sense of the word—the making known of God. It is not a conclusion reached by reason.” But man holds down this revelation in unrighteousness. “In his present state man does all he can to eradicate every notion of God. He no longer knows who and how God is; his foolish heart has become dark. That is why God sends His second revelation through His Word, in which He gives a clear and true description of His first revelation and in which He, at the same time, reveals Himself as the Savior in Christ.”

It is therefore necessary to observe, says Calvin, that there is now a different order of study to be observed than there would have been if Adam had not fallen. The work of Christ as mediator is restorative of that which was originally given. Accordingly, Calvin in his Institutes deals first with the revelation of God in his works. This is the proper order. But since the entrance of sin it is necessary to begin even the study of the works of God through the Word of God. “Everyone needs the Scriptures as his leader and teacher in order to come to God the Creator.”

Are we then to conclude that there is only one means by which we may learn of God? Not at all. Believers should do justice to both forms of revelation. With the spectacles of Scripture they now read with good effect the book of nature and of history.

(6) It is after Polman has thus set forth the position of Calvin that he returns to the second article of the Confession and says: “He who, after this explanation of the thoughts of Calvin regarding this problem of the knowledge of God, compares with it this second article of de Bres, will not be able to admire any change in it. There is not a single untrue, let alone heretic, thought in it. The rich contemplations disclosed by Calvin are contained in it, even though they do not appear clearly and consciously. Both the progress of God’s revelation through and in His works according to the revelation of the Word and the mutual relationship between the two are clear.” Especially because the comparative “more clearly and fully involves not our knowledge but God’s revelation. The full necessity of this progress, however, remains in the dark as does also the reverse order in the understanding of the revelation, in which knowledge by means of the Word precedes knowledge by means of God’s works.” Dr. Berkouwer is in essential agreement with Polman in his evaluation of article two of the Confession.

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Ibid., p. 155.
22 Idem.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 156.
25 Ibid., p. 158.
3. Other Confessions

This interpretation given of article two of the Confession also sheds light on the frequently quoted words of the five articles of Dordt. “Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator, and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright, all his affections pure, and the whole Man was holy. But revolting from God by the instigation of the devil, and abusing the freedom of his own will, he forfeited these excellent gifts; and on the contrary entailed on himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment; became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in all his affections.” 26 To this may be added the words of Article 4: “There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God (notitias quasdam de Deo), of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God (salutarem Dei cognitionem pervenire), and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it (back) in unrighteousness; by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.” 27 It would be out of keeping to interpret these words as teaching anything like the natural theology of man Catholicism.

The same may also be said of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The first chapter of this Confession begins with these words: “Although the light of nature, and works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will which is necessary to salvation.”

The expression “the light of nature” does not mean, it would seem anything like the Romanist idea of the “natural light of reason.” It refers rather to man’s innate knowledge of God. God’s revelation to man in his works is clear and inescapable. But the reaction to that revelation constitutes the “natural theology” which is, according to Romanism, the fruit of the light of reason. Romanism omits the element of resistance to the truth in unrighteousness that is so prominent in the theology of Paul. And it is the sharp accent upon this element of suppression in the Reformed Confessions, says Berkouwer, and the inexcusability of man which shows that they understand Romans 1 far otherwise than does Rome. 28

4. The Picture As A Whole

Let us now look again at the landscape as a whole. We shall do something in the way of showing the connection between such points as Calvin has stressed.

27 Idem.
28 De Algemeene Openbaring, p. 127.
(1) General and special revelation find their unity in God who is self-sufficient. Dr. Valentine Hepp has stressed the idea that Reformed theology is distinguished from other forms of Christian theology by the great emphasis that it places on the fact of God’s self-existence. All other theology says Hepp, is in some measure a correlation-theology. For in other forms of theology God is made to some extent dependent upon man. Only in Reformed theology is man wholly dependent upon God.

(2) Believers accept this view of God because they accept the Scriptures to be the Word of God. They have not first worked up a philosophy of theism in order to find this theism afterwards corroborated by scriptural teaching. With Calvin they have come to know God as the Creator and controller of the universe because they have regarded the works of God in the light of Scripture. And they have, with Calvin, learned to take the Scriptures as the Word of God because they have received the witness of the Holy Spirit to the divinity of the Scriptures. Involved in this second point is the fact that the Reformed system of doctrine is composed of elements that are exegetically taken from Scripture. The Reformed system is not a deduction from a master concept. Nor is it a mere concatenation of individual items of truth. It is a “system” of truth—an analogical system of truth. And the idea of analogy is not formed by an independent study of Being, but by an ordering of the Scripture teaching as a whole.

In discussing the Christian doctrine of providence Berkouwer speaks of the phrase *articuli mixti* which has sometimes been applied to such doctrines as creation and providence. He quotes Herman Bavinck as saying that the belief in the providence of God is an article of the Christian Faith. 29 Concluding his discussion of Bavinck’s views he says: “From all this it is clear that Bavinck wants nothing to do with an independent natural theology.” Bavinck still retains the expression *articuli mixti* but has in effect rejected the idea for which it usually stands. And Berkouwer expresses full agreement with Bavinck’s rejection. His reason is that in the idea of *articuli mixti* the element of suppression is practically omitted. 30 “This truly does not apply only to the idea of creation but also to that of providence.” 31

As for Abraham Kuyper, Berkouwer says he has the same view as that of Bavinck. Kuyper points out how the doctrine of creation and of providence are “built up out of Christ” (*uit Christus opgebouwd*). The Confession of Faith, says Kuyper, does not as clearly and beautifully show the connection between the work of creation and that of salvation as does the Catechism. Yet the thought is essentially the same. 32

As to his own position, Berkouwer sums it up by saying: “Also in the confession of the work of providence the word of Christ applies when he says: No one comes to the Father but by me.” 33 We must learn of Christ through the Scriptures which we accept as the word of God through the testimony of the Holy Spirit and his regenerating grace.

(3) But to speak thus of the necessity and priority of Scripture is not in the least to deny that there is, in another sense, a priority of the works of God. As Polman indicates, Calvin discusses first the works of God and then the Word of God. But, strictly speaking,

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29 *De Voorzienigheid Gods*, p. 44.
30 *Idem*.
31 *Idem*.
it is not possible to speak of a temporal priority of the one over the other. Their relation is rather that of supplementation. Paul tells us that from the beginning the works of God challenged men to honor God. And the Genesis narrative, while it relates first the creation of man in the image of God, forthwith proceeds to supplement this narrative by telling us of supernatural communication in the way of the covenant that God made with and ordained for man. Says the Westminster Confession: “The distance between God and man is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him, as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.”

Abraham Kuyper also argues for the supplementative character of the two forms of revelation. He does so by vigorously opposing the idea of their juxtaposition. He points out especially that the idea of natural revelation cannot be considered as something that can stand by itself. “It is, indeed, by means of the *cognitio specialis* that the *cognitio naturalis* becomes useful. Only in the light of Scripture is the sinner enabled to account for the *semen religionis* in his heart and of the glory which is patent in the world: where the light of Scripture is hidden I know no more than ‘the unknown God’ even on the Areopagus.” 34 Even in paradise, he adds, God did not reveal himself to man through natural revelation independently. Even there God spoke to him. But then, he adds that it is natural that such should be the case. Supernatural revelation is not inherently and originally a revelation of grace; it is part and parcel of the normal, and in that sense natural, relation between God and man.

