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Autopistia : the self-convincing authority of scripture in reformed theology

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5 Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921)

Now we have studied the development of the *autopistia* of Scripture in the Reformation and in Reformed orthodoxy, we turn to the end of the nineteenth century. We have seen an increasing tension between the objective side of the authority of Scripture – the *notae* and evidences – and the subjective side – the testimonium as internal *principium* of theology – in Reformed orthodoxy. We have chosen to skip the period of late Reformed orthodoxy and turn to the Reformed theology in the context of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. To determine our own position we will also have to deal with modernity in its full-grown form. At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century the Reformed theologians had to deal with new scientific discoveries and theories, with the historical-critical approach to Scripture, and with the alternatives of liberal theology. Our main question for this and the following chapter is how Reformed theologians responded to the new developments with respect to the authority of Scripture in general and to the question how Christians can be sure of this authority in particular.

In this chapter we will study the position of Benjamin B. Warfield on the authority of Scripture. Warfield was one of the leading Reformed theologians of his time. He is often seen as the defender of the inerrancy of Scripture against liberal attacks. Today he is still of influence in world-wide evangelicalism; for some his approach to the authority of Scripture is a great example, while others have sharply criticized him.¹ His position is also important because he represents the objective approach to the authority of Scripture, emphasizing the necessity of apologetics and the importance of the evidences, or *indicia* of Scripture, as he calls them. We are interested in how this relates to the self-convincing character of Scripture and to the work of the Spirit in his theology. Warfield uses the Greek term *αὐτόπιστος* only once in his oeuvre in a quotation, translated from Heinrich Heppes's *Dogmatik*.² Nevertheless, his position is important because of his influence, because of his interpretation of Calvin and because of the contrast with his colleague Herman Bavinck. The general absence of the term *αὐτόπιστος* and its derivatives may indicate his theological position.

Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield was born in Kentucky and studied at Princeton Seminary where Charles Hodge (1797-1878) was one of his teachers. He also visited Leipzig for further studies in 1876. After a short time as assistant pastor in Baltimore,

¹ For the criticism see Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, 323-358. J.C. Vander Stelt, *Philosophy and Scripture: A Study in Old Princeton and Westminster Theology*, Marlton (NJ) 1978. J.A. Montsma, *De exterritoriale openbaring: de openbaringsopvatting achter de fundamentalistische schriftbeschouwing*, Amsterdam 1985. J. Veenhof, 'Orthodoxie und Fundamentalismus,' *Praktische Theologie* 29 (1994), 9-18.

² B.B. Warfield 'The Westminster Doctrine of Holy Scripture' (1893), in Warfield, *Works* 6, 155-257, 165. "Warfield, *Works*" refers to B.B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, ed. E.D. Warfield, W.P. Armstrong, C.W. Hodge, New York [etc.] 1927-1932, reprinted in Grand Rapids, 1991, 10 vol. In the footnotes only the year of publication and the location in Warfield's *Works* are given; the original publication of the articles can be traced via the bibliography. Cf. Heppes, *Dogmatik*, 10. Cf. Heppes, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 22. We have used the digital publication of *The Works of B.B. Warfield* from AGES software to search for *αὐτόπιστος* and its derivatives.

he was appointed as instructor of New Testament language and literature at Western Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania in 1878 and became a professor there one year later. In 1887 he turned to systematic theology, accepting a call from Princeton Theological Seminary, where he stayed until his death.

B.B. Warfield's opinion on the authority of the Bible did not change essentially throughout the years, but his emphasis shifted.³ First Warfield focused on the relationship between historical-critical research and the doctrine of inspiration. He was interested in textual criticism and the forming of the New Testament canon. This first period runs parallel with his time as a New Testament professor.⁴ In Princeton he shifted to historical research on the development of the doctrine of Scripture. This was not only caused by his switch to a chair in Systematic Theology, but also by the intensifying debate with liberalism, the influence of mediating theology in the Presbyterian churches and the proposed revision of the Westminster Standards. In the final phase, after the turn of the century, Warfield wrote less on the authority of Scripture than before, concentrating on Christology and on the work of the Spirit in the application of redemption and in sanctification.⁵ When the subject of the authority of Scripture was handled, Warfield focused on the pneumatological aspects of the doctrine.⁶

Our main question in this chapter is where Warfield found the ultimate certainty of the authority of Scripture. We will also examine how he dealt with modernity in general and the critical approach to Scripture in particular. Our question regarding the meaning of the theological term αὐτόπιστος will be discussed when we study his perception of Calvin's theology.

5.1 Historical-Critical Approach

Warfield expresses his thoughts in many articles; most of those on the authority of Scripture have a polemical background, but his contributions to several encyclopedias have a more general character. Instead of summarizing Warfield's theology, we will

³ A chronological bibliography of Warfield's articles on Scripture is given by R.R. Nicole in A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield, *Inspiration*, ed. R.R. Nicole, Grand Rapids 1979, 83-90. For a complete survey of Warfield's articles see J.E. Meeter and R.R. Nicole, *A Bibliography of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, 1951 – 1921*, Nutley 1974.

⁴ Warfield's scholarly background in the field of the New Testament is often overlooked. K. Riddlebarger, 'The Lion of Princeton: Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield on Apologetics, Theological Method and Polemics' [Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary] 1997, 52.

⁵ D.B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony 1869-1929*, vol. 2, Edinburgh [etc.] 1996, 321. Nicole lists twelve articles on Scripture in the period before 1890, 53 in the period from 1890-1900 and seventeen after 1900. Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 83-90.

⁶ W.B. Wallis gives a general scheme of Warfield's theological development. "The major emphasis of Warfield's thought may be traced by decades: 1880-1890 emphasized Biblical foundations; 1890-1900 brought the clash with McGiffert over Christian origins; 1900-1910 was Christological; 1910-1920 logically was concerned with the application of redemption and the theology of the Holy Spirit." According to Wallis, Warfield's development was due to the advance of rationalistic liberalism. W.B. Wallis, 'B.B. Warfield: Didactic and Polemic Theologian,' in *Documents of Synod: Study Papers and Actions of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod -- 1965-1982*, Lookout Mountain 1982, 289-300, 299.

examine a few of his main articles in detail. We have chosen a chronological approach and will discuss the articles that deal with historical criticism, the doctrine of inspiration, and Calvin's doctrine of Scripture.

5.1.1 Inaugural Address 'Inspiration and Criticism' (1879)

Warfield's first contribution to the discussion on the authority of Scripture was the inaugural address at Western Theological Seminary in 1879, when he had already been an instructor in the New Testament at that seminary in Allegheny (Pennsylvania) for a year. In the address, titled 'Inspiration and Criticism' he shows that the New Testament claims inspiration. He also states that the apostolic church has acknowledged this claim, displaying a detailed knowledge of the early church fathers and their acceptance of the New Testament canon. Then he discusses the question whether this claim is valid. From a "critical standpoint" this claim can only be undermined in two ways. "It may be shown that the books making it are not genuine and therefore not authentic [...] Or it may be shown that the books, as a matter of fact, fall into the same errors and contain examples of the same mistakes which uninspired writings are guilty of."⁷ In both cases the books would not be trustworthy and the claim false. Warfield replies that "modern criticism has not disproved the authenticity of a single book of our New Testament."⁸ Radical criticism claims that a major part of the New Testament is not genuine, but this criticism is not honest and impartial. Behind it lies a denial of the possibility of miracles and especially of the miracle of God's revelation. A materialist can never be open to any evidence for the supernatural.⁹ Warfield advocates an honest criticism that does not rule out God's revelation beforehand. He trusts that such a "true criticism" leads to the conclusion not only that Scripture claims to be inspired, but also that this claim is correct. According to Warfield, science is not neutral; every science, including theology, is based on certain presuppositions.¹⁰ Criticism that starts with the presupposition that the supernatural is impossible, and does violence to the facts is not true criticism at all; it is "biblioclastic criticism."¹¹ The assumed inconsistencies in the New Testament are due to an exaggeration of the possibilities and results of criticism.¹²

This inaugural address is characteristic of Warfield's critical approach to the authority of Scripture. He defends the authority of Scripture on historical-critical grounds and lays the burden of proof with the opponents of the inspiration of Scripture. But he does not reject the historical-critical method; on the contrary, he trusts that the Scriptures are "just what they profess to be; and criticism only secures to them the more

⁷ B.B. Warfield, 'Inspiration and Criticism' (1880), in Warfield, *Works* 1, 395-425, 408.

⁸ Warfield, 'Inspiration and Criticism,' 408.

⁹ Warfield, 'Inspiration and Criticism,' 410, n. 6.

¹⁰ M.A. Noll asserts that Warfield and his conservative colleagues were "sharply aware of the role of presuppositions in scholarship." M.A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids 1991, 23.

¹¹ B.B. Warfield, 'The Rights of Criticism and of the Church' (1892), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 595-603, 598. "Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*" refers to B.B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. J.E. Meeter, 2 vol., Phillipsburg 1970, 1973.

¹² Warfield, 'Inspiration and Criticism,' 415-417. Elsewhere he says that the theories of higher criticism "rest on no better basis than an over-acute criticism, overreaching itself and building on fancies." Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 39-40.

firmly the position they claim.”¹³ An honest approach to Scripture shows that the opposition of higher criticism to the doctrine of inspiration is biased.

As a New Testament scholar Warfield had a positive attitude towards textual criticism. He wrote an *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (1886), explaining the textual principles of B.F. Westcott (1825-1901) and F.J.A. Hort (1828-1892).¹⁴ Warfield found “that every reading in the New Testament requires to be discussed separately and to be determined on the merits of its own evidence.”¹⁵ Warfield believed that the proper use of textual criticism could establish a text near to the original and for instance rejected the genuineness of Mark 16,9-29.¹⁶ He believed that the method did not bring doubt to any important doctrine of Scripture and he was optimistic about the results: “the inerrant autographs were a fact once; they may possibly be a fact again, when textual criticism has said its last word on the Bible text.”¹⁷ This positive attitude had its roots in his stay at Leipzig in 1876 where the discoverer of the Sinaitic Codex, L.F.C. Von Tischendorf (1815-1874), had erected an institute for the study of New Testament textual criticism.¹⁸

Warfield shared this appreciation of the critical method with other conservative biblical scholars of his time. W.H. Green (1825-1900), Warfield’s colleague in the Old Testament at Princeton, carefully studied the structure of Genesis and discovered the importance of the toledot-formula as a key to the literary unity of the book in 1895, long before structural analysis became a popular method for Old Testament exegesis.¹⁹

¹³ Warfield, ‘Inspiration and Criticism,’ 423. Warfield concludes: “We may say that modern biblical criticism has nothing valid to urge against the church doctrine of verbal inspiration, but that on the contrary it puts that doctrine on a new and firmer basis and secures to the church Scriptures which are truly divine. [...] If the sacred writers clearly claim verbal inspiration and every phenomenon supports that claim, and all critical objections break down by their own weight, how can we escape admitting its truth? What further proof do we need?” Warfield, ‘Inspiration and Criticism,’ 424.

¹⁴ The age of a manuscript, for instance, can be misleading. “It is not the mere number of years that is behind any manuscript that measures its distance from the autograph, but the number of copyings.” B.B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, London 1886, 110.

¹⁵ B.B. Warfield, ‘Review of J.W. Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established*, J.W. Burgon, *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, G. Salmon, *Soms Thoughts on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, F.H.A. Scrivener, *Adversaria Critica Sacra*, F.H. Chase, *The Old Syriac Element in the Text of the Codex Bezae*, F.H. Chase, *The Syro-Latin Text of the Gospels*, and J.R. Harris, *Four Lectures on the Western Text of the New Testament*’ (1897), in Warfield, *Works* 10, 25-41, 29.

¹⁶ Riddlebarger, ‘The Lion of Princeton,’ 72.

¹⁷ B.B. Warfield, ‘The New Testament Use of the Septuagint, and Inspiration’ (1892), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 549-559, 557. Cf. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Majestic Testimony*, 113.

¹⁸ It is very probable that Warfield attended the lectures of his successors W.G. Schmidt (1836-1888) and the American scholar C.R. Gregory (1846-1917). It is also possible that he met Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), who was a professor of Church History in Leipzig from 1876 to 1879.