(4) God therefore addresses man everywhere and always through the one body of his revelation. Through this one body of revelation God assigns to man, generically speaking, his cultural task. And mankind is still responsible for that task (Rom 5:12). Man as sinner is not merely responsible for the revelation that comes to him through the works of God as they now are. The revelation that now comes to men who have not heard the gospel is but one aspect of the full revelation that came to him originally. The idea that God’s revelation to man is clear must primarily be said about revelation as a unit, inclusive of both supernatural pre-redemptive and natural revelation. The revelation of God in nature, as it is now, still clearly manifests God. But it is manifestory as a fragment of, a whole. It is clear therefore when general revelation is seen as calling out for and needing its supplement in original supernatural revelation. How else could the presence of the curse of God now resting upon nature be seen for what it is?

(5) If present general revelation is but an aspect of a revelation which includes supernatural thought communication, then man the sinner must be said to be a covenant breaker. The whole of revelation was given to mankind as the assignment of a task. Man has refused to undertake this task. He broke the arrangement or covenant that God ordained for him.

Man has declared his independence from God. We may therefore call him the would-be autonomous man. This would-be autonomous man assumes that he is ultimate and properly the final reference point in predication, i.e., reality must be interpreted by man in terms of man. He wants to avoid the address of God that comes to him from his own constitution as well as from the world about him. But he cannot do so fully.

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“Nevertheless, life does not remain untouched by the power of God’s revelation. We understand the sensus divinitatus not as an ‘organ’ of the knowledge of God which conquered the depravity of human nature but as an inescapable impression received by man via this power of God.”\textsuperscript{35} It was by thus stressing the inescapability of God’s revelation as it comes to man especially through his sense of deity and through the sinner’s effort at suppressing this revelation that Calvin effected in principle a complete break between the idea of general revelation and natural theology. “It was especially Calvin, who interpreted the thoughts of Scripture clearly at this point, when he denied the indissolubleness of general revelation and natural theology in allowing himself to be guided by Romans 1.”\textsuperscript{36}

By virtue of his creation in the image of God man therefore knows God. He cannot get away from the revelation of God. He knows he is a creature of God. The revelation about him, conjoined with the revelation through his constitution, cries day and night that God is the Creator and controller and therefore Redeemer of the universe.

But day and night the sinner seeks to hold back this revelation of God. When Paul on the Areopagus uses the words “as certain also of your own poets have said,” this cannot be explained otherwise than in terms of the idea of suppression. “Paul’s words can be understood only in view of the actual suppression supported by supplanted truth. Paul’s ‘as … also’ certainly does not mean that their ideas are in agreement with the deepest intent of Paul’s gospel. He knows the background of their words and does not idealize them. And yet he quotes their words. This is to be explained only in connection with their suppression of the truth of God—apostate religion lives antithetically to and in suppression of God’s truth.”\textsuperscript{37}

(6) What has been said just now is true of the sinner, the natural man in principle but not in consummation. Every form of non-Christian religion, of non-Christian philosophy and science seeks therefore to envelop God in his creation. In principle men turn the true process of knowledge upside down; they think of God as made in man’s image instead of thinking of man as made in God’s image. They worship and serve the creature more than the Creator.

(7) But God continues, in spite of man’s sin, to call men to himself through the works of his hands. He pours out his good gifts upon the race asking them thereby to be grateful to the giver of these gifts. The goodness of God is given to men that it might lead them to repentance. That is the first God-assigned purpose of them. “… or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forebearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom 2:4). At the same time God threatens to send punishment upon men for breaking his precepts. “And thinkest thou this, O man, that judges them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?” (Rom 2:3). In fine, God continues to deal covenantally with mankind as a unit.

(8) When looked at from the point of view of the past, this covenantal dealing of God with man stands as the sign of the favor which God continues to show to man in spite of his breaking of the covenant. Regarded from the point of view of the future, this covenant

\textsuperscript{35} Berkouwer, \textit{De Algemeene Openbaring}, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Idem}.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 116.
dealing stands as the sign of judgment upon those who do not repent and turn unto God and as a sign of eternal reward of grace for those who do. God gives his good gifts, says Paul, so that men should repent. But when they fail to repent, their continuance in disobedience adds to their condemnation. God’s rain and sunshine come upon men first that they might be “saved.” But when men reject this salvation they add condemnation to themselves. And since all things happen by the counsel of God’s will, it must finally be said that even the disobedience of man is a part of the realization of the plan of God. Men are finally disobedient and retain their covenant-breaking attitude because it was God’s ultimate purpose that they should do so. To say anything less is to deny the very idea that God controls whatsoever comes to pass.

After the entrance of sin into the world God’s revelation to man becomes a revelation of grace and of wrath. It is not that common grace is merely added to revelation; it is rather that revelation itself becomes characterized by common grace. Man who receives his life in the first place as a free gift of God now continues to receive it, and the generosity of nature that goes with it, in spite of his breaking of the covenant. He continues to receive it though now he has made himself the enemy of God. This is grace.

(9) The sinner’s reaction to this gracious revelation, to this call to repentance, can never be right in principle unless and until he is redeemed in Christ. Short of this his basic reaction continues to be that which Berkouwer speaks of as living by the suppression of that revelation. The sinner may and does turn to God adventitiously but never in principle. He cannot even suppress the truth without giving witness to the truth that he suppresses. This is true even of Satan and the lost. They can only love and practice the lie in opposition to the truth. They know the distinction between good and evil too. Their rational and moral constitution is still maintained by God. This maintenance is the presupposition of the nature and eternal endurance of their punishment.

But until the judgment day the revelation of God to man is a revelation of grace as well as of wrath, of long suffering endurance as well as of punishment of sinners that they might come to repentance. So, in addition to knowing truth and the difference between good and evil, men respond favorably to it in casual fashion. They have a certain love of the truth, and a certain respect for the good in distinction from evil. They do works which “for the matter of them” are things which God commands and are “in themselves praiseworthy and useful.” They do the “civil and moral good.” Without these “good works” of unregenerate men civilization could not long endure. Not only that, but through these “good works” unregenerate men contribute to the fulfilling of the original mandate God gave to mankind in spite of themselves so far as their principle is concerned.

But to say this, and to say much more that might be said, is not in the least to tone down the fact that in principle sinners live by the suppression of the truth. They live in principle by the suppression of truth even as adventitiously they love the truth. They do despite to the Spirit of truth even as, up to a point, they follow him. Even the truth which Satan knows but hates, and the righteousness which Satan knows but despises, come from the Spirit of God as the Spirit of revelation. But Scripture teaches that men in this world are not finished products of wickedness; they are not satanic or diabolic in the sense of being consummately wicked in all that they think or do. Due to the irrepressible
character of God’s revelation to them as gracious, they give some measure of reluctant recognition to God and his truth in this world.

(10) The believer, however, has been changed in principle a covenant keeper. He now seeks to serve the Creator instead of the creature. He is perfect. He is holy. He is righteous. He loves the truth and only the truth. He hates the lie and only the lie. John says he cannot sin.

In practice, however, he daily sins against God. He daily comes short of practicing truth and righteousness. But he now serves sin and the body of death adventitiously, in spite of his true self in Jesus Christ. This is what Luther meant when he said of the Christian that he is *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time just and sinful).

(11) We may therefore with Kuyper speak of twofold science and yet also speak of the unity of science. When Kuyper speaks of twofold science he contrasts the principle of those whose primary aim is to serve and worship the creature, with the principle of those whose primary aim is to serve and worship the Creator. He speaks of the *principium naturale* and the *principium speciale*. Creature worshipers seek to live by the natural principle alone. Those who have no part in the *principium speciale* do not understand themselves. “You yourself acknowledge from your own point of view that he who stands outside does not and cannot understand the actual focus of his own being and consequently of his reason.”

The man of the natural principle will require that the special principle subject itself to his criterion of truth. On the other hand the idea of the special principle presupposes that the natural principle has, because of sin, disqualified itself as a judge of the special principle. “When special revelation presupposes that as a consequence of sin the *principium naturale* is distorted, it follows that the *principium naturale* has lost its authority to judge.”

It is the nature of the special principle that it cannot submit its claims to a principle that would require its own abdication. Unity of knowledge, accomplishment of man’s cultural task, accordingly, cannot be obtained by a compromise of principle between those whose ultimate point of reference is God and those whose ultimate point of reference is man. It is the nature of a principle, argues Kuyper, to be the presupposition of all interpretation. A principle is totalitarian in nature. Two totalitarian principles stand over against one another; no compromise of any sort is possible between them.

How then can unity of knowledge and of science be accomplished? By the fact that the special principle is bound to be victorious. By being victorious it saves the natural principle as created by God. The special principle would not be victorious if it did not save the natural principle. It is victorious precisely in saving the natural principle. The believer, as Calvin stresses, is most anxious to explore the works of God. And the unbeliever, in clinger to his rejection of the special principle, is made tributary to the service of the special principle. By being made tributary to the special principle he indirectly contributes to the true development of the natural principle. Those who refuse to submit the natural principle to the special principle are untrue to the natural principle itself. Their discoveries of truth in the area of the works of God, therefore, rightly belong to those who are covenant-keepers in principle. The unity of science is accomplished in Christ, the Savior of the world.

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(12) There is in consequence no neutral territory between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. The antitheses of principle is equally real and equally basic at every point of contact between them. How could it be otherwise? The antithesis is not basic at any point unless it is basic at every point. The point of battle between two totalitarian powers may be a spot of desert sand. The battle is not any the less violent for all that. The fate of the empire is always involved. If one fact were intelligible without the presupposition of the truth of the special principle, i.e., of Christ as the Savior of the natural principle, then all facts would be. If the unbeliever could, on his principle, discover any meaning in one fact in relation to any other fact, in terms of his principle, then the indispensability of supernatural revelation, and in particular of supernatural revelation in its redemptive garb, would disappear.

(13) But though no compromise can be made between the two principles, this constitutes no bar against cooperation between the adherents of these two principles. In a religious ethical sense, says Kuyper, the unbeliever’s opposition to the special principle derives from his enmity of God. But this unbeliever need not on that account, as a man of science, be dishonest. And he has the ability to discover much truth. He can count and weigh and measure. He can gather facts. His logical powers are often greater than those of believers. Even to oppose the truth he must set it forth. His interpretative endeavor is bound to be revelatory of the truth.

Why should the Christian then not gratefully employ, for purposes of advancing knowledge, the funded results of the investigations of scientists, whether they be Christians or not? He may do so, if only he does not, while doing it, thereby concede the autonomy, the juxtaposition of the natural principle as over against the special principle.

(14) This leads us to our final point. The believing scholar will gladly cooperate with the unbelieving scholar. But the believing scholar cannot excuse himself from the task of witness-bearing. And this witness-bearing must take place at every point of meeting between believers and unbelievers. The wisdom of this world has been made foolishness with God. If the unbelieving scholar’s principle were to be adopted there would be no truth, no science, no knowledge. Basic to the unbelieving scholar’s position is the notion of possibility as standing above God. If the unbelieving scholar’s assumption were true, all would be Chaos and old Night. No fact could then be found. There would be no distinguishing mark that would differentiate one fact from another fact. Anything might happen, except that nothing intelligible could happen. The human mind would itself be a product of chance. Its laws of logic would have no deeper foundation than a derelict adrift on a shoreless sea. Logic and fact could never come into fruitful union with one another. The very concepts of “probability” and “proof” would be meaningless.

The unbelieving scholar may at first appear to be very open-minded. But he is too open-minded. According to him, God, if he exists, may possibly not exist. Christ may, but he also may not, be the Savior of men. By this “may-or-may-not” of the unbeliever, the special principle has in effect already been rejected. According to Christianity, especially according to Christianity as expressed in the Reformed confessions, God is the source of possibility. The believer cannot allow that justice is done to God and to Christ unless it be maintained that all hypotheses about facts and their possible and probable relations must presuppose God and his Christ as self-existent, self-identifying and

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40 Ibid., p. 339.
therewith as the source of the intelligibility and applicability of the idea of fact or of hypothesis.

The believing scholar, therefore, begs the unbelieving scholar not to forego the fruits of his own labor. The believer pleads with the unbeliever no longer to rebel against the truth, which he must, in spite of himself, constantly presuppose. The revelation of God is clear, it is inescapable. If every fact in the universe, even those facts discovered by the unbeliever, were not themselves by their nature the condemnation of the principle of unbelief, they would not be facts at all. There would be no reality to cite against the unbeliever unless unbelief itself as a parasite must feed upon the truth.

This is not merely to say that if truth should perish it would still be true that it is truth that perishes, and so truth did not perish after all. It is rather to say that the revelation of God in the works of God (as interpreted by the principles of the Word of God, and therefore by the motifs of creation and providence as the carrying out of God’s all-controlling plan) is clear. By presenting this revelation of God in Christ to men in the laboratory as well as in the arena of philosophical and theological discussion, the believer himself manifests the clarity of the natural revelation of God.

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Appendix 2: Berkouwer’s Recent View Of Scripture

We have made several references to Berkouwer’s view of Scripture. All of these references were to his earlier work on Scripture under the title The Problem Of Scripture Criticism. We turn now to a recent work on Scripture by Berkouwer. Its title is Holy Scripture. This work appeared too late to be included in the body of this pamphlet.

It is of considerable importance for us to compare the later with the earlier work. In the earlier work Berkouwer lays great stress on the distinctive character of the Reformed view of Scripture. He speaks of the “isolation” of the Reformed view of Scripture. The Reformed view of Scripture does full justice to the Reformation principle of sola Scriptura-sola fide. This is the case because the Reformed view of Scripture involves the Reformed view of God and his relation to man and his world.

The scriptural teaching that man is a creature made in the image of God is not taken seriously anywhere else but in the Reformed Faith. And only if man as the subject which interprets the revelation of God to man, is itself first interpreted by God, can the words of man be used as “instruments” through which God speaks his Word. Neither the historic opponents of the Reformed Faith, the Roman Catholics and the Arminians, nor the current opponents of the Reformed Faith, the neo-orthodox theologians, especially Karl Barth, interpret man, the receiver of revelation, in terms of the scriptural notion of creation.