¹⁹ P.J. Wallace, ‘The Foundations of Reformed Biblical Theology: The Development of Old Testament Theology at Old Princeton, 1812-1932,’ *The Westminster Theological Journal* 59 (1997), 41-69, 59. Green, who was the leader of the conservative school of higher criticism,

Criticism was used as a general term for the scholarly study of the Scriptures, regardless of one's opinions on inspiration. At Princeton it was appreciated as a method, provided that it was not misused to undermine the authority of Scripture. Criticism was an instrument to test the truth; the higher the claim of a book, the more searching the critical inquiry must be. The Bible was not less subject to criticism than other books: "we are bound to submit its unique claims to a criticism of unique rigor."²⁰ Nevertheless, this critical attitude had to be balanced by a believing submission to the authority of Scripture. "The critical investigation must be made, and we must abide by the result when it is unquestionably reached. But surely it must be carried on with infinite humility and teachableness, and with prayer for the constant guidance of the gracious Spirit."²¹

5.1.2 Determination of the Canon

Warfield followed a critical approach to determine the canon, placing the final criterion to for the New Testament in the apostolicity of the books, though he made a distinction between apostolic authority and apostolic authorship. "The principle of canonicity was not apostolic authorship, but imposition by the apostles as law."²² Warfield distinguished between the completion of the canon and the acceptance of the canon. The canon of Scripture was complete when John wrote the Apocalypse. The acceptance at first was more locally and only became universal by and by until in the time of Irenaeus the whole church held the whole canon. The principle upon which a book was accepted or rejected was its apostolic origin. Christ gave the apostles the right to instruct and admonish the church. In their writings they claimed divine inspiration and spoke with divine authority. For Warfield the acceptance of the authority of the New Testament Scriptures rested "on the fact that God's authoritative agents in founding the church gave them as authoritative to the church which they founded. [...] It is clear that prophetic and apostolic origin is the very essence of the authority of the Scriptures."²³ The claim of apostolicity must be examined by biblical criticism. Warfield used historical criticism to show that the claim of the books was trustworthy and thus the authority of Scripture rested on the results of criticism. Warfield would not allow critical results that contradicted this claim. Still principally he approached the matter from a neutral point of view, trusting that honest criticism would validate the canon.

opposed A. Kuenen and J. Wellhausen. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Majestic Testimony*, 154. Cf. M.A. Taylor, *The Old Testament in the Old Princeton School (1812-1929)*, San Francisco 1992, 167.

²⁰ Warfield, 'Rights of Criticism and of the Church,' 595.

²¹ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 35.

²² B.B. Warfield, 'The Formation of the Canon of the New Testament' (1892), in Warfield, *Works* 1, 451-456, 455.

²³ B.B. Warfield, 'Review of A.W. Dieckhoff, *Das gepredigte Wort und die Heilige Schrift und Das Wort Gottes*,' *The Presbyterian Review* 10 (1890), 504-507. Quoted by M.J. Sawyer, 'Evangelicals and the Canon of the New Testament,' *Grace Theological Journal* 11 (1990), 29-52, 32, n. 16. Cf. "The authority of the Scriptures thus rests on the simple fact that God's authoritative agents in founding the Church gave them as authoritative to the Church which they founded." B.B. Warfield, 'The Authority and Inspiration of the Scriptures' (1889), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 537-541, 537.

5.1.3 'The Canonicity of Second Peter' (1882)

At Western seminary Warfield tried his critical skill in an article, titled 'The Canonicity of Second Peter' (1882). He regarded the canonicity of the book as a historical question that must be settled on appropriate historical evidence.²⁴ The authorship of the book was doubted and Warfield reckoned with the possibility of pseudepigraphy. He did not conclude that Peter must have written the book only because it was canonical – this would be circular reasoning – but he intended to prove its canonicity by demonstrating that Peter was the author. To reach that goal Warfield first argued that the letter was old enough to have been written by an apostle. Origen and Clement of Alexandria commented on the book, and it was quoted or alluded to in the works of Irenaeus, and Justin Martyr, in *The Shepherd of Hermas*, and even in the *Testaments of the Twelve Prophets*. Then he demonstrated that in spite of some early doubts about its authority, the book was generally accepted in the fourth century. The quotations in the second and third centuries implied that the church fathers found the book in their canon and did not insert it there. Warfield laid the burden of proof with the opponents of its canonicity, wondering what the sufficient grounds for putting Second Peter out of the canon could be.²⁵ Turning to the internal evidence, Warfield wrote: "It bears on the forefront the name of Peter [...] It is therefore Peter's, or else a base and designing forgery."²⁶ The content of the book also was in harmony with its authorship, given that certain texts corresponded with Mark's gospel that was written under Peter's influence. Warfield finally refuted the counter-evidences such as the anachronisms and the differences in style with First Peter. Warfield concluded that the "mountain mass of presumption in favor of the genuineness and canonicity of 2 Peter" could not be overturned by the lever of "a pitiable show of rebutting evidence."²⁷

This article shows his approach to the canon of Scripture. Christ gave his apostles the commandment to teach the church; whatever they taught had authority. The books of the New Testament claimed apostolic authorship or rather apostolicity and therefore they came to the readers with divine authority. The early church accepted their authority and included them in the canon. Unless the claim of the books is proved to be false, their authority stands. The task of historical-critical research is to show that the claim of the books is true and to refute all objections that are brought forward against it. Warfield continually lays the burden of proof with his opponents. This turn of the tables shows that he is in a defensive position. In principle his approach is neutral, but in fact the conclusion that Peter must be the author of the book is fixed from the beginning of his argument. Because the canonicity of the book has been generally accepted in the church, the opponents must demonstrate that the authorship of Peter is impossible.

Warfield was aware of the fact that "even Calvin" spoke doubtfully of its genuineness.²⁸ Calvin expressed some doubts regarding the authenticity of Second

²⁴ B.B. Warfield, 'The Canonicity of Second Peter' (1882), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 48-79, 48.

²⁵ Warfield, 'Canonicity of Second Peter,' 59.

²⁶ Warfield, 'Canonicity of Second Peter,' 68.

²⁷ "It is doubtless true that we can move the world if proper lever and fulcrum be given. But if the lever is a common quarryman's tool and the fulcrum thin air! Then woe to the man who wields it." Warfield, 'Canonicity of Second Peter,' 78.

²⁸ Warfield, 'Canonicity of Second Peter,' 79.

Peter, because of the differences in style with First Peter and he wrote: “There are also other probable conjectures by which we may conclude that it was rather written by someone else than by Peter.”²⁹ Nevertheless, he rejected the idea and concluded that if the book was canonical, Peter must be the author, because pseudepigraphy was unworthy of a minister of Christ. Probably one of the apostle’s pupils wrote the book for him. Calvin accepted the genuineness of the book because it was canonical, while Warfield proves its canonicity, by demonstrating that it is genuine.

5.1.4 Conclusions and Questions

Warfield uses the scholarly method of historical criticism to establish and defend the claim of the divine origin of the Bible. He is optimistic about this endeavor though he is aware of the results of biblical criticism that undermine the authority of Scripture. Warfield rejects a biased form of criticism and pleads for an honest and believing criticism that is willing to accept the possibility of supernatural revelation. The basis of the canon of the New Testament is its apostolicity. For Warfield this does not mean that the apostolicity must be accepted because the books are canonical, but that the canonicity of the books can only be accepted if their apostolic origin can be proved. This implies that the acceptance of the books of the New Testament by the early church must be investigated through historical-critical research. If there are no external or internal evidences that disagree with the claim of apostolicity, the books must be accepted as apostolic and therefore canonical and therefore divinely inspired.

Warfield lays the burden of proof regarding the authenticity of the canonical books with his opponents, because the canon has been generally accepted by the church of all ages. Warfield takes a defensive approach. This incites the question if his position is really neutral. At least he leaves the impression that the apostolicity of the New Testament canon is unquestionable and that the result his critical investigation is fixed from the beginning.

Warfield’s mode of canon-determination illustrates how he deals with the results of the historical-critical approach to Scripture. He does not avoid the confrontation but goes as far as he can in using the critical methods to establish the canon of Scripture. He even challenges his opponents to show that their theories are based on facts and exposes their biased principles. Warfield wrestles with the results of the historical-critical approach to Scripture. As a New Testament scholar he refuses to draw back in an isolated position and he trusts that the modern methods will not harm the authority of Scripture. In the meanwhile he uses the critical weapons of his opponents to show their own weaknesses and to demonstrate the reasonableness of the acceptance of the canon.

Warfield’s method of canon-determination evokes the question if he is not too optimistic about the possibilities and the results of the critical method. He opposes the prejudices of “biblioclastic criticism,” but his own “honest criticism” can easily be classified as biased. The suspicion arises that Warfield’s conclusions are settled beforehand and that he believes in the genuineness and apostolicity of the canonical books because they are canonical. We will look at his ambiguous approach to criticism in some articles on the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture. It is also doubtful

²⁹ “Sunt et aliae probabiles coniecturae ex quibus colligere liceat, alterius esse potius quam Petri.” *CO* 55, 441.

whether Warfield's approach offers real certainty about the canon. His acceptance of the New Testament canon is based on the probability that the claim of these books regarding their apostolic origin is true. Warfield admits this:

Of course, this evidence is not in the strict logical sense "demonstrative"; it is "probable" evidence. It therefore leaves open the metaphysical possibility of its being mistaken. But it may be contended that it is about as great in amount and weight as "probable" evidence can be made, and that the strength of conviction which it is adapted to produce may be and should be practically equal to that produced by demonstration itself.³⁰

There is a "bulk of evidence," but even the largest bulk cannot render the matter absolutely certain. Warfield has been criticized on this point.³¹ Does Warfield's doctrine of the authority of Scripture ultimately rest on human reason, because it starts with logical demonstration that can principally get no further than probability? We will return to this question in discussing Warfield's apologetics.

5.2 Inspiration and the Doctrine of the Church

It is important to know why Warfield takes an objective and critical approach to the canon. Is this due only to his polemical context or is there a more fundamental reason for his emphasis on the critical proof of the apostolicity? What is the theological context of the historical-critical approach to the canon?

5.2.1 'The Inspiration of the Bible' (1894)

In an article on 'The Inspiration of the Bible' (1894) Warfield explains that two "movements of thought" in the history of the church have tended to a "lower conception of the inspiration and authority of Scripture."³² The first is the rationalistic view that distinguishes between inspired and uninspired elements within the Scriptures. In the "life-and-death struggle of the eighteenth century" the rationalistic approach has been of great influence among the defenders of supernatural religion. They were willing to give up some parts of Scripture "in their desperate efforts to save what was of even more importance, – just as a hard-pressed army may yield to the foe many an outpost which justly belongs to it, in the effort to save the citadel."³³ The consequence of this

³⁰ B.B. Warfield, 'The Real Problem of Inspiration' (1893), in Warfield, *Works* 1, 169-226, 218. According to C.N. Kraus, Warfield claimed that the probable evidence he had produced was of such a quantity and quality as to overwhelmingly establish the rational ground for and force mental assent to the message and authority of Scripture. C.N. Kraus, 'The Principle of Authority in the Theology of B. B. Warfield, William Adams Brown, and Gerald Birney Smith' [Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University] 1961, 270.

³¹ According to Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987), Warfield's procedure is based on the concept that "men have every right to start from the idea that God can possibly not exist and that the Bible at least can possibly be the word of men rather than the word of God. [...] The Christian must not claim more than probable certainty for his position." C. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, [Philadelphia], 1969, 251.

³² B.B. Warfield 'The Inspiration of the Bible' (1894), in Warfield, *Works* 1, 51-74, 58. At the background the discussion with liberalism plays a role. The inspiration theories of the liberals differ, but they all agree that "there is less of the truth of God and more of the error of man in the Bible than Christians have been wont to believe." Warfield, 'Inspiration of the Bible,' 51.

³³ Warfield 'Inspiration of the Bible,' 58. Warfield mentions three forms of this rationalistic distinction between inspired and uninspired parts of Scripture: according to the first, only the mysteries of the faith are inspired, according to the second, only the matters of faiths and

rationalistic distinction is a lower view of the authority of Scripture. Ultimately its authority depends on human choice, for we have to determine which parts of Scripture are authoritative

The second movement of thought is the mystical view; “its characteristic conception is that the Christian man has something within himself, – call it enlightened reason, spiritual insight, the Christian consciousness, the witness of the Spirit, or call it what you will, – to the test of which every “external revelation” is to be subjected.”³⁴ In the history of the church this view in its extreme form has often been held by the separated sects, “but in our own century, through the great genius of Schleiermacher it has broken in upon the church like a flood, and washed into every corner of the Protestant world.” Though the influence of this naturalistic mode of thought is immense, still Warfield trusts that it will not “supplant the church-doctrine of the absolute authority of the objective revelation of God in his Word, in either the creeds of the church, or the hearts of the people.”³⁵ In this view the authority of Scripture ultimately depends on our own feeling. In its extreme forms there is no difference with vulgar rationalism, except in the terms that are used.³⁶ Both views agree in their rejection of the external authority of Scripture.

Warfield takes a different approach. The faith of the Christians of all ages is his first argument for the doctrine of inspiration. The church doctrine of inspiration “is not the invention nor the property of an individual, but the settled faith of the universal church of God.”³⁷ The fact that we have received the Scriptures via the church only strengthens its authority. All Christians have a deep reverence for the Bible; they “receive its statements of fact, bow before its enunciations of duty, tremble before its threatenings, and rest upon its promises.”³⁸ Warfield shows that, according to the church fathers and the Reformers, the Bible was the infallible Word of God and that this faith in the divine trustworthiness of Scripture was brought to formal expression in the creeds.³⁹ The church has so universally accepted this doctrine only because it is also held by the writers of the New Testament and by Jesus himself. “This church-doctrine of inspiration was the Bible doctrine before it was the church-doctrine, and was the church-doctrine only because it is the Bible doctrine.”⁴⁰ Warfield compares the church with a mother that speaks to her child.

practice are inspired, and, according to the third, the Bible is inspired only in its thoughts or concepts, not in its words. Warfield ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 58-59.