Again, the scriptural teaching that man is a sinner and, as such, hinders the truth in unrighteousness, is not taken seriously anywhere else but in the Reformed Faith. And only if sin is seen for what it is, in the light of Scripture, can there be an adequate appreciation for the necessity, the authority, the clarity and the sufficiency of Scripture. Neither the historic opponents of the Reformed Faith, the Roman Catholics and the Arminians, nor the current opponents of the Reformed Faith, the neo-orthodox, especially Barth, interpret sin in terms of the biblical notion of the fall of man.

In the Council of Trent the Roman Catholic church vigorously declared its adherence to Scripture as the Word of God. But this declaration, Berkouwer argues, was a merely formal assertion. By putting tradition on a par with Scripture and by insisting that the Church had the right and duty of giving a final, and therefore authoritative, interpretation of Scripture, its confession of the Bible as the Word of God was reduced to a nullity in practice.

As for Barth, it may appear at first glance that, in rejecting the subjective views of the Modernists, he has, at the same time, returned to the Reformation view of Scripture. Does he not say that the Bible is the Word of God? Yes, he does, says Berkouwer; but it should be carefully noted that this too means nothing more than a formal adherence to the Reformation principle. This is clear from the fact that according to Barth’s own explanation the word must be taken activistically. Barth does not believe that we have or could have available in Scripture a direct and therefore a given revelation of God to man.

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1 Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek, Kok, 1936.
For Barth, revelation is historical, but history is never revelational. If we are to escape the orthodox notion of a book with a once-for-all given revelation of God to man, says Barth, then we must think of the relation of God to man activistically rather than statically.

This neo-orthodox position with respect to Scripture is, for all its opposition to the Roman Catholic view of Scripture and for all its opposition to the modern Protestant view of Scripture, still subjective. The idea of man as not first interpreted by Scripture, but as first interpreted apart from Scripture in terms of man himself, in short, the idea of human autonomy, has a spurious and debilitating influence both on Roman Catholicism and on neo-orthodoxy.

It is of particular importance to note that, according to Berkouwer, the Reformed view of Scripture and the Reformed view of the teachings of Scripture involve one another. The “formal” principles and the “material” principle of the Reformation must always be stated as implying one another. Without the theology of the Reformed confessions one cannot have the proper doctrine of Scripture.

We may say that the Scripture is what it is because in it Christ tells us who he is and what he came to do in the world of sinful men. He tells us that he was sent by the Father in order to save the world (Jn 3:16). He tells us that by his death and resurrection he saved his people from the “wrath to come” and made them “heirs” with himself of eternal life in glory. It is by his Spirit that they are born again, born “from above” and brought into living relation with him through faith.

This is the purpose of his mission. And in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments he tells us of that purpose. He uses men, sinful men, as his mouthpiece. Why should he not? Should the fact that they are men, and therefore finite, stand in his way? Not at all. A father can make himself understood to his child. The child will not exhaustively understand the words of his father, but neither does he need to. Man does not need to understand the words of his Creator-Redeemer exhaustively to understand him truly. A father cannot be certain that he has “reached” his son, that he has conveyed his meaning clearly to his son. The Creator is certain that he does convey his purpose unmistakably. The created world therefore is what it is because it is revelational of God’s purpose.

Even by their sin men, as creatures of God, have not been able to destroy the all-penetrating light of the purpose of God in every fact of the world. Men could not be sinners except as “breakers” of the ordinances of God. And they could not “break” these ordinances unless these ordinances were “unbreakable,” i.e., unless they were rebelling against God within the all-encompassing plan of God.

Accordingly when God freely creates man, freely “permits” him to rebel against him, and freely comes into the world to redeem him, God can freely chose any man from any historical situation at any point of history in order to speak through him to all men in any other historical situation at any other point of history.

Neither the Roman Catholic church nor the neo-orthodox theologian have any such view of the purpose or scope of God’s revelation of grace to men. In both cases it is their notion of human autonomy that prevents them from having a philosophy of history in which man can at no point escape from God. Both Roman Catholicism and neo-orthodoxy have in effect only a finite God. Their problematics therefore differ from the problematics of those who hold to the Reformed Faith.
In both cases their problematics have to do with mystery. But the mystery in each case is different. Those who hold the Reformed Faith take their view of God exclusively from Scripture. Accordingly their God dwells in light that no man can approach unto. No man can penetrate the counsels of the self-referential, self-naming God. As a consequence all the facts of the universe are “mysterious” to man. Man is mysterious to himself. All the facts of the world are mysterious to man because they are what they are, in the last analysis, in relation of dependence to God who is not mysterious to himself. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. Thus for those who believe in God there is true, though never comprehensive, knowledge. On the other hand, the Roman Catholics and the neo-orthodox do not take their view of God exclusively from Scripture. The Roman Catholics first take their view of God and man from “natural theology.” The neo-orthodox first take their view of God and man from Kant or some other modern philosopher.

In both cases they assume the autonomy of man. In both cases Christianity is but an addition to their philosophy.

Thus both the Roman Catholics and the neo-orthodox theologians surround their God with ultimate mystery. Their God can be of no help to them since he must himself find his way in a cave. All around him is darkness. All is pure contingency. And man and God as partners must find their way in this darkness. Fortunately they do not need to find their way, because neither they nor their God exist. Neither they nor their God can identify themselves.

Reformed believers also have their problems. For them too omnia abeunt in mysterium. They too will never “solve” their problems. Even so they have solved their problems. Their God has solved their problems for them. Their God has no problems. There are no ideas or laws “above” him, and there are no facts of history “below” him that have any self-existence and, therefore, restricting power with respect to him. All the facts and all the laws of the created cosmos are his servants. God is conditioned by nothing; he is the all-conditioner.

Of course Reformed believers do not seek to prove the existence of their God. To seek to prove or to disprove the existence of this God would be to seek to deny him. To seek to prove or disprove this God presupposes that man can identify himself and discover facts in relation to laws in the universe without reference to God. A God whose existence is “proved” is not the God of Scripture.

In whatever the Reformed Christian does, as he seeks to obey the cultural mandate originally given to man, he seeks to implicate himself into a deeper intellectual understanding and into a more unqualified spiritual commitment to his Creator-Redeemer.

This means that the Reformed believer seeks to understand the “system” of truth expressed in Scripture. He will seek truly to grow in the grace and knowledge of his Savior as he undertakes anew each day to realize something toward the fulfillment of man’s cultural mandate.

Thus both the Reformed believer, as well as the Roman Catholic and the neo-orthodox believers, seek to “approximate” truth. But so far as non-Reformed Christians are self-consciously committed to the idea of human autonomy, they have no truth. Their approximation to the “truth” is approximation into a vacuum. Then, so far as they are Christian in their thinking they “share” the problematics of the Reformed Christian. They
have two mutually exclusive sets of problematics. And they commingle these two mutually exclusive sets of problems. Hence the all-pervasive confusion.

We must now introduce a warning. In what I have given above I have not directly reproduced the thinking of Berkouwer in detail. I have tried to work out the implications of his earlier view of Scripture as it related to his earlier view of theology. So much is clear: Berkouwer’s earlier view of Scripture and of theology were, like the views of such men as Bavinck and Warfield, involved in one another. Together they expressed the all-encompassing purpose of the God of all grace to save the whole man with his whole world.

Such men as are not saved, are not saved because as covenant-breakers they are guilty before God and abide under God’s wrath. Scripture teaches that the discriminating grace of God in history is the realization of God’s plan. The self-determinative God is the ultimate, all-conditioning God. Some men hear, others do not hear the gospel; they never have the “opportunity” of responding to the overtures of grace. They are lost. Yet they are not lost without guilt. They are guilty because they hinder the revelation of God that has been present to them, as to all men, from the beginning of history. Thus the providence of God is discriminating. God controls the facts of space and time. He inclines a young man’s heart to become a missionary. As a missionary he goes, because he is sent, to the dark continent of Africa rather than to Asia. In all this it is, ultimately, the all-conditioning activity of God that is the final determining factor in the lot of every man. And it is the self-conditioning God who acts as the final discriminating power upon all the forces—objective and subjective—that operate in history.

Summing up the matter, we may say that the “earlier Berkouwer” stressed the fact that though Roman Catholicism and neo-orthodoxy formally confessed adherence to Scripture as the Word of God, they practically denied this belief by the false interpretation that they give of the content, the teaching of Scripture. This content can be expressed by the word purpose or scope. The Reformed believer holds that Christ came to save the whole man with his world. There is not one spot to be found in the world that is not under the curse of God because of the sin of man. Man’s entire reaction to the revelation of God which confronts him everywhere is one of guilt and pollution. So, God saves the whole man with the whole world. This is the purpose of Christ’s coming into the world.

According to Roman Catholicism and neo-orthodoxy, the curse of God is not thus intensive and extensive. The sinner is not insulting God when he asks whether nature reveals him. The scientist is not guilty when he handles nature as though it were a grab-bag tossed into his lap by chance instead of the estate of the Creator-Re Redeemer. Accordingly, the purpose of Christ’s coming is not to save the whole man and the whole world. The purpose of Christ is merely to help men in one aspect of their life where they seem to need some help. This is the “religious” aspect. But even in this aspect of life they are not entirely helpless. They do not need the regenerating power of the Spirit of Christ before they can believe.

Thus the purpose of Christ is, at most, a very restricted one. Man does not need the sovereign grace of God and therefore man does not need the sovereign interpretation of such a sovereign grace as Scripture claims to give.

The uniqueness of the Reformed view of Scripture is therefore but an expression of the uniqueness of Reformed theology. And this uniqueness is found in the consistency
with which the sovereign grace of God in Christ is recognized for what it is at every point.

1. The Later Berkouwer

In his second work on Scripture Berkouwer takes a quite different approach. Not as though he no longer stresses the necessity of combining one’s view of Scripture and one’s view of the message of Scripture. On the contrary, he now speaks constantly of the scope, the purpose, the message of Scripture as involving one’s view of Scripture.

Berkouwer’s new approach appears rather in a change of viewpoint with respect to the nature of the message or purpose of Scripture. And with a change of view of the message of Scripture goes a change of view of Scripture itself. Berkouwer’s view of Scripture is different from what it was in his earlier works because his view of Christ and his work among men is different from what it was formerly.

We realize that this is a radical judgment. We must not make it lightly. But we are driven to it by a re-reading of all of Berkouwer’s major works. This judgment is in essential agreement with that of Dr. Hendrikus Berkhof in his article “The Method of Berkouwer’s Theology,” in Ex Auditu Verbi. Berkhof argues that Berkouwer’s theological method, the method of correlation, was bound to lead him, at last, to a virtual denial of the view of Scripture taken in his earlier work. In the earlier work Berkouwer starts with the “unproblematic” authority of Scripture as the Word of God. The “problems” of criticism and of the historical conditions under which Scripture revelation is given are, as it were, “solved” in advance. They may never be solved in the sense that they can be “cleared up.” But then it remains true that unless we take our ultimate light from Scripture, all is darkness.

In his later work, says Berkhof, Berkouwer has seen the tendency toward determinism in his earlier view of the relation of God to man. To escape this charge of determinism Berkouwer criticized the Synod of Dordt for using causal categories in its attempt to safeguard the notion of the sovereignty of the grace of God over against the Remonstrants. Though their real intent was to stress the doxological character of grace, the Fathers of Dordt used determinist categories in trying to do so. As Berkouwer now uses ethical or doxological rather than determinist categories in order to express the notion of sovereign grace, so now he also uses ethical or doxological rather than causal categories in his defense of the Scriptures as the Word of God.

Berkhof has, we believe, accurately summed up the nature of a general change in Berkouwer’s theology. We may add to what Berkhof says that this change appears very strikingly in Berkouwer’s books Providence, and The Election Of God. A true notion of providence and a true notion of election can be obtained only if we express them in teleological or doxological instead of causal categories.

It is only in recent times, Berkouwer now argues, that theologians have learned to interpret the doctrines of grace and with them the doctrine of Scripture in teleological rather than causal categories. And on this point neo-orthodox theologians have been

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A fuller justification of this severe judgment is found in my article, The Relevance of Dordt.
pioneers. Whereas in an earlier work Berkouwer speaks of Barth as more nominalist than Occam, in a recent work on Barth he speaks of Barth’s theology as “unambiguously Christocentric.” Now for Barth, Christ is the Christ-Event. Barth has, he says, actualized the incarnation. And actualizing the incarnation implies, for Barth, that the states of Christ, the state of humiliation and the state of exaltation, do not follow one another in history. Berkouwer recognizes this fact, even in his second book on Barth. He says: “Barth’s conception of Christ’s humiliation and exaltation does not involve two successive ‘states’ of Christ, but rather two sides or aspects or forms of what takes place in Jesus Christ in His effecting of reconciliation between God and man.”

It is in consonance with this when Berkouwer speaks of Barth’s “supralapsarian” view of election as being “the reverse side” of Barth’s doctrine of “the ontological impossibility of sin.” And, “if sin is ontologically impossible, a transition from wrath to grace in the historical sphere is unthinkable.”

Barth’s actualization of the Incarnation involves also the actualization of scriptural revelation. Therefore when Barth says that the Bible is the Word of God this must be taken in an activist sense. Thus God is Christ and Christ is his revelation, and his revelation is reconciliation, and reconciliation is inherently universal. To be sure, Judas represents the “open situation in preaching.” Nominalism is always correlative to realism. Contingency is always correlative to determinism. The supralapsarian view of election, therefore, has nothing to do with determinism. Election has nothing directly to say about distinctions in the phenomenal world. Election does not distinguish between persons as they are distinct from one another in the world of space and time. There is no person named Esau who is “reprobate,” as there is no person named Jacob who is elect. All that we know is that Christ is the electing God and Christ is the elected man. In the Christ-Event all of God’s rejection of men has been absorbed. In the Christ, therefore, all men are saved but, of course, always free to be lost.

All this, Barth admits, involves the rejection of the traditional view of the incarnation, the traditional view of election, and the traditional view of Scripture. From Barth’s point of view the traditional view both of Scripture and of the message of Scripture with respect to the person and work of Christ as reported in Scripture, was expressed in causal categories. The traditional view of Scripture and of its message is therefore static. It is metaphysical. It is intellectualist. Its problematics are the problematics of an impoverished mechanical view taken from the “I-it” dimension of human experience. Calvinists and Remonstrants fought their battle on the common, mistaken assumption that God’s revelation of grace is directly discernible in the realm of cause and effect. Neither expressed their conviction in terms of the existential-ethical dimension, the dimension of divine-human encounter, the dimension that is above the dimension causal relations.