³⁴ Warfield ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 59. Elsewhere he says that the “thinkers of a mystical type” tend to erect the “inner light” to a position co-ordinate or superior to the external light of divine revelation in the Scriptures. B.B. Warfield, ‘Inspiration’ (1909), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 614-636, 620.

³⁵ Warfield ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 60.

³⁶ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 620.

³⁷ Warfield, ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 52.

³⁸ Warfield, ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 53.

³⁹ Warfield, ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 54, 56. Warfield shortly discusses Origen, Irenaeus, Polycarp, and Augustine; he calls the allegorical interpretation of the Bible “the daughter of reverence for the biblical word.” Warfield ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 55.

⁴⁰ Warfield ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 60. John Stott follows the same train of thought “The reason why the church has historically submitted to Scripture, and why evangelicals continue to do so, is that our Lord Jesus himself did.” J.R.W. Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity*,

Our memory will easily recall those happier days when we stood a child at our Christian mother's knee, with lisping lips following the words which her slow finger traced upon this open page – words which were her support in every trial and, as she fondly trusted, were to be our guide throughout life. Mother church was speaking to us in that maternal voice, commending to us her vital faith in the Word of God.⁴¹

For Warfield the authority of the Scriptures does not depend on the authority of the church. The church only bears witness to the authority of Scripture by recognizing it. Warfield illustrates this point by comparing the church to a signpost that only has relative authority; “the guide-post may point us to the right road but it does not give its rightness to the road.”⁴² His appeal to the *consensus ecclesiae* is not an appeal to tradition, as in Roman Catholic theology, but more to the church as a means of grace. Warfield follows Calvin's perception of the church in the *Institutes*, where the church is the first means of grace and the mother of believers; Calvin discusses the doctrine of inspiration in his ecclesiology. It is not the formal authority of the institutional church that warrants Scripture, but it is the maternal authority of a pedagogical church that teaches us to trust in the Scriptures as children.

Warfield's appeal to the *consensus ecclesiae* must be understood as an attempt to avoid the subjectivism of alternatives. The appeal to the *testimonium* in the school of F.D.E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) functioned in a subjectivistic or mystical way. For Warfield the authority of Scripture does not depend on the *testimonium*, which was a matter of experience. He says that he is in complete agreement with the fathers of the Reformed churches at this point.⁴³ But there seems to be a gap between Warfield's approach and Calvin's emphasis on the *testimonium*. Warfield discovers a strong ally against this subjectivism in the authority of the church of all ages. The authority of Scripture has always been a safe harbor for believers from generation to generation. “It is due to an instinctive feeling in the church, that the trustworthiness of the Scriptures lies at the foundation of trust in the Christian system of doctrine.”⁴⁴ The Word of God gives the church assurance in the details of its teaching; the Christian faith needs an external authority.

It remains the profound persuasion of the Christian heart that without such an “external authority” as a thoroughly trustworthy Bible, the soul is left without sure ground for a proper knowledge of itself, its condition, and its need, or for a proper knowledge of God's provisions of mercy for it and his promises of grace to it, – without sure ground, in a word, for its faith and hope.⁴⁵

In his rejection of rationalism and mysticism Warfield follows Charles Hodge, who in the “Introduction” to his *Systematic Theology* rejected rationalism, mysticism, and

Leicester 1999, 69. Cf. J. Wenham, ‘Christ's View of Scripture’ in *Inerrancy*, ed. N.L. Geisler, Grand Rapids 1980, 3-36.

⁴¹ Warfield ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 53.

⁴² B.B. Warfield, ‘The Authority & Inspiration of the Scriptures’ (1889) in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 537-541, 538.

⁴³ B.B. Warfield, ‘Review of M. Dods, *The Bible, Its Origin and Nature*’ (1906), in Warfield, *Works* 10, 120.

⁴⁴ Warfield ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 67.

⁴⁵ Warfield, ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 70. Warfield cites Adolphe Monod who declares that, “If faith has not for its basis a testimony of God to which we must submit, as to an authority exterior to our personal judgment, and independent of it, then faith is no faith.” Warfield, ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 70.

Romanism and stated that Scripture as the only infallible rule of faith and practice is the Protestant principle of theology.⁴⁶

5.2.2 Supernaturalism

Warfield's position is benchmarked by his simultaneous rejection of rationalism and mysticism; both are "essentially naturalistic." If we are to distinguish between inspired matters of faith and uninspired parts of the Bible, the authority of Scripture depends on our own decision. Similarly if we subject the revelation of God to some criterion within ourselves, the authority of Scripture depends on our own opinions. Both rationalism and mysticism come together in their subjectivism and anti-supernaturalism.

For Warfield the supernatural origin of Scripture forms the basis of the authority on which Christian faith is founded. "The religion of the Bible is a frankly supernatural religion."⁴⁷ The truth of Christianity does not rest on the theory of inspiration, but on the fact of supernatural revelation.⁴⁸ This idea is so fundamental for Warfield's doctrine of revelation, that there is hardly one article on this theme in which he does not use the word "supernatural." Supernatural revelation is necessary because sinful human beings are not able to recognize God in his general revelation in the right way; it "supplements" and "completes" general revelation.⁴⁹ Supernatural revelation is divine revelation that goes beyond the natural or general knowledge of God. This supernatural revelation also makes the difference between Christianity and the other religions. Why is Christianity the "one supernatural religion"?⁵⁰

There is an element in revealed religion, therefore, which is not found in any unrevealed religion. This is the element of authority. Revealed religion comes to man from without; it is imposed upon him from a source superior to his own spirit. The unrevealed religions, on the other hand, flow from no higher source than the human spirit itself.⁵¹

The authority of Christian revelation comes to us from the other side and this is the reason why Warfield can say that "the supernatural is the very breath of Christianity's nostrils."⁵² Therefore Warfield uses the term "supernatural" to explain what is wrong

⁴⁶ "Some claim for Reason a paramount, or, at least a coordinate authority in matters of religion. Others assume an internal supernatural light to which they attribute paramount, or coordinate authority. Others rely on the authority of an infallible church." Ch. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1, 33.

⁴⁷ Warfield, 'The Biblical Idea of Revelation' (1915), in Warfield, *Works* 1, 3-34, 3.

⁴⁸ "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." Warfield, 'Inspiration of the Bible,' 67. Cf. B.B. Warfield, 'Christian Supernaturalism' (1897) in Warfield *Works* 9, 25-46, 31. "The Christian man, then must first of all, give the heartiest and frankest recognition to *the supernatural fact*. 'God,' we call it."

⁴⁹ B.B. Warfield, 'Christianity and Revelation' (1902), in *Selected Shorter Writings* 1, 23-30, 27. For Warfield general and special revelation together form an "organic whole"; special revelation does not supersede general revelation. It was provided to meet the circumstances occasioned by the advent of sin. Warfield, 'Christianity and Revelation,' 28.

⁵⁰ B.B. Warfield, 'Christianity and Revelation,' 23.

⁵¹ B.B. Warfield, 'Mysticism and Christianity' (1917), in Warfield, *Works* 9, 649-666, 650.

⁵² Warfield, 'Christian Supernaturalism,' 29. It is especially in Calvinism that Warfield finds this essential supernaturalism elaborated. "The supernaturalism for which Calvinism stands is the very breath of the nostrils of Christianity; without it Christianity cannot exist." B.B. Warfield,

with the “rationalistic” and “mystical” views of Christianity. The dividing line between orthodox theology and modernism is marked by the acceptance or rejection of the supernatural.⁵³ Warfield rejects both positions because they are naturalistic; they lay the foundation of the certainty of faith in us rather than in God. There is merely a difference in temperature between the subjectivism of the mystic and the rationalist.

Warm up a Rationalist and you inevitably get a Mystic; chill down a Mystic and you find yourself with a Rationalist on your hands. The history of thought illustrates repeatedly the easy passage from one to the other. Each centers himself in himself, and the human self is not so big that it makes any large difference where within yourself you take your center.⁵⁴

Rationalism refuses to recognize anything outside the lines of natural development and denies the possibility of miracles. The supernatural revelation of God is a miracle and therefore rationalism rejects it and necessarily finds its ultimate foundation in ourselves and not in God.⁵⁵ Mysticism substitutes the external authority of the Bible for the internal of the Inner Light. There is a tendency in the German churches “to substitute, as the seat of authority for the Christian man, his own inner experience for the infallible book which the Reformers substituted for the infallible Church.”⁵⁶ According to Warfield, the theology of Schleiermacher was the main source of this tendency.

In our discussion of Warfield’s determination of the canon we have discovered an objective tendency in Warfield’s theology. The emphasis on the witness of the church of all ages to the authority of Scripture is just another example of this tendency. At the background of his aversion to subjectivism stands his rejection of rationalism and mysticism and his emphasis on the supernatural character of God’s revelation. Warfield is careful not to lay the ground of faith in the believing subject, because that it is a denial of the foundation of the Christian faith *extra nos* in the authority of God. In this emphasis he is a true disciple of the Reformation in general and of Calvin in particular.

‘Present day Attitude to Calvinism’ (1909), in B.B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, Philadelphia 1956, 496-507, 505-506.

⁵³ Cf. L. Boettner, *Studies in Theology*, 1947, 51. “The fundamental conflict in which Christianity is engaged today in the intellectual sphere is a conflict between the Supernaturalism of the Bible and the Naturalism of other systems. [...] those who accept the supernatural are commonly known as ‘Evangelicals’ or ‘Conservatives,’ while those who reject the supernatural are known as ‘Modernist’ or ‘Liberals.’ The terminology, however, would have been much more accurate had the terms ‘Supernaturalists’ and ‘Anti-Supernaturalists’ been used.”

⁵⁴ B.B. Warfield, ‘Review of W.K. Fleming, *Mysticism in Christianity* and J.W. Buckham, *Mysticism and Modern Life*’ (1916) in Warfield, *Works* 10, 366-372, 366-367. Cf. Riddlebarger, ‘The Lion of Princeton,’ 246, n. 165.

⁵⁵ This corresponds with what J. Orr says in a contribution to the *Fundamentals*. “Scripture contains a record of a true supernatural revelation; and that is what the Bible claims to be – not a development of man’s thoughts about God, and not what this man and that one came to think about God [...] but a supernatural revelation of what God revealed himself in word and deed to men in history. And if that claim to a supernatural revelation from God falls, the Bible falls, because it is bound up with it from beginning to end.” J. Orr, ‘Holy Scripture and Modern Negations,’ in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R.A. Torrey and A.C. Dixon, 4 vol., Los Angeles 1917, reprint Grand Rapids [1980], vol. 1, 94-110, 104.

⁵⁶ B.B. Warfield, ‘Review of R. Seeberg, *Revelation and Inspiration*’ (1910), in Warfield, *Works* 10, 231-242, 239. Seeberg’s booklet was a translation of R. Seeberg, *Offenbarung und Inspiration* [Biblische Zeit- und Streitfragen, Ser. 4], Berlin 1908.

Warfield emphasizes the authority of the church because of the danger of subjectivism of the rationalistic and mystical views of Scripture. Calvin emphasizes the *testimonium* because of the danger of subjectivism in the Roman Catholic and enthusiastic views of Scripture. Both have the same desire to safeguard the authority of Scripture against human arbitrariness. In their desire Calvin and Warfield stand close to each other. Warfield equalizes rationalism and mysticism, because both are subjectivistic, just like Calvin equalizes Rome and the Radical Reformers, because both are based on human authority.

Still a difference remains between Warfield's emphasis on the *consensus ecclesiae* and Calvin's emphasis on the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*. The focus in the *Institutes* is not on the canon of Scripture, but on the acceptance of the authority of Scripture. Nevertheless, Calvin relates the acceptance of the canon to the witness of the Spirit.⁵⁷ The *testimonium* is the key that unlocks the door of Scripture. As a Renaissance humanist Calvin also approaches Scripture critically, but for him the authority of Scripture is independent of this criticism and hinges on the *testimonium*. For Warfield the authority of Scripture hinges on historical criticism and on the acceptance of Scripture through the church of all ages.

5.3 Scripture as the Infallible Word of God

Warfield is often seen as a champion of inerrancy. To evaluate this claim we will have to place his position on the authority of Scripture in the broader theological context of the debate between liberalism and fundamentalism at the close of the nineteenth century.

5.3.1 Liberalism and Fundamentalism in America

For at least two reasons liberal theology arose comparatively late in America. American theology followed the developments on the continent at some distance; the impact of liberalism in the churches was not felt until a generation of theological students that had studied in Germany became influential. The influence of the historical-critical approach to the Scriptures in the American churches was negligible until the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the unity between Christian faith and general science was stronger than in Europe where the liberation of science had come to completion in the Enlightenment. The epistemology of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and his rejection of all metaphysical knowledge ultimately led to a science that was principally atheistic or at least agnostic. In America, however, most scientists in the nineteenth century were theists and even orthodox Christians. The first real shock came with the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859) by Charles Darwin and then American Protestantism was slow in its reaction.⁵⁸

When the reaction came it caused a fierce debate within churches and theological seminaries. The discussion focused on the relation between Christianity and Darwinism and on the authority of Scripture. The implications of Darwinism and of biblical criticism for the fundamental doctrines of the orthodox Protestant faith were the main

⁵⁷ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.1, OS 3, 66.

⁵⁸ G. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805-1900*, Louisville 2001, 249.

issue of the debate. Darwinism seemed to exclude the biblical doctrine of creation, and the results of Higher Criticism contradicted the claims of Scripture regarding its authors and authenticity.

The reaction against liberalism in America is mostly called “Fundamentalism” after a series of articles titled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*. These articles were published between 1910 and 1915 in twelve volumes and were spread free of charge among clergymen and seminarians. The authors responded to the influence of Higher Criticism and Darwinian theories about the origin of life and opposed the attempts to adapt Christian doctrines to modern science. About one third of them dealt with the authority of Scripture, including titles as “The Authorship of the Pentateuch,” “One Isaiah,” and “Fulfilled Prophecy, a Potent Argument for the Bible.” The articles that discussed the doctrine of inspiration stressed the importance of verbal and plenary inspiration. The very words of the Bible were the words of God.⁵⁹ The testimony of the Spirit and the self-convincing character of the Scriptures were mentioned by G.S. Bishop (1836-1914), a president of the Reformed Church in America who wrote an article on “The Testimony of the Scriptures to Themselves.” This testimony is “their own self-evidence, the overpowering, unparticipated witness that they bring.”⁶⁰ The short article was not exempt from circular reasoning. The Bible was the Word of God, because the Bible called itself the Word of God. “The Scriptures testify to their divine original by their transcendent doctrine, the glow of the divine, the witness of the Spirit.”⁶¹ And if they are divine then what they say of themselves is divine; “the Scriptures are their own self-evidence.”⁶² Many contributions to *The Fundamentals* were written by millenarians with a literal approach to the text of the Bible.⁶³

Warfield’s career as a biblical scholar started long before the term Fundamentalism was coined. He is often seen as one of the early fundamentalists. In his doctrine of Scripture Warfield emphasized the absolute authority of Scripture and he wrote an article for *The Fundamentals* on the Deity of Christ.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, his relationship with Fundamentalism was complicated. Early Fundamentalism was a strange alliance between dispensationalists and orthodox Protestants. The dispensationalists who in general were not trained in academic theology found their allies in the defenders of orthodox Calvinism. The theologians at Princeton rejected the pre-millenarian exegesis, but still found that the millenarians stood closer to them than liberal theologians.⁶⁵ The

⁵⁹ “We mean by verbal inspiration that the words composing the Bible are God-breathed. If they were not, then the Bible is not inspired at all, since it is composed only and solely of words.” L.W. Munhall, ‘Inspiration,’ in Torrey, *Fundamentals* 2, 44-60, 45.

⁶⁰ G.S. Bishop, ‘The Testimony of the Scriptures to Themselves’ in Torrey, *Fundamentals* 2, 80-96, 80.

⁶¹ Bishop, ‘Testimony of the Scriptures,’ 189.

⁶² Bishop, ‘Testimony of the Scriptures,’ 190.

⁶³ E.R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930*, Chicago 1970, 199-200.

⁶⁴ B.B. Warfield, ‘The Deity of Christ’ (1909), in Torrey, *Fundamentals* 2, 239-246. Cf. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 1, 151-157.

⁶⁵ Sandeen remarks that the Princeton theologians were willing to say a good word for the millenarians while liberal Presbyterians wanted to excommunicate them. Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, 169.

alliance did not hold for long and ended in the 1930s.⁶⁶ The literal interpretation of the Bible and especially of biblical prophecy became characteristic; millenarianism was the dominant view of eschatology. The theological questions regarding the final foundation of the authority of Scripture were hardly discussed.⁶⁷

The term Fundamentalism does not do justice to Warfield's profound scholarship in diverse fields of theology. The term has become synonymous with an anti-scholarly attitude and there is a wide gap between the biblical literalism of later fundamentalists and the careful exegesis of Warfield. He opposed the biblicistic and dispensationalistic attitude towards Scripture and strongly rejected the method of proof-texting in which the Bible texts were quoted without reference to the context. In a review of R.A. Torrey's (1856-1928) *What the Bible teaches* Warfield raises serious questions about the theological method of the editor of *The Fundamentals*. Many doctrines of the Bible – such as election – are not treated by Torrey and of those that are treated “the treatment moves far too much on the surface to have plumbed the depths of any one of them.”⁶⁸

Warfield's article on the “Antichrist” (1921) is an example of his rejection of millenarianism and of his exegesis as a New Testament scholar. John's Epistles do not necessarily teach that there will be a personal Antichrist. John only gave his reaction to the fact that his readers had heard “Antichrist is coming.” John, according to Warfield, recognizes an element of truth in this saying, but amends and corrects it in three ways; he says that Antichrist is already in the world, that there are many Antichrists and that the Antichrist is he who denies that Jesus is the Christ. John “transposes Antichrist from the future to the present. He expands him from an individual into a multitude; He reduces him from a person to a heresy.”⁶⁹ Careful exegesis shows that John does not say that a personal Antichrist will appear, but that this was the expectation of his readers. According to Warfield, John leaves the possibility open, but amends and corrects the overstrained expectation. This example illustrates the difference between Warfield and the millenarian fundamentalists.⁷⁰

It is also important to note that the terms “inerrant” and “inerrancy” are rare in Warfield's vocabulary and that they are reserved for the original autographs of

⁶⁶ According to Marsden, separation from the mainstream churches and an anti-scholarly attitude became a test of faith within Fundamentalism. G.M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, Grand Rapids 1991, 4.

⁶⁷ Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 58.

⁶⁸ B.B. Warfield, ‘Review of R.A. Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches*’ (1898), in *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield*, ed. M.A. Noll, Grand Rapids 1983, 299-301, 300. According to Riddlebarger, the substantial theological divisions between Warfield and key figures in the emerging fundamentalist movement are often overlooked. Riddlebarger, ‘The Lion of Princeton,’ 207.

⁶⁹ B.B. Warfield, ‘Antichrist’ (1921), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 1, 356-362, 358. Cf. B.B. Warfield, ‘The Millenium and the Apocalypse’ (1904), in Warfield, *Works* 2, 643-664.

⁷⁰ It also shows that Warfield, who always defended the confessions, dared to differ from the Westminster Confession that calls the pope the Antichrist. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 25.6. Cf. B.B. Warfield, *The Confession of Faith as Revised in 1903*, Richmond, 1904, reprinted in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 370-410. Warfield states that the idea that the pope was the antichrist was “of comparatively little doctrinal importance.” Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 393.

Scripture. The transmitted text has been kept pure enough to secure the “full authoritativeness” of the Bible, but only the original text was inerrant. Furthermore Warfield was not “altogether happy” with the phrase “the inerrancy of the original autographs” because he was afraid that the real problem of the trustworthiness of Scripture would be forgotten if the controversy narrowed to the question of inerrancy. He admitted that the expression affirmed the doctrine of the entire truthfulness of the Scriptures, and that opposition to it often rooted in a denial of this doctrine.⁷¹ The liberal wing in the Presbyterian Church accused the orthodox wing of making the inerrancy of the original autographs the touchstone of orthodoxy.⁷² Warfield preferred “infallibility” to “inerrancy” for the text as we now have it. For him the Bible was an infallible guide, but only the original writings were produced by the inerrant guidance of the Spirit. Even for the autographs he rather used “errorless” than “inerrant.”⁷³ Warfield adhered to verbal inspiration, but he rejected the term “verbal inerrancy” even for the autographs, because term ruled out the loose quotations from the Old Testament.⁷⁴

5.3.2 ‘Inspiration’ (1881) – A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield

Liberalism in the Presbyterian Church in America originally took the form of mediation between radical rationalism and Reformed orthodoxy. In the nineteenth century many American theological students studied at German universities. The University of Berlin was favorite, because there the extreme rationalism was answered by the mediating theology (*Vermittlungstheologie*) that carried on the legacy of Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834).⁷⁵ One of these students, Charles A. Briggs (1841-1913), later became one of the main the opponents of Warfield.⁷⁶ As a Professor of Hebrew at Union Theological Seminary in New York he gave an account of the trial of Professor W. Robertson Smith (1846-1894) of the Free Church in Scotland, who had been accused of heresy because of his articles in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in which he advocated higher criticism and the source-critical theories regarding the Pentateuch.⁷⁷ Briggs wrote about this trial in *The Presbyterian Review*.⁷⁸ He legitimized Smith’s

⁷¹ B.B. Warfield, ‘The Inerrancy of the Original Autographs’ (1893), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 580-587, 580-582.

⁷² Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, 170-171.

⁷³ Cf. R.R. Nicole, ‘Introduction,’ in Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, vii-xiv, xiv.

⁷⁴ B.B. Warfield, ‘The New Testament Use of the Septuagint’ (1892), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 549-559, 552.

⁷⁵ The total number of American students that visited Germany between 1830 and 1930 is approximately ten thousand, of which the half studied at Berlin. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 404.

⁷⁶ From 1866 to 1869 Briggs studied in Berlin under the Lutheran theologian Isaak A. Dorner (1809-1884) who inspired him to aim at an integration of historical-critical scholarship with evangelical faith. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 341.

⁷⁷ Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Majestic Testimony*, 84. Cf. A.R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution: 1789 to the Present Day: The Pelican History of the Church*, vol. 5, London 1974, 171.

⁷⁸ This periodical was founded in 1880 as a joint publication of the faculties of Union Theological Seminary and Princeton Theological Seminary. The co-operation was remarkable because of the differences between Princeton, representing Old School Presbyterianism and Union, representing the New School. The faculties of the two seminaries shared the editorial work and controversial topics originally were to be avoided.

views in very careful words, expressing that the discussion should take place free from the complications and technicalities of ecclesiastical proceedings, by competent scholars on both sides, seeking the truth earnestly and prayerfully. Briggs's account implied that he found Smith's position acceptable within the Presbyterian Church and that church courts were incompetent to judge historical-critical theories.⁷⁹ After protest from Princeton, Briggs agreed with his co-editor Archibald A. Hodge (1823-1886) to discuss the topic in *The Presbyterian Review* in a series of eight articles. The first article was a co-production of A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield. The first part was written by Hodge and dealt with the doctrine of verbal inspiration in general; the second part was from Warfield and answered some critical objections against this doctrine. Both authors were convinced of the "great catholic doctrine" of inspiration namely "that the Scriptures not only contain, but ARE, THE WORD OF GOD, and hence that all their elements and all their affirmations are absolutely errorless and binding the faith and obedience of men."⁸⁰ An analysis of this article reveals three reasons why Hodge and Warfield connected verbal inspiration with infallibility.

Historically, the view of an errorless Bible is consistent with the doctrine of the church of all ages and especially with the Protestant faith as it has been articulated in the Reformed confessions.⁸¹ Hodge writes that: "the historical faith of the Church has always been, that all the affirmations of Scripture [...] are without any error when the *ipsissima verba* of the original autographs are ascertained and interpreted in their natural and intended sense."⁸² According to Warfield, the historic churches have affirmed the errorless infallibility of the Word in their creeds.⁸³ The first reason to stress the infallibility of the Bible is that the looser views endanger the historical and confessional orthodox faith; the authority of Scripture is the cornerstone of Reformed orthodoxy.

Doctrinally, the authors state that Scripture is infallible because Scripture is the Word of God and God cannot lie. They do not make this point very explicit, but it is implied that Scripture is errorless, because of its identification with the Word of God; inspiration and error exclude each other. According to Hodge, the real difference with the "more liberal school of Christian scholars" is that, according to them, Scripture in

⁷⁹ C.A. Briggs, 'The Robertson Smith Case,' *Presbyterian Review* 1 (1880), 737-745, 745. Cf. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Majestic Testimony*, 84-85.

⁸⁰ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 26-27. Whatever the Bible "may be found to say, that is the Word of God." Warfield, 'The Inspiration of the Bible,' 52. Elsewhere he defines inspiration as "the fundamental quality of the written Scriptures by virtue of which they are the word of God, and are clothed with all the characteristics which properly belong to the word of God." B.B. Warfield, 'Inspiration' (1898) in *Selected Shorter Writings* 1, 31-33, 32.