But now we have learned to be unambiguously Christocentric. We have actualized the Scriptures and its content. Now we can, for the first time, really state and defend the primacy of grace. We are now able to do what Calvin, what even the “orthodox Fathers”

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5 Karl Barth, Kok, 1936.
6 The Triumph Of Grace In The Theology Of Karl Barth, Engl. tr., Eerdmans, p. 17.
7 p. 133.
8 p. 256.
9 p. 233.
really intended to do but could not do, namely: state unproblematically that the words of
men, the oftentimes quite mistaken words of men in Scripture, are the Word of God, and
that the wholly hidden God is wholly revealed in Jesus, and while wholly revealed is still
wholly hidden in him.

We can now, for the first time, escape Docetism both with respect to the person of
Christ and with respect to Scripture.

It is thus that Barth and his neo-orthodox disciples have “solved” the problem of the
relation of a first or primary cause to secondary causes in the case of election as in the
case of providence. At the same time and by the same token Barth and his disciples have
“solved” the problem of the relation of the primary to secondary authors in the case of
Scripture. They have solved it by showing that all such problems disappear as the mist
before the sun the moment we are lifted into the dimension of ethics or doxology.

But we are interested in seeing what bearing all this has on the change in
Berkouwer’s views with respect to Scripture.

The first point to note is that Berkouwer does use an activist framework in his
statement of the doctrine of Scripture. He uses virtually the same terminology that neo-
orthodox theologians use. In an article on Dordt published in 1963 he criticizes the
causal framework (kader) in which the doctrine of free grace is expressed by the Synod
of Dordt. The Articles of Dordt, unfortunately, present us with an “objective distinction”
to the effect that God has in time given some men faith and withheld it from others. Such
teaching is not taken from Scripture. It is a “conclusion” which is connected with a vision
of God as causing all things. It is no wonder that men charged Dordt with holding a
determinist view of reality and, in particular, that they charged Dordt with the idea that
the unbelief of men must be traced to an all-causing God.

If only we took our doctrine of election from the Scriptures. Then we would, in the
first place, no longer speak of a doctrine of election. Scripture does not present us with “a
doctrine of election but with the free electing God.” And herewith we are above the
realm of causation; we are in the realm of doxology. We are no longer concerned about a
“metaphysical system,” but with the praise of the electing God. The biblical perspective
lifts us out of the determinism-indeterminism antithesis altogether. We no longer employ
a formal idea of the all-powerfulness of God.

It is especially the new or recent exegesis of Scripture that has opened our eyes to the
true teleological character of Scripture itself. The new exegesis of Romans 9–11 has
enabled us to see that the older, objective, causal view of election was mistaken. Esau’s
rejection and Jacob’s election, it is now quite generally recognized, does not indicate that
God has determined everything from eternity with respect to the eventual salvation of
these men as individuals. What the passage teaches is simply that salvation is of grace
and not of works. Seeing this, we shall no longer be anxious with respect to the
“number of the predestined.” Nor need we then any longer trouble ourselves about the
relation of an eternal counsel of God and its relation to the movement of time. If only we

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10 Vragen Rondom de Belijdenis in Gereformeerden Theologisch Tydschrift, vol. 63, 1963,
pp. 1–41.
11 p. 13.
13 p. 77.
retain the vision of the doxological nature of the gospel we drop the eternity-time antithesis as we have already dropped the idea of an all-causing God. If we have once seen the fact that election is election in Christ, we shall spontaneously give up any “isolated interest in an all-determining counsel of God, which cannot be followed by a decisive significance of history.” 14

We briefly interrupt our exposition of Berkouwer’s changed view of theology in order to bring it into perspective.

In the first place, as already noted, Berkouwer uses, to all intents and purposes, the same activist framework that neo-orthodox theologians use, in order to set forth the message of God’s sovereign grace as given in Scripture in modern language.

In the second place, Berkouwer is outspoken in his insistence that it is in this new activist framework instead of in the framework of orthodox theology that the idea of the sovereign grace can be set forth adequately. The men of Dordt meant to speak of the scriptural truth that salvation is all of grace and not at all of merit, but when they spoke they frequently used a causal framework of language in which the idea of grace cannot be expressed at all. Worse than that, it is only in spite of such language that the idea of grace shines through it at all.

Berkouwer sets the dimensions of ethical relation, of sin and salvation, over against one another in the sharpest possible manner. If the doctrine of grace is to be expressed at all this must be done doxologically and not causally. Only thus can the charge of determinism lodged against the Reformed view of the primacy of grace be shown to be pointless.

If then the contention is made at this point that Berkouwer merely uses the framework or pattern of language of neo-orthodoxy but is not committed to its thought-content, the following considerations come into the picture.

Formerly Berkouwer insisted that for all his opposition to liberalism, Barth’s theology was, nevertheless, subjective. In his latest work on Barth, Berkouwer insists that for all the serious danger in Barth’s supralapsarianism, Barth maintains the “virgin birth,” “the historicity of the Resurrection of Christ,” and “the traditional Christological dogma of the deity and the humanity of Christ.” “What must one think,” asks Berkouwer rhetorically, “of a characterization of Barth’s theology as ‘new-modernism’ when in that theology are taught the virgin birth, incarnation, resurrection, and ascension to heaven?” 15

With his activist framework, Barth actualizes the incarnation so that, in Berkouwer’s words, “it is no longer possible to speak of a process that moves from humiliation to exaltation,” 16 and yet be said to believe in all of the teachings mentioned in the previous paragraphs. Is this the price that Berkouwer is willing to pay in order, with Barth, to escape the “traditional” idea of a “God in himself” and a “man in himself”?

We now follow Berkouwer point by point as he discusses his view of Scripture. First we turn to:

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14 p. 165.
15 The Triumph of Grace, p. 16.
16 p. 314.
The Authority of Scripture. When we deal with the question of the authority of Scripture we must not speak of it as though it were a matter of “timeless contemplation.” We must not, in our day, in the face of the many questions pertaining to its historically conditioned terminology simply assert the unproblematic character of inspiration. We must rather be able to give an account of its nature. There is no such thing as a “timeless correlation between Scripture and faith.” We must not minimize the “human factor” in the interest of maintaining the place of priority for the “divine factor.” We must not stand with Fundamentalists who “obscured the contexts in which God himself has given Scripture to us.” We must not think of Scripture as a code-book of articles. Such a position involves a negative apologetic.

The view of Scripture which Berkouwer now calls fundamentalist is said to be a formal one. It is no longer the Roman Catholics and the neo-orthodox, but it is the Fundamentalists who are said to hold a formal view of Scripture.

Over against this formal view of Scripture Bavinck already warned us by saying that Scripture must bind us to Christ. As if the Fundamentalist intended anything else. It is clear that Berkouwer needs a scape-goat at this point. The American Fundamentalist will do. Yet Berkhof spoke of Berkouwer’s own view of Scripture as formal. Berkhof is mistaken. Berkouwer never held to a view of Scripture apart from its message pertaining to Christ. Neither did Bavinck or many of the Fundamentalists.