⁸¹ Hodge cites the *Second Helvetic Confession*. Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 23.

⁸² Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 28. This was in line with the doctrine of inspiration in the *Systematic Theology* of Charles Hodge, the father of Archibald Alexander Hodge. "On this subject the common doctrine of the Church is, and ever has been, that inspiration was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of his mind and will." Ch. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, New York 1871, 154.

⁸³ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 33.

certain incidental elements is “limited by inaccuracies and discrepancies.”⁸⁴ The Bible is the Word of God, “hence, in all the affirmations of Scripture of every kind there is no more error in the words of the original autographs than in the thoughts they were chosen to express.”⁸⁵ The Scriptures are the Word of God and “hence” errorless. Hodge and Warfield adhere to “plenary” and “verbal” inspiration, though they do not advocate a “mechanical conception” of inspiration or a theory of dictation.⁸⁶ Plenary means that the whole of Scripture is inspired, nothing excluded; verbal means that the “divine superintendence, which we call inspiration, extended to the verbal expression of the thoughts of the sacred writers, as well as to the thoughts themselves.”⁸⁷ This implies that “every element of Scripture, whether doctrine or history, of which God has guaranteed the infallibility, must be infallible in its verbal expression.”⁸⁸

The admittance of errors in Scripture leads to a weakening of its authority. If we are to distinguish between fallible and infallible elements in Scripture, the final authority is transposed from the text of Scripture to the reader. If inspiration extends only to the thoughts of the authors and not to their words, we have to determine the inspired thoughts. “If, then, the inspiration of the sacred writers did not embrace the department of history, or only of sacred and not of profane history, who shall set the limit and define what is of the essence of faith and what the uncertain accident?”⁸⁹ The doctrine of verbal inspiration secures the objective basis of the Christian faith. A looser view definitely leads towards a subjective approach to the authority of Scripture. The new views “threaten not only to shake the confidence of men in the Scriptures, but the very Scriptures themselves as an objective ground of faith.”⁹⁰ It is safer to accept an errorless Bible with all its difficulties than to accept one error in the Bible and so place the certainty of faith on the slippery slope of subjectivism.

Hodge and Warfield adhere to an errorless Bible, because it is not necessary to give up the infallibility of Scripture, as long as the objections against it are based on assumptions and not on demonstration. The verbal inspiration and the infallibility of Scripture are only in danger if the assumed errors can be proved. The Princeton doctrine

⁸⁴ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 26. Cf. “If the Scriptures abound in contradictions and errors, then it is vain to contend that they were written under an influence which precludes all error.” Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1, 169.

⁸⁵ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 19. This must not be explained as an unanswerable claim of the inerrancy of a lost text. Warfield believed that some but not all of the exegetical difficulties disappeared on the restoration of the original text. Moreover, it is not the “autographic codex” but the “autographic text” that is in question. Warfield, ‘Inerrancy of the Autographs,’ 583-584.

⁸⁶ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 19.

⁸⁷ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 19. Warfield also articulated this position when he wrote: “that the Spirit’s superintendence extends to the choice of the words by the human authors (verbal inspiration).” B.B. Warfield, ‘The Real Problem of Inspiration’ (1893), in Warfield, *Works* 1, 169-226, 173. The articulation of plenary and verbal inspiration can also be found in Ch. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1, 164-165.

⁸⁸ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 21.

⁸⁹ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 35. “The issue raised is whether we are to look upon the Bible as containing divinely guaranteed and wholly trustworthy account of God’s redemptive revelation [...] or as merely a mass of more or less trustworthy materials, out of which we are to sift the facts in order to put together a trustworthy account of God’s redemptive revelation.” Warfield, ‘Inerrancy of the Autographs,’ 581-582.

⁹⁰ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 34-35.

of inspiration is only undermined if the Bible is proved to be erroneous. Contrariwise, as long as this is not proved, the doctrine of inspiration stands. "A proved error in Scripture contradicts not only our doctrine, but the Scripture claims, and therefore its inspiration in making those claims. It is therefore of vital importance to ask, Can a phenomena of error and untruth be pointed out?"⁹¹ According to Warfield, the "*onus probandi*" rests upon the advocates of the laxer view and he trusts that it will be impossible for them to prove their case.⁹² He is not willing to give up the doctrine of plenary and verbal inspiration as long as this is not strictly necessary. To prove that a "discrepant statement" is an error, it must be certain that the statement occurs in the original autograph, that the interpretation is evident, and that this interpretation is "inconsistent with some certainly-known fact of history or truth of science, or some other statement of Scripture certainly ascertained and interpreted."⁹³ According to him, this has never yet been successfully done.⁹⁴ As long as errors are not proved, but only assumed, there is no logical reason to leave the solid rock of an infallible Bible. Why should the authority of Scripture be given up for a seeming error? If you look carefully at the text, perhaps the seeming error disappears; at least we can doubt our interpretation of the text. If a statement still seems to be an error, perhaps the text is a corruption of the original autograph. If there seems to be a contradiction with the facts of science or history, perhaps these facts are disputable. Why should we give up the certainty of verbal inspiration for the uncertainties of human reason? Warfield challenges his opponents to prove the assumed errors, because of the immense consequences of admitting errors for the authority of Scripture.

Behind the three reasons mentioned lies the same quest for the objective certainty of faith that we have seen in Warfield's approach to the canon. For Hodge and Warfield the final ground for the authority of Scripture lies in the claim of Scripture itself, in the acceptance of this claim by the church of all ages and in the impossibility of proving that this claim is false.

Hodge and Warfield do not articulate the question why Scripture is to be accepted as the Word of God. There is no reference to the *testimonium Spiritus sancti* or the self-convincing character of the Word of God. Our knowledge of the divine nature of Scripture is taken for granted and not questioned or analyzed. This is due to polemical character of the article. One remark, however, draws attention; Warfield lists five proofs of the doctrine of inspiration at the beginning of his part of the article: (1) Scripture's claim of this inspiration, (2) its unity, (3) its general agreement with modern science, (4) its moral and spiritual character and (5) its acceptance by the Church. The fourth argument is:

The moral and spiritual character of the revelation which the Scriptures convey [...] is the characteristic self-demonstration of the word of God and has sufficed to maintain the unabated catholicity of the strict doctrine of inspiration through all change of time and in spite of all opposition.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 41.

⁹² Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 34.

⁹³ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 36.

⁹⁴ In his inaugural address Warfield had already said that every valid argument against the doctrine of inspiration would have to begin by *proving* an error in statement or contradiction in fact. Warfield, 'Inspiration and Criticism,' 420.

⁹⁵ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 31-32.

Warfield refers to the “self-demonstration” of the Word of God, which roots in the spiritual character of its revelation. The text of Scripture has its own power. The self-demonstration of Scripture is one of the arguments for its authority.

Warfield’s statement that a proved error in Scripture contradicts the Scripture claims, and therefore its inspiration in making those claims, is open for misunderstanding. Briggs used the statement in *Whither?* to argue that Princeton deviated from Westminster theology.⁹⁶ Even Warfield’s colleague F.L. Patton declared that “it is a hazardous thing to say that being inspired the Bible must be free from error; for then the discovery of a single error would destroy its inspiration.”⁹⁷ Moreover, Warfield required something that was impossible, because the original autographs were lost, the interpretation of Scripture was always disputable, and the facts of history and science were never absolutely certain. Especially the fact that Warfield explicitly referred to the original autographs, was an occasion for scorn. The statement that “a proved error” – or in the phrasing of the opponents “one proved error” – contradicts inspiration is often used to show that the doctrine of verbal inspiration is untenable and that the idea of an inerrant Bible is a fruit of fear.⁹⁸

The context of the statement must not be forgotten. Warfield challenged his opponents and laid the burden of proof with them, because the admittance of errors had such far-reaching consequences. He did not refer to the autographs to make the proof of errors logically impossible – he even trusted that textual criticism would result in a nearly-autographic text – but because he refused to give up the authority of Scripture for the uncertainties of human reason.

Warfield’s analysis of the consequences of the admittance of errors in Scripture seems to have been confirmed by the theological development of his opponents, who started questioning minor points and ended up in liberalism. Questioning of minor aspects of the authority of Scripture mostly leads to the undermining of the whole. Scripture is not a detachable machine that can be sold in parts. It is naive to believe that the authority of Scripture can be defended by giving up the authority of Scripture on minor points.

5.3.3 Charles A. Briggs

The second and seventh articles in the series in *The Presbyterian Review* were by C.A. Briggs. He asserted that the Bible was infallible in matters of faith and practice, but not in all circumstantial details.⁹⁹ Inspiration and infallibility extended only to the inward

⁹⁶ C.A. Briggs, *Whither? A Theological Question for the Times*, New York 1889, 73.

⁹⁷ F.L. Patton, *Fundamental Christianity*, New York 1926, 163-164. Cf. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Majestic Testimony*, 513, n. 19.

⁹⁸ “If a single error in a scriptural autograph were to be proven, the entire Protestant structure of authority would collapse.” Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 346. Muller says that the point made by Hodge and Warfield is “a logical trap, a rhetorical flourish, a conundrum designed to confound the critics – who can only prove their case for genuine errancy by recourse to a text they do not (and surely *cannot*) have.” Muller, *PRRD* 2², 414, n. 192.

⁹⁹ C.A. Briggs, ‘Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures in Relation to their Inspiration,’ *The Presbyterian Review* 2 (1881), 550-579. C.A. Briggs, ‘A Critical Study of the History of Higher Criticism with Special Reference to the Pentateuch,’ *The Presbyterian Review* 4, (1883), 69-

spiritual sense of Scripture and not to the external words and meanings. He claimed that modern science had found many errors in the Bible.

The doctrine of Inspiration as stated in the symbols of faith will maintain its integrity in spite of any circumstantial errors that may be admitted or proved in the Scriptures, so long as these errors do not directly or indirectly disturb the infallibility of its matters, of faith or of the historic events and institutions with which they are inseparably united.¹⁰⁰

Briggs rejected verbal inspiration and rather spoke of plenary inspiration; the inward spiritual sense of Scripture was inspired and not the external words.

A second step in Briggs's development was the debate in the Presbyterian Church during the 1890s regarding the revision of the Westminster Standards. Briggs advocated a completely new confession, rather than a revision.¹⁰¹ True orthodoxy was progressive and not conservative; he described his own position as "true orthodoxy" and "progressive theology."¹⁰² The revision-debate was an occasion for him to attack Princeton, calling its theology "haughty and arrogant orthodoxy."¹⁰³ Briggs did not view himself as a liberal, but as an evangelical Calvinist, faithful to Scripture and the Westminster Confession. According to Briggs, Calvin and Westminster Standards only affirmed the infallibility of Scripture in matters of faith and practice, but not on incidental details.¹⁰⁴ Briggs's publication of *Whither? A Theological Question for the Times* (1889) formed a climax in the debate. Briggs reproached the anti-revisionist party that the Confession of Faith had been substantially revised by their scholastic orthodoxy. According to him, the Princeton theologians had sharpened the Westminster definition of inspiration by logical deduction, inserting the term "verbal" into the definition and making the acceptance of inerrant autographs a touchstone for orthodoxy.

These false doctrines are partly extra-confessional, sharpening the definitions of the Westminster symbols by undue refinements and assumed logical deductions, such as, (a) the addition of the adjective *verbal* to inspiration, and (b) the use of the term *inerrancy* with reference to the entire body of Scriptures. They are chiefly contra-confessional, substituting false doctrines for the real faith of the Church in these two particulars, (c) basing the authority of the Scriptures upon the *testimony of the ancient Church*, and (d) making the inspiration of the Scriptures depend upon their supposed *human authors*.¹⁰⁵

Briggs found the idea of inerrancy dangerous for the Christian faith; the scholastic doctrine of an errorless Bible was a form of idolatry. The doctrine of inerrancy he called

130. The background of this controversy has been analyzed in Mark S. Massa, *Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism*, Minneapolis 1990, 53-68. For a discussion of these articles cf. L.A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869*, Philadelphia 1954, 29-37.

¹⁰⁰ Briggs, 'Critical Theories,' 552, Cf. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 17.

¹⁰¹ "Would it not be far better to let the historical document alone and give our strength to the construction of a new and simpler creed that will give us exactly what we need at the present time?" C.A. Briggs, 'Subscription and Revision,' *The Christian Union* 40 (1869), 764, cited in Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 353.

¹⁰² Briggs, *Whither?*, 267.

¹⁰³ Briggs, *Whither?*, 7. The publication of *Whither?* aroused opposition in the Presbyterian Church and led to the end of the *Presbyterian Review* as a joint publication of Union and Princeton. James McCosh (1811-1894) a retired president of Princeton College answered with a whimsically titled pamphlet. J. McCosh, *Whither? O Whither? Tell Me Where*, New York 1889.

¹⁰⁴ Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 347.

¹⁰⁵ Briggs, *Whither?*, 63-64.

“an awful doctrine to teach in our days when Biblical criticism has the field! [...] No more dangerous doctrine has ever come from the pen of men.”¹⁰⁶ This doctrine would cost the church hundreds of thousands believers.

Briggs accused the Princeton theologians of making the authority of Scripture dependent on the authority of the ancient church. According to Briggs, Warfield based the authority of Scripture on its human authors and in consequence on the authenticity of their writings that could only be determined by critical investigation.¹⁰⁷ His alternative is an appeal to inspiration itself. Criticism can only determine the human authorship and has nothing to do with the inspiration. “The Reformers found the essence of the authority of the Scriptures in the Scriptures themselves and not in traditional theories about them.”¹⁰⁸ In his *General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture* Briggs discerned three principles of canon-determination. The first principle was the testimony of the church; the second was the character of the Scriptures themselves and the third was the witness of the Spirit. “The Spirit of God bears witness by and with the particular writing, or part of writing, in the heart of the believer, removing every doubt and assuring the soul of its possession of the truth of God, the rule and guide of life.”¹⁰⁹ The witness of the Spirit was the most important principle for Briggs. “The decisive test of canonicity and interpretation of the Scriptures is God Himself speaking in and through them to his people. This alone gives us the *fides divina*.”¹¹⁰

Briggs believed that biblical criticism could rescue the true Westminster doctrine of the Scripture and faith in the Word.¹¹¹ Briggs made a distinction between substance and form of Scripture. The form could be examined by the historical-critical method, but this did not affect the substance. Criticism destroyed the claims of the doctrine of inerrancy, but it did not destroy the claims of Scripture.¹¹²

Briggs was suspended from the ministry in the Presbyterian Church in 1893 as a result of the uproar in the orthodox camp caused by Briggs’s inaugural address for his professorate in Biblical Theology at Union in 1891. In this address, titled *The Authority of Holy Scripture*, Briggs named six barriers of the operation of Scriptural authority: bibliolatry, verbal inspiration, the authenticity of Scripture, the doctrine of inerrancy, the interpretation of miracles as violations of the laws of nature, and the predictive element in prophecy.¹¹³ He not only repeated the claim that errors in the Bible did not endanger the authority of Scripture and the claim that criticism was in line with the doctrines of the Reformation, but also argued that the miracles in the Bible should be

¹⁰⁶ Briggs, *Whither*, 73. Cf. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 354.

¹⁰⁷ “The inspiration, the canonicity, and the authority of the Bible depends, therefore, upon the results of Higher Criticism.” Briggs, *Whither*, 84. He accused Warfield of basing the authority of Scripture on the doubtful soundness of the traditional theories of the literary origin of the New Testament. Briggs, *Whither*, 87.

¹⁰⁸ Briggs, *Whither*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ C.A. Briggs, *General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture*, New York 1899, 165. Cf. M.J. Sawyer, ‘The Witness of the Spirit in the Protestant Tradition’ [Unpublished lecture for the Evangelical Theological Society, November 21, 1996].

¹¹⁰ Briggs, *General Introduction*, 142-143.

¹¹¹ Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 354.

¹¹² R.L. Christensen, *The ecumenical orthodoxy of Charles Augustus Briggs (1841-1913)*, Lewiston 1995, 89.

¹¹³ Taylor, *Old Testament in Old Princeton School*, 235.

explained naturally.¹¹⁴ Furthermore he called the Bible, the church, and reason the three great fountains of divine authority.¹¹⁵ He wrote this book in a sharp polemical style: “We have undermined the breastworks of traditionalism; let us blow them to atoms.”¹¹⁶ Briggs was tried for heresy because of this address and was finally defrocked by the General Assembly in 1893. The General Assembly that suspended Briggs, declared that “the Bible as we now have it, in its various translations and versions, when freed from all errors and mistakes of translators, copyists, and printers, is the very word of God, and consequently wholly without error.”¹¹⁷

Briggs remained a professor at Union until the end of his life, thanks to the seminary’s choice for independency from the Presbyterian Church. After some years he was ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church and in the last period of his life he spent his energy on the ecumenical movement, regarding the Anglican theology as a promising mediation between Protestantism and Catholicism. Union Seminary developed in a liberal direction; the mediating theology collapsed under the weight of the radical liberal theology of the later generation of American scholars that studied in Germany; in the light of this development Briggs was conservative.¹¹⁸

Briggs was influenced by German liberalism and especially by the German mediating school. He tried to incorporate the philosophy and theology from the continent in American Presbyterianism. Warfield, who also had studied in Germany, adhered to Reformed orthodoxy and rejected the influence from the continent with Schleiermacher as its theological exponent. In retrospect we can conclude that Briggs was too optimistic about the endeavor of maintaining the Reformed position. He believed that the admittance of the results of historical criticism would rescue the doctrine of inspiration, if it were only freed from some scholastic implications as the theory of inerrancy. Briggs was slow to admit that he was liberal and sincerely thought that his position was consistent with the Reformed creeds.¹¹⁹ “We have an infallible standard of orthodoxy in the sacred Scriptures. God himself, speaking in His holy Word to the believer, is the infallible guide in all questions of religion, doctrine and morals.”¹²⁰ Even his opponents

¹¹⁴ Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 358.

¹¹⁵ C.A. Briggs, *The Authority of Holy Scripture: An Inaugural Address*, New York 1891, 25; cited in Massa, *Charles Augustus Briggs*, 87.

¹¹⁶ Briggs, *Authority of Holy Scripture*, 41; cited in Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 359.

¹¹⁷ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1893, 105th Annual Meeting*, Philadelphia 1893, 169; cited in Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 365. Cf. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Majestic Testimony*, 136.

¹¹⁸ Briggs felt so uneasy with this development that he considered a heresy trial against his younger colleague Arthur C. McGiffert. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 369-370. According to Gerald B. Smith, Briggs was so conservative on doctrinal matters that the only well-known American with whom he could be compared was B.B. Warfield. L.A. Loetscher, ‘C.A. Briggs in the Retrospect of Half a Century,’ *Theology Today* 12 (1955), 27-42, 41; cited in Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 37.

¹¹⁹ Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 336. Briggs’s optimism becomes clear in his attitude towards ecumenism. He expected the evolution of a Christianity that would be “as much higher than Protestantism as Protestantism is higher than Romanism.” Cf. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Majestic Testimony*, 472, n. 19.

¹²⁰ Briggs, *Whither*, 9.

at Princeton were convinced that Briggs was honestly trying to defend the Word of God and evangelical religion against the attacks of destructive criticism.¹²¹ During his lifetime Briggs was overtaken by the consequences of his own liberalism.

Warfield had a conservative and defensive attitude towards modernity. This attitude made him more careful than his Union colleague. He felt that mediation between orthodoxy and liberalism would always end at the liberal side. He sharply analyzed the consequences of incorporating the ideas of the Enlightenment in Reformed theology. He found mediating theology inconsistent: “There is no standing ground between the two theories of full verbal inspiration and no inspiration at all. Gaussen is consistent; Strauss is consistent: but those who try to stand between! It is by a divinely permitted inconsistency that they can stand at all.”¹²²

5.3.4 ‘Inspiration’ (1915)

The question rises why Warfield connects the doctrine of inspiration with the concept of an infallible and errorless Bible. Already in his inaugural address ‘Inspiration and Criticism,’ he gives a definition of inspiration. Inspiration is “such an influence as makes the words written under its guidance, the words of God.”¹²³ Every word is at one and the same time the consciously self-chosen word of the writer and the divinely inspired word of the Spirit.¹²⁴

After 1900 Warfield does not publish on the authority of Scripture as often as before, but in 1915 he writes an article for *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* on ‘Inspiration’ that gives a good summary of his position. He says: “Inspiration is, therefore, usually defined as a supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given Divine trustworthiness.”¹²⁵ The first part of this article is a summary of the biblical proof of inspiration. Warfield considers some important passages, explaining that θεόπνευστος in 2 Timothy 3,16 does not mean “inspired by God,” but “breathed out by God, “God-breathed.”¹²⁶ The use of Scripture by Jesus proves its inspiration, for it is his testimony that whatever is written in Scripture is a word of God and this witness belongs not only to the Jesus of our evangelical records but also to the Jesus of the earlier sources which underlie the evangelical records.¹²⁷ Furthermore God and Scripture lay so close together

¹²¹ W.H. Green, ‘Heresy Hunters,’ *The Presbyterian* 63 (1893), 12, quoted in Taylor, *Old Testament in Old Princeton School*, 236.

¹²² The reverence is to L. Gaussen (1790-1863) and to D.F. Strauß (1808-1874), who held opposite positions on the authority of Scripture. Warfield, ‘Inspiration and Criticism,’ 423.

¹²³ Warfield, ‘Inspiration and Criticism’ 397.

¹²⁴ Warfield, ‘Inspiration and Criticism,’ 399.

¹²⁵ B.B. Warfield, ‘Inspiration’ (1915), in Warfield, *Works* 1, 77-112, 77. There is little difference between the early and the late definitions, both focus on the final result of inspiration. Cf. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1, 154. Inspiration is “an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of his mind and will. They were in such a sense the organs of God, that what they said God said.”

¹²⁶ Warfield wrote an article titled ‘God-Inspired Scripture,’ in which he discussed the meaning of θεόπνευστος at length. B.B. Warfield ‘God-Inspired Scripture’ (1900), in Warfield, *Works* 1, 229-280.

¹²⁷ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 89-90.

in the minds of the writers of the New Testament that they could naturally speak of “Scripture” doing what God was doing.¹²⁸ In his conclusion of the first part of the article on the divine origin of Scripture Warfield relates the inspiration of Scripture to its trustworthiness and infallibility. Scripture’s authority rests on its divinity; it is “a God-breathed document, which, because God-breathed, is through and through trustworthy in all its assertions, authoritative in all its declarations, and down to its last particular, the very word of God, His “oracles”.”¹²⁹

Warfield does not like the expression “human element,” because the whole of Scripture in all its parts and in all its elements, in form of expression as well as in substance of teaching, is from God and at the same time the whole of it has been given by God through human instrumentality.¹³⁰ Warfield rather speaks of a human side or aspect of Scripture. The human writers are overruled or controlled by the Spirit. Warfield avoids two extremes: the process is much more intimate than dictation, but still the control of the Holy Spirit in this process is so complete that the human qualities of the secondary authors have no influence whatever on the purity of the product as the Word of God.¹³¹

In earlier articles Warfield calls this theory of divine control over the whole process of the production of Scripture the theory of *concursum*. In an article on ‘The Doctrine of Inspiration of the Westminster Divines’ (1894) he says that there is a difference between the Reformers’ treatment of Scripture and that of the theologians of the seventeenth century arising from the differing points of view from which they approach the subject. The thinking of the Reformers concerning Scripture appears “to be rooted in a theory of *concursum* or *synergism* rather than in one of *dictation*.”¹³² This theory of the *concursum* implies that “every word of Scripture is truly divine and yet every word is as truly human.”¹³³

Previous to the inspiration lies a complex process by which the Scriptures have come into being. According to Warfield, God also has overruled the history that is recorded in Scripture and the whole process of preparation of the authors and the way in which they have gained their information. “There is the preparation of the men to write these books to be considered, a preparation physical, intellectual, spiritual, which must have attended them throughout their whole lives.”¹³⁴ It is not necessary for God to force the writers against their nature to express his Word, for “if God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul’s, He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul He brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters.”¹³⁵ The

¹²⁸ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 92. At the background stands a philological article on this subject. B.B. Warfield, “‘It says,’ ‘Scripture says,’ ‘God says’” (1899), in Warfield, *Works* 1, 283-332.

¹²⁹ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 96.

¹³⁰ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 96. In 1881 Warfield was less critical of the term; he wrote: “We do not deny an everywhere-present human element in the Scriptures.” Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 42.

¹³¹ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 99.

¹³² B.B. Warfield ‘The Doctrine of Inspiration of the Westminster Divines’ (1893) in Warfield, *Works* 6, 261-333, 261.

¹³³ Warfield, ‘Doctrine of Inspiration of Westminster,’ 276.

¹³⁴ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 101.

¹³⁵ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 101. “There is first of all the preparation of the history to be written: God the Lord leads the sequence of occurrences. [...] Then He prepares a man, by birth,

human authors are like the colored glasses of a stained-glass window that “have been designed by the architect for the express purpose of giving to the light that floods the cathedral precisely the tone and quality it receives from them.”¹³⁶ God has formed the personalities of the authors of the Bible into exactly those personalities that would spontaneously and not forcedly write these books.

In the Protestant theology of the seventeenth century the idea is dominant that God has dictated Scripture, excluding the personal contribution of the human authors. Warfield believes that the Scriptures are “the joint product of divine and human activities, both of which penetrate them at every point.”¹³⁷ The theological basis for this concept lies in God’s providence; God is not only transcendent, but also immanent in his modes of working.