Berkouwer’s argument in his first book was to the point. In it he contended that only he who spurns the idea of seeking wisdom from any source but Scripture has a truly teleological view of Scripture. Reformed theology comes nearer to this ideal than any other theology. Roman Catholic and neo-orthodox theology seek their interpretation of much of life by means of method that presupposes the idea of human autonomy. However far Reformed theology may be from its goal it is at least trying to make every thought captive to the obedience of Christ speaking in Scripture.

The real issue today is between those who believe a true teleology, the teleology of the Christ of the Scriptures, and those who believe in false teleology, a teleology of human construction. Roman Catholicism seeks a combination between, or synthesis of, a teleology taken from Aristotle’s philosophy and a teleology taken from the Christ of the Scripture. Neo-orthodoxy seeks a combination between, or synthesis of, a teleology taken from Kant and a teleology taken from Scripture. Both of these syntheses are monstrosities. We shall not deny that one holding to such a monstrosity intellectually is a Christian at heart. But we are obliged to call upon him to join us in presenting a lost and dying world with the teleology of Scripture instead of with an Aristotle-Kant teleology lest all be lost.

17 p. 7.
18 p. 15.
20 p. 36.
3. Volume 2

That Berkouwer is unwilling to make this sort of antithesis is obvious in what he says about:

A. The Inspiration Of Scripture

In this section Berkouwer actually defends the activist view of Scripture of The Confession of 1967 against Dr. Edmund P. Clowney, who criticized it from the historic Reformed point of view. Clowney is said to be reactionary. As noted above, Berkouwer, knowing full well that Barth’s actualizing of the incarnation involves the complete rejection of the idea that the resurrection follows his death in time, nevertheless insists that Barth holds to the “historicity of the resurrection” of Christ.

Similarly, Berkouwer, who once told us to realize that the activist view of Scripture as held by Barth is the opposite of the Reformed view, now insists that the activist view is the true view.

He now argues that the activist view of inspiration alone does justice to what some Reformed traditional theologians were trying to express when they said that the inspiration of Scripture must be conceived of organically rather than mechanically.

Even though we say that Scripture is inspired organically, many problems remain. We may profess to hold to an organic view of Scripture without escaping formalism. We still need to study the nature of Scripture in order to appreciate the true role of the human subject in relation to it. It is the question of the “way of the Word of God through that which is human.” We are after “the true functionality of the human organ.”

In doing so, we must be careful not to say that God is the real author of Scripture. Are then the human authors unreal? One may read many discussions on the question of the instrumentality of men in connection with the inspiration that bear “a strongly formal character, which is connected with the causal approach to Scripture.”

The men of Dordt held to a causal view of the relation of God to men, and some men today, presumably among the sons of Dordt, hold to a causal approach to Scripture. So long as such men still think causally they will remain caught in a “metaphysical problematic.” They will not see that they are still the victims of a theoretical problematic which is “entirely alien to Scripture.” Such a “theoretical problematic” is a “competition problematic.” The men of Dordt, with their causal problematic, could not properly express their doxological intentions. Today there are those who still think causally in relation to Scripture. They can never see the true doxology of grace. They can never properly express the primacy of God’s grace.

The only way of ever learning to express the priority of grace is to speak of Scripture as witnessing to Christ. The people who wrote The Confession of 1967 have seen this

21 p. 37.
22 p. 38.
23 p. 41.
24 p. 46.
25 p. 47.
26 p. 48.
point. Clowney apparently has no eye for the “mystery” of the Word of God as related to a “fully human witness.”

One would think at this point that Berkouwer now thinks exclusively in terms of the alternative between a properly activist view of Scripture as witness to Christ and the formal-causal approach of Fundamentalists and some less progressive sons of Dordt. Berkhof predicted that, committed as Berkouwer is to his method of correlation, he would, in the second volume of his new work on Scripture, no longer be able to hold to his earlier position with respect to the unproblematic character of Scripture. Berkhof’s prediction has come true.

In the body of this pamphlet we have spoken of Beegle’s work. Beegle, we saw, wants to adjust his view of Scripture to harmonize with results obtained by studying the phenomena of Scripture by the empirical method of modern science. The position of Berkouwer is not just that. Yet there is a similarity between the two views. Berkouwer is greatly troubled by the historically conditioned character of Scripture, by the limitations of human language, etc. He knew about the basic elements in these problems when he wrote his first work on Scripture. Then he saw that Christ was really Lord of history, and that no phenomena of history, whether directly or indirectly related to Scripture, could disprove the concrete significance of that Lordship. Now all has changed. If God was once the source of possibility, now at many points possibility seems to be the source of God. Mere chance can spout forth all kinds of facts that require a reduced interpretation of the all-mightiness of God. The idea of God as self-determinate and as being the all-conditioning, all-directing, power back of history is now said to be a threatening bogeyman in the way that Barth speaks of the God of Calvin.

**B. The Inerrancy Of Scripture**

The idea of the inerrancy of Scripture receives the same treatment as the idea of its inspiration. We are warned against holding to a formal idea of inerrancy which “requires exact accuracy of all Scriptural presentations.” With such a formal idea of inerrancy we may fall into the realm of competition with science. Ramm was therefore quite right when he spoke of the hyperorthodox who fail to see that Scripture comes to us “in terms of the culture in which the writers wrote.” It is only if we use the idea of the scope of Scripture that we can work out the idea of the organic nature of inspiration into further nuances and have a true insight into the “human factor.” Then we shall understand what Barth means by the worldliness (welthaltigkeit) of revelation.

A formal view of the inerrancy of Scripture virtually eliminates the human and the historical by a direct appeal to the Holy Spirit. A proper teleological view is not worried about “perfect precision” that would exclude all “interpretative subjectivity.” By the standard of a formal view of inerrancy “the gospels appear to be untrustworthy.”

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27 p. 53.
28 p. 93.
29 p. 94.
30 p. 23.
31 p. 211.
C. The Perspicuity Of Scripture

Berkouwer devotes much space to the question of the perspicuity of Scripture. There are, again, those who hold to a formal idea of perspicuity. They think of perspicuity as an “objective ‘quality’ of Scripture.” There are others who see that the idea of perspicuity needs to be related to that of interpretation. The Reformers held the latter view. They meant by the clarity of Scripture the fact that its message actually penetrates the hearts of men.

This is again the position of a true teleology of Scripture. They who hold this true teleological view of Scripture do not seek to deduce doctrines from Scripture by “good and necessary consequences” as if from some major premise.

D. The Sufficiency Of Scripture

When dealing with the sufficiency of Scripture, Berkouwer again contrasts the position of those who hold a formal view with the position of those who hold a teleological view. The former think of the sufficiency of Scripture as of a “lifeless abstraction” even as they think of its clarity as an “attribute.” The latter realize, with the Reformers, that the idea of sola Scriptura involves the “stretching out toward the gospel of salvation as its message” on the part of the believer.

If we are to speak to our day on such points as the authority, the clarity and the sufficiency of Scripture, and on its inspiration, we must go beyond our fathers in that we must seek to do more justice than they, bound as they were to their causal categories, could do to the historical conditions in which Scripture was given, and, in particular, to the “interpreting subject.”

Now neo-orthodox theology does just that. And, to our joy, neo-orthodoxy seeks to give its rightful place to history in general and to the interpretative subject in particular, not by falling back into a natural theology but by interpreting both history and man in terms of the Christ-Event. This means that for neo-orthodoxy the causal dimension of reality is made properly subject to the ethical or doxological dimension. With the help of an actualized concept of the incarnation and an actualized concept of revelation, we can now discover and express in proper words the priority of grace over works. Surely this was the true intent of Dordt and of the Reformers.