If God overrules the human authors, the question remains why a divine act of inspiration still is necessary. Warfield answers: “Providence is guidance; and guidance can bring one only so far as his own power can carry him. [...] This is the reason for [...] the additional Divine operation which we call technically ‘inspiration.’”¹³⁸ It is exactly this operation that makes Scripture not merely the word of godly men, “but the immediate word of God Himself, speaking directly as such to the minds and hearts of every reader.”¹³⁹ Warfield connects this final supernatural operation of the Spirit with the immediate authority of Scripture. The value of this final act of inspiration is twofold.

It gives to the books written under its ‘bearing’ a quality which is truly superhuman; a trustworthiness, an authority, a searchingness, a profundity, a profitableness which is altogether Divine. And it speaks this Divine word immediately to each reader’s heart and conscience; so that he [...] can listen directly to the Divine voice itself speaking immediately in the Scriptural word to him.¹⁴⁰

God controls the preparation of the human authors as well as the actual writing of Scripture. The first is a providential operation, the second a supernatural one. This second supernatural operation is the main reason why inspiration implies infallibility for Warfield. Although he leaves room for the human side of Scripture he refuses to accept a division of Scripture into a human and a divine part. The whole of Scripture is human because God has used human instruments, but the whole is also divine because God not only overruled and prepared the humane authors, but also has inspired them in the moment of writing. Or as A.A. Hodge says in their earlier co-production: “An organist determines the character of his music as much when he builds his organ and when he tunes his pipes as when he plays his keys.”¹⁴¹ God not only makes the instruments and tunes them, but he also blows on them to produce the divine music of his revelation.

training, experience, gifts of grace, and, if need be, of revelation, capable of appreciating this historical development and eager to search it out, thrilling in all his being with its lessons.” Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 102-103.

¹³⁶ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 102.

¹³⁷ B.B. Warfield, ‘Inspiration’ (1909) in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 629. Cf. B.B. Warfield ‘The Divine and Human in the Bible’ (1894), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 542-548, 546.

¹³⁸ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 104.

¹³⁹ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 104.

¹⁴⁰ Warfield, ‘Inspiration,’ 104.

¹⁴¹ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 14-15.

The difference with the theory of dictation lies in the fact that Warfield leaves more room for the diversity of the books and of the different styles of the authors and for the historical investigation by the authors prior to their writing. Warfield's desire to secure the Scriptures from any defective human influence brings him to a position where the human aspect is acknowledged, but completely overruled by God. In the theory of dictation the writers are the penmen or rather the pens of God. In Warfield's concept they are the musical instruments. "Human writers have contributed no quality of their own to the product, save as a musical instrument may contribute a quality to the music played upon it."¹⁴² Nevertheless, it is God who as a musician not only produces and tunes his instruments, but also plays them.

5.3.5 Scripture and Science

It is interesting to take a short look at Warfield's attitude towards science in general and the theory of evolution in particular to see the implications of his doctrine of inspiration. Although Warfield rejected atheistic evolutionary theories, he did not believe that creation had taken place in six days some six thousand years ago, but that God had created our world via a process of evolution.¹⁴³ He did not stand alone in this opinion. The possibility of evolution was left open in the *Fundamentals*. James Orr (1844-1913), a Scottish professor of apologetics, wrote an article on 'Science and the Christian Faith' and referred to Calvin's commentary on Genesis where he advised those who desired to learn astronomy and other arts to go elsewhere, because Moses wrote in a popular style.¹⁴⁴ Orr used this example to illustrate that there was no tension between the style of the Bible and the results of science. Orr was even ready to accept that "the world is immensely older than the 6,000 years which the older chronology gave it."¹⁴⁵ Orr rejected Darwinism, but left some room for an evolutionary theory that described how God created the living creatures, including human beings.¹⁴⁶ Though "evolution is not yet proved; there seems a growing appreciation of the strength of the evidence for the fact of some form of evolutionary origin of species – that is, of some genetic connection of higher with lower forms."¹⁴⁷ Orr had no problem combining the idea of an evolutionary process with the divine creation of the universe.

¹⁴² Warfield, 'Inspiration,' in *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 628.

¹⁴³ Mark A. Noll has given an excellent survey of Warfield's development at this point. M.A. Noll, 'Introduction: B.B. Warfield as a conservative evolutionist,' in B.B. Warfield, *Evolution, Scripture and Science: Selected Writings*, ed. M.A. Noll and D.N. Livingstone, Grand Rapids 2000, 13-44.

¹⁴⁴ J. Orr, 'Science and the Christian Faith,' in Torrey, *Fundamentals* 1, 334-347, 340.

¹⁴⁵ Orr, 'Science and Christian Faith,' 343.

¹⁴⁶ McIntire, 'The Fundamentals' 436.

¹⁴⁷ Orr, 'Science and Christian Faith,' 345. The geologist George Frederick Wright (1838-1921), another contributor to *The Fundamentals*, stated that a certain evolutionary development of species confirmed the teleology of creation. Cf. J.R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870-1900*, Cambridge 1979, 72.

The later fundamentalists thought very differently; in the later editions of *The Fundamentals* this part of Orr's article was deleted.¹⁴⁸ The problem for Orr was not the age of the world, but the creation of human life. "Man is the last of God's created works [...] and he is made in God's image. To account for him, a special act of the Creator, constituting him what he is, must be presupposed."¹⁴⁹ In Orr's idea of evolution our origin may be as sudden as Genesis represents and we may have come from our Creator's hand in as morally pure a state, and as capable of sinless development, as Genesis and Paul affirm.

The open attitude towards the results of modern science was also common at Princeton. In 1874 Charles Hodge published *What is Darwinism?* His conclusion is often quoted: "It is Atheism."¹⁵⁰ This should not be interpreted as an absolute denial of the possibility of evolution; the main problem was with Darwinism as a naturalistic process. The Princetonians accepted the possibility of theistic evolution; the development of created material overruled and controlled by the providence of God. At the background stands the conviction that there is no conflict between the facts of nature and the facts of Scripture. Charles Hodge stated in his *Systematic Theology*:

Science has in many things taught the Church how to understand the Scriptures. The Bible was for ages understood and explained according to the Ptolemaic system of the universe; it is now explained without doing the least violence to its language, according to the Copernican system. Christians have commonly believed that the earth has existed only a few thousands of years. If geologists finally prove that it has existed for myriads of ages, it will be found that the first chapter of Genesis is in full accord with the facts, and that the last results of science are embodied on the first page of the Bible.¹⁵¹

If science proves a much older age of the earth, then our interpretation of Genesis 1-3 needs to be renewed.

Warfield's attitude to evolution changed slightly throughout the years. First Warfield left the truth or falsity of the Darwinian theory an open question. There was no real conflict between the interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis and the theory of evolution. He did not think that there was "any general statement in the Bible or any part of the account of creation, either as given in Genesis 1 and 2 or elsewhere alluded to, that need be opposed to evolution."¹⁵² Even the detailed narrative of the creation of Eve, might teach only the general fact that Eve came from Adam's flesh and bone. Warfield did not believe that there was a "necessary antagonism" of Christianity to evolution, unless evolution excluded miraculous intervention. After 1900 he even adopted a more favorable attitude towards evolution. Writing on the origin of the human

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Orr, 'Science and Christian Faith,' 345-347 with *The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths*, ed. R.A. Torrey, updated by C.L. Feinberg, with biographical introductions by W.W. Wiersbe, Grand Rapids 1990, 134.

¹⁴⁹ Orr, 'Science and Christian Faith,' 346.

¹⁵⁰ Ch. Hodge, *What is Darwinism?*, ed. M.A. Noll and D.N. Livingstone, Grand Rapids 1994, 156.

¹⁵¹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1, 171. According to his son A.A. Hodge, "evolution is not antagonistic to our faith as either theists or Christians." A.A. Hodge, 'Introduction,' in J.S. Van Dijke, *Theism and Evolution: An Examination of Modern Speculative Theories as Related to Theistic Conceptions of the Universe*, London 1886, xvii-xix. Cited in Moore, *Post-Darwinian controversies*, 241.

¹⁵² B.B. Warfield 'Evolution or Development' (1888), in Warfield, Noll, *Evolution, Scripture and Science*, 114-131, 130 Cf. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Majestic Testimony*, 258.

species Warfield asked why the evolutionist should explain this origin from the “blind action of natural forces” and why the biblicist should assert that the creation of man “must have been immediate in such a sense as to exclude all process.”¹⁵³ Referring to a study of W.H. Green, Warfield explained that the genealogical records in Scripture did not necessarily imply that the human species is not older than 6,000 years. “The genealogies of Scripture were not constructed for a chronological purpose. [...] While they must be esteemed absolutely trustworthy for the purposes for which they were given, these genealogies are not to be pressed into use for other purposes.”¹⁵⁴

Warfield’s doctrine of inspiration was related to his perception of evolution. Just as the divine character of inspiration did not exclude human activity, so creation did not exclude development. In both cases Warfield believed in a *concursum* of divine action and natural process.¹⁵⁵ His Calvinistic orthodoxy was a means for him to relate science and revelation. In his article ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Creation’ (1915), he stated that Calvin opened the door for a “controlled materialist explanation of natural history.”¹⁵⁶ He acknowledged that Calvin had understood the six days of creation as literal days, but suggested that “these six days would have to be lengthened out into six periods – six ages of the growth of the world. Had that been done, Calvin would have been a precursor of the modern evolutionary theorists.”¹⁵⁷

Warfield’s defense of an errorless Bible demonstrates that Warfield’s doctrine of inerrancy did not disallow some accommodation to the evident or assumed findings of science, because the authority of Scripture does not imply a sacrifice of the intellect (*sacrificium intellectus*). He believed that there was no real contradiction between the facts of science and the exegesis of Genesis. He sought a harmony between science and faith and could not accept a dichotomy of scientific truth and revealed truth. The hand of God in his creation could not contradict the mouth of God in Scripture.

5.3.6 Conclusion

We have seen that Warfield defends the authority of Scripture on critical grounds. He refuses to admit errors in the Bible, because this is inconsistent with the authority of

¹⁵³ B.B. Warfield, ‘The Manner and Time of Man’s Origin’ (1903), in Warfield, Noll, *Evolution, Scripture and Science*, 211-229, 213.

¹⁵⁴ Warfield, ‘Manner and Time of Man’s Origin,’ 217-218. Warfield refers to W.H. Green, ‘Primeval Chronology,’ in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 47 (1890), 285-303. Green’s conclusion is that “the Scriptures furnish no data for a chronological computation prior to the life of Abraham; and that the Mosaic records do not fix and were not intended to fix the precise date either of the Flood or of the creation of the world.” In 1911 Warfield wrote that the antiquity of the human race “has of itself no theological significance. It is to theology, as such, a matter of entire indifference how long man has existed on earth.” B.B. Warfield, ‘On the Antiquity and Unity of the Human Race’ (1911), in Warfield, *Works* 9, 235-258, 235.

¹⁵⁵ “The key for Warfield was a doctrine of providence that saw God working in and with, instead of as a replacement for, the processes of nature.” Noll, ‘Introduction,’ 43.

¹⁵⁶ Noll, ‘Introduction,’ 38.

¹⁵⁷ B.B. Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Creation’ (1915), in Warfield, *Works* 5, 287-349, 306. Cf. Noll, ‘Introduction,’ 39. John Murray criticized Warfield saying that his inferences are not supported by evidence in Calvin’s writings. According to him, we are not able to characterize the process of creation as an evolutionary scheme. J. Murray ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of Creation,’ *Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (1954) 21-43, 41-42.

Scripture. Scripture does not contain the Word God, but is the Word of God. Notwithstanding the alliance with millenarianism in early fundamentalism, Warfield remains far from biblicistic and dispensationalistic exegesis.

Warfield makes full use of the critical method of his own days. As an expert in the field of textual criticism he is willing to use the historical-critical method, provided that the results do not weaken the authority of Scripture by contradicting the implications of the doctrine of inspiration. He even finds that the high claim of Scripture's inspiration must be examined in a critical way. If the claim is proved to be valid, then Scripture is trustworthy. The books of the New Testament deserve to be believed if they are proved to be the authentic apostolic writings they claim to be. According to Warfield, the claim of divine inspiration can be demonstrated as valid. Warfield also determines the canon on historical-critical grounds. It is the task of criticism to investigate the apostolic authorship of the books and show that their claim is so probable that it cannot be rejected. The burden of proof lies with the opponents of Scripture's authority; if there are no evidences that contradict the claim of apostolicity, the books must be accepted as apostolic and therefore canonical and therefore divinely inspired. Warfield rejects a biased form of criticism and pleads for an honest and believing criticism that is willing to accept the possibility of supernatural revelation.

There are three reasons for Warfield to adhere to the infallibility of Scripture: the historical reason that this has been the cornerstone of the faith of all ages, the doctrinal reason that inspiration implies infallibility because God is the God of truth, and the polemical reason that it is not necessary to give up infallibility unless errors in the Bible can be proved. Warfield is willing to remain with many unanswerable questions rather than to distinguish between inspired and uninspired parts of the Bible, for that opens the door for subjectivism.