We are not suggesting at all that Berkouwer is now ready to go down the line with Barth’s actualist reinterpretations of Reformation teaching. Berkouwer continues to have serious objections to certain aspects or points of Barth’s theology. And he makes these serious objections on the basis of the idea of Scripture as the direct revelation of God to man. In other words, Berkouwer is still using his earlier view of Scripture as a standard by which alone he can find anything seriously wrong with Barth.

Thus there appears to be great confusion in Berkouwer’s thinking both on the idea of Scripture and on its contents. He has not altogether given up his earlier position on either

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32 p. 249.
33 p. 256.
34 p. 282.
35 p. 357.
point. The obvious tension present in his thinking seems to spring from the fact that he was worried about the charge of formalism in relation to his earlier view of Scripture and was worried about the charge of determinism in relation to his earlier view of election and of God’s all-controlling providence.

Neo-orthodoxy then appeared attractive as a way of escape. It offered to take one out of the problematics of history in its relation to God’s plan hack of history in the way that an airplane takes one over the mountains.

But Barth’s lifting us over the mountains does not mean that we never need to land again. One can set the ethical dimension over against and above the causal dimension but, unless one wants to remain in the realm of pure mysticism, one must come down again. In Kant’s philosophy, ethical dualism is followed by ethical monism. In Barth’s theology, nominalism is followed by an extreme realism. Barth’s theology may properly be called a Christo-monism. Man is, in advance (zum vornherein) taken up into the triumphant grace of Christ. Man is man only as fellow man with Christ, the only true man.

This is the theology that Barth himself sees as the fruit of is Christ-centered methodology. We can scarcely refute him.

Of particular import is what Berkouwer says about causal thinking. If he had developed his theology along the lines of his early commitment with respect to Scripture and of the Christ of Scripture, and along the lines of a scripturally based philosophy of history, he would have seen that one cannot speak of the cause idea. To speak thus is to speak formally and abstractly. There is a Christian as there is a non-Christian view of cause. The meaning of the word cause depends upon the context in which it is used. If set in the Christian context, causation means merely to give expression to a certain regularity of relationship that obtains between spatio-temporal facts in terms of the creation and providence of God. If set in the non-Christian context, causation means that a relation of regularity somehow, mysteriously, obtains between purely contingent facts. This regularity may, with the Greeks, be thought of as actually present in the facts between which it exists or it may, with post-Kantian philosophy, be thought of as a form of thought in terms of which alone the subject that interprets the facts of a purely contingent world can make itself believe that there is any order in them at all.

It is, in any case, the would-be autonomous man, using an abstract principle of continuity and an equally abstract principle of discontinuity that postulates regularity in a world of chaos.

Berkouwer speaks of a certain imperiousness that marks the causality idea. This is true in the case of the non-Christian view of cause. In fact, on this non-Christian view cause is what it is because of the supposedly legislative character of human logic. Reality must be what man—and his god—by thinking logically, say that it must be. Spinoza gave best expression to this idea when he said that the order and connection between ideas is the same as the order and connection between things.

He who thinks along these lines thinks deterministically. And indeterminism is no cure for determinism. Indeterminism is merely the admission of failure in one’s interpretation along lines of determinism.

It is Barth who is still caught in this false dilemma between determinism and indeterminism. The only way to escape it is to set the position that Berkouwer advocated in his earlier days, the position that starts with the presupposition of the authority, unity, and clarity of Scripture as the Word of God.
This is not a “causal approach” to Scripture. This is the approach of faith, of faith in the self-identifying Christ; not faith in faith, or faith in man.

A remark must finally be made about “the negative apologetic” which, Berkouwer says, is implied in a formal view of Scripture. A positive or proper view of apologetics is, presumably, involved in a proper or teleological view of Scripture. This point is well taken.

What does it mean? We believe it means that we must return to Berkouwer’s earlier view of the isolated character of the Reformed view of Scripture. Only if we return to this earlier view do we have a true teleology of Scripture. Only if we return to this earlier view do we have the self-identifying Christ who is the light of the world.

In the English-speaking world the neutral, Arminian method of apologetics reigned supreme, even in the work of many Reformed theologians. In terms of the method of this Arminian apologetics, even Reformed theologians compromised their deepest theological convictions. Thinking biblically they knew it was the sovereign God of creation and redemption who is the source of what can possibly happen in history. Then, under the influence of Bishop Butler, they started their apologetic argument with the assumption of possibility as above God. They lowered their claims for Christ by merely asking that men, in terms of their autonomous judgment, should elect him commander-in-chief of the armies of righteousness.

It was like a breath of fresh air when Abraham Kuyper advocated an apologetic in which the natural man was challenged to capitulate and prostrate himself before the cross of Christ or lose life and light in all dimensions of life. To be sure, Kuyper sometimes dropped to a lower level. Bavinck, too, in deep sympathy with Kuyper’s view, was much influenced by Thomas Aquinas. Even so, both of these men held before us the idea of a truly biblical apologetic. Holding to the position that a true apologetic presupposes a true, i.e., a biblical theology, they argued with Calvin that one must presuppose the Bible and its content in order to approach any problem properly. No problem about any fact of history, including the problem of the “historically conditioned” character of scriptural revelation and the problem of the “interpretative subject” in relation to the Scripture, can be properly stated, let alone solved, except upon the presupposition that the biblical picture of reality is true.

Since the days of Kuyper and Bavinck, neo-orthodoxy has appeared upon the scene. It is a theology far more definitely based upon the idea of human autonomy than is that of Butler. It is clearly imperative, then, that the heirs of Kuyper and Bavinck now set the historically Reformed view of Scripture and its content sharply over against neo-orthodoxy. Not to do so clearly is not to set the gospel of the free grace of God clearly before men as a challenge.

Neo-orthodoxy is a force within the church deceiving many of its members and ministers into compromise with a man-centered teleology. If its activistic methodology is accepted its activistic theology is also accepted.

If Berkouwer thinks that an activistic pattern of thinking is a better means of expressing the doctrines of grace than the traditional one, he would oblige us by showing how he can, by using his method, avoid slipping into neo-orthodoxy altogether. So far, every time he uses the activist pattern of thought, his theology also becomes activist. When Berkouwer is most activist in his thinking he first starts off with causal thinking as though it were an intelligible way of thinking without the biblical presuppositions of
creation and redemption, then he takes off into the realm of the unspeakable, the realm of praise without words, in order finally to return and speak of that realm in the language of causality. In short, so far as Berkouwer uses the activist pattern, he insinuates into the church a theology based on the idea of the autonomous man, using a Parmenidean-Spinozistic principle of continuity which would destroy all historical differentiation only to find that to use this method and not to go off into space, this method must be made correlative to a principle of discontinuity based on chance.

Thus it appears that if we follow the earlier Berkouwer in his view of Scripture and theology we have, and if we follow the later Berkouwer in his view of Scripture and its content we do not have, a positive biblical apologetic. Only if we follow the earlier Berkouwer as he followed Bavinck and Calvin can we challenge the world with the wisdom of God and seek to persuade the neo-orthodox theologian to return to the faith of the Reformers, and with them make their every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.