Warfield's concept of inspiration can be summarized in the word *concursum*. He rejects a mechanical process; inspiration is much more intimate than dictation; God is involved in the whole process from the character-building of the writers via the historical research behind their work into the very act of writing. God both tunes the organ and plays the music.

Warfield's defense of the authority of Scripture includes some accommodation to the evident or assumed findings of science, because the authority of Scripture does not imply a sacrifice of the intellect (*sacrificium intellectus*). Warfield's defense of an errorless Bible does not lead to a sacrifice of the intellect. Though he does not believe that evolution can be proven and rejects an atheistic mode of evolution that excludes a divine intervention in the process, he is still wonderfully open to the possibility that creation of life and even human life is the result of a long evolutionary development. There is no real contradiction between the proven facts of science and the exegesis of Genesis. In line with Calvin's explanation, Warfield does not read the first chapters of the Bible as an exact scientific account of creation. Two interesting questions remain open: how Warfield's reception of Calvin influences his concept of the *testimonium*, and how Warfield's position on the theme is related to his concept of apologetics.

5.4 Calvin's Concept of the *Testimonium*.

Warfield was one of the leading Calvin scholars of his days and considered Calvin's "greatest contribution to theological science lies in the rich development which he gives

– and which he was the first to give – to the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵⁸ Calvin was the first to relate the whole experience of salvation specifically to the working of the Holy Spirit and worked it out into its details, especially in the *Institutes*.

Therefore it opens with the great doctrine of the testimonium Spiritus Sancti – another of the fruitful doctrines which the Church owes to Calvin – in which he teaches that the only vital and vitalizing knowledge of God which a sinner can attain, is communicated to him through the inner working of the Spirit of God in his heart, without which there is spread in vain before his eyes the revelation of God's glory in the heavens, and the revelation of His grace in the perspicuous pages of the Word.¹⁵⁹

By stressing the pneumatological character of Calvin's work, Warfield criticized the common opinion at the turn of the century that the sovereignty of God and the doctrine of election and reprobation formed Calvin's leading theological principle.¹⁶⁰ Of course, a theology which commits everything to the Spirit of God hangs everything on the sovereign good-pleasure of God and therefore can be called predestinarian.

But this is not the peculiarity of his theology. [...] What is special to himself is the clearness and emphasis of his reference of all that God brings to pass, especially in the processes of the new creation, to God the Holy Spirit, and the development from this point of view of a rich and full doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶¹

This is the reason why he characterizes Calvin as “the theologian of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶²

5.4.1 ‘Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God’ (1909)

For Warfield's understanding of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture we turn to his discussion of the first chapters of the *Institutes* in an article published in *The Princeton Theological Review* at the 400th anniversary of Calvin's birth in 1909: ‘Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God.’ The following articles in this series discuss Calvin's doctrine of God and of the Trinity while Warfield picks up the thread six years later with an article on Calvin's doctrine of creation. The article on the knowledge of God in Calvin's theology consists of four parts: Natural Revelation, Holy Scripture, The Testimony of the Spirit and, Historical Relations. In the introduction Warfield says that Calvin “set a compressed apologetical treatise in the forefront of his little book”; the first chapters of the *Institutes* are “an exposition of the sources and guarantee of the knowledge of

¹⁵⁸ B.B. Warfield, *John Calvin as a Theologian and Calvinism To-day*, Philadelphia 1909. Reprinted in B.B. Warfield, S.G. Craig (ed.), *Calvin and Augustine*, Philadelphia 1956, 481-507, 486.

¹⁵⁹ Warfield, *John Calvin as a Theologian*, 486.

¹⁶⁰ In the nineteenth century it was popular to look for a leading principle in every school of thought. Calvin's thought was analyzed in terms of one specific dogmatic center. According to Parker, such a method was abhorrent to Calvin's mind. T.H.L. Parker, ‘The Approach to Calvin,’ *Evangelical Quarterly* 16 (1944), 169. Quoted by Muller who remarks that many have continued to search for central motifs around which Calvin's thought crystallized. Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 4. Cf. Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 28, n. 14.

¹⁶¹ Warfield, *John Calvin as a Theologian*, 487.

¹⁶² Warfield, *John Calvin as a Theologian*, 487. Cf. B.B. Warfield, ‘John Calvin: The Man and his Work’ (1909), in Warfield, *Works* 5, 3-26, 21. Cf. S. Van der Linde, *De leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn: bijdrage tot de kennis der reformatorische theologie*, Wageningen, 1943, 1-2, Krusche, *Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 12 and I.J. Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary*, Louisville 1997, 177, who adds: “No one has denied this as far as I know.”

God.”¹⁶³ Calvin is the first theologian to deal with the problems raised by the Christian revelation in a constructive statement. According to Warfield, it is the first time in the history of Christian theology that the plan of a complete structure of Christian apologetics is drawn in outline. In the introduction Warfield also summarizes what he sees as the elements of Calvin’s thought:

These include the postulation of an innate knowledge of God in man, quickened and developed by a very rich manifestation of God in nature and providence, which, however, fails of its proper effect because of man’s corruption in sin; so that an objective revelation of God, embodied in the Scriptures, was rendered necessary, and, as well, a subjective operation of the Spirit of God on the heart enabling sinful man to receive this revelation – by which conjoint divine action, objective and subjective, a true knowledge of God is communicated to the human soul.¹⁶⁴

It is clear from the outset that, according to Warfield, the internal and external natural revelation fail because of sin; therefore God gives an objective supernatural revelation in Scripture and a subjective supernatural revelation through the Spirit. The knowledge of God is communicated to us through the cooperation of objective and subjective supernatural revelation.

Already in the introduction Warfield explains his concept more in detail. We all have an instinctive knowledge of God that is developed by the manifestations of God in nature and providence. But the subjective condition of the soul, corrupted by sin, affects this knowledge making it insufficient to know God aright.

God has therefore supernaturally revealed Himself to His people and deposited this revelation of Himself in written Scriptures. In these Scriptures alone, therefore, do we possess an adequate revelation of God; and this revelation is attested as such by irresistible external evidence and attests itself as such by such marks of inherent divinity that no normal mind can resist them.¹⁶⁵

The problem is that we do not have a normal mind, but a sin-darkened mind; the objective revelation fails because our receptivity is destroyed by sin. Of the objective revelation Warfield says: “The revelation of God is its own credential. It needs no other light to be thrown upon it but that which emanates from itself: and no other light can produce the effect which its own splendor as a revelation of God should effect.”¹⁶⁶ This characteristic of revelation reminds us of the *autopistia* of Scripture in Reformed orthodoxy, but Warfield does not use the terminology. This characteristic is related to the *testimonium* of the Spirit. The knowledge of God cannot be restored merely by the

¹⁶³ B.B. Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God’ (1909), in Warfield, *Works* 5, 29-130, 30. Warfield leans on Köstlin’s perception of the *Institutes* of 1539. “Bereits erhebt sich so bei ihm ein in den Grundzügen fertiges Gebäude christlicher Apologetik. Er steht mit demselben schon 1539 einzig da unter den Reformatoren und unter den bisherigen christlichen Theologen überhaupt.” J. Köstlin, ‘Calvin’s Institutio,’ 39. Regarding the large insertions made into the first part of the *Institutes* between 1539 and 1559 Warfield says that “no modifications were made in its fundamental teaching by these additions.” Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 29.

¹⁶⁴ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 31.

¹⁶⁵ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 32. The Scriptures “stand as a perpetual special revelation of Himself to His people, to supplement or to supersede in their case the general revelation which He gives of Himself in His works and deeds, but which is rendered ineffective by the sin-bred disabilities of the human soul.” Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 67.

¹⁶⁶ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 32.

special revelation of God in Scriptures alone, because Scripture only provides the objective side of the cure, the subjective side is provided by the *testimonium* of the Spirit. Warfield calls this testimony of the Spirit a “repairing operation” that enables the souls of sinners to see the light of the Word. It is “the subjective action of the Spirit of God on the heart, by virtue of which it is opened for the perception and reception of the objective revelation of God.”¹⁶⁷ It is no extra revelation and it cannot take the place of the objective Word of God. It implants or restores a spiritual sense in the soul by which God is recognized in His Word.

When this spiritual sense has been produced the necessity of external proofs that the Scriptures are the Word of God is superseded: the Word of God is as immediately perceived as such as light is perceived as light, sweetness as sweetness – as immediately and as inamissibly.¹⁶⁸

Warfield deals with the *sensus deitatis* and the *semen religionis* and the external natural revelation, concluding with Calvin the bankruptcy of the natural knowledge of God. According to Warfield, however, this is not due to any inadequacy of natural revelation considered objectively.¹⁶⁹ The only cause of the failure of natural revelation lies in the corruption of the human heart, which throws us back upon the supernatural revelation for adequate knowledge of God.

Warfield also discusses the objective supernatural revelation in Scripture, starting with Calvin’s concept of the canon. According to him, Calvin accepted the books of the Bible as canonical on historical-critical grounds.¹⁷⁰ Calvin accepted the “Antilegomena” – the disputed books of the New Testament like 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation – on the basis of a critical investigation both into the history of the tradition of the books from the Apostolic Church and into their internal characteristics of their divine origin. He accepted 2 Peter “on the two grounds of the external witness of the Church and the internal testimony of the contents of the book.”¹⁷¹ This is an important point for Warfield, for whom the canon did not depend on the testimony of the Holy Spirit, but on historical and critical research.

It was, in a word, on the ground of a purely scientific investigation that Calvin accredited to himself the canon. It had come down to him through the ages, accredited as such by the constant testimony of its proper witnesses: and it accredited itself to critical scrutiny by its contents.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 32.

¹⁶⁸ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 33.

¹⁶⁹ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 44.

¹⁷⁰ “These grounds, to speak briefly, were historico-critical. Calvin, we must bear in mind, was a Humanist before he was a Reformer, and was familiar with the whole process of determining the authenticity of ancient documents.” Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 53.

¹⁷¹ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 56.

¹⁷² Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 57. Warfield refers to J. Cramer who wrote: “The *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* no doubt made its influence felt. But without the help of the scientific investigation, this internal testimony would not have the power to elevate the book into a canonical book.” Cramer in contrast with Warfield considered this critical procedure on Calvin’s part inconsistent with his doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit. Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 57-58, n. 28. Cf. J. Cramer, *Nieuwe bijdragen op het gebied van godgeleerdheid en wijsbegeerte*, vol. 3, Amsterdam 1881, 155.

Calvin exhibited the same scholarly spirit in dealing with the text of Scripture; as a humanist he used the same methods in his determination of the text of the Bible as in settling the texts of classical authors.

Turning to Calvin's concept of inspiration, Warfield rejects the opinion that there is a wide gap between his position and the later orthodox Protestant dogmatic view of Scripture. "Nothing is more certain than that Calvin held both to 'verbal inspiration' and to 'the inerrancy of Scripture,' however he may have conceived the action of God which secured these things."¹⁷³ Calvin held the sixty-six books of the Bible to be the very Word of God in its simplest and most literal sense, although he did not overlook the fact that the Scriptures were written by human hands. But he thought of the human authors as notaries (*amanuenses*) who wrote merely as the organs of the Spirit. "The diversity of the human authors thus disappears for Calvin before the unity of the Spirit, the sole responsible author of Scripture, which is to him therefore not the *verba Dei*, but emphatically the *verbum Dei*."¹⁷⁴ Although Calvin did not give a detailed discussion of the mode of inspiration, he used language that implied that this mode was "dictation." According to Warfield, this language was figurative. "What Calvin has in mind is not to insist that the mode of inspiration was dictation, but that the result of inspiration is as if it were by dictation, viz., the production of a pure word of God free from all human admixtures."¹⁷⁵

According to Warfield, Calvin taught that the effect of inspiration was the production of a pure Word of God, free from all admixture of human error. Over against the attempts to discover in Calvin acknowledgments of human errors in Scripture, Warfield shows that Calvin sometimes spoke relatively of the chronology precisely to free Scripture from errors. When he explained that the purpose of the evangelists

was not to write a chronologically exact record, but to present the general essence of things, this is not to allow that the Scriptures err humanly in their record of the sequences of time, but to assert that they intend to give no sequences of time and therefore cannot err in this regard.¹⁷⁶

Sometimes Calvin did not speak of an error in the original text but in the transmitted text.¹⁷⁷ Warfield's interpretation of Calvin and his own position run parallel. He is aware of the different context, but states that Calvin accepted the canon on historical and critical grounds. Also Warfield's interpretation of Calvin's concept of inspiration, with the emphasis on the result, is similar to his own concept.

Warfield makes a distinction between the historical-critical grounds on which Calvin accepted the canon and the ground on which, having accepted the canon as the Word of God, his concept of inspiration rested. His confidence in the divine origin of

¹⁷³ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 61, n. 36. As examples of the common opinion he cites Cramer: "We nowhere find in Calvin such a magical conception of the Bible as we find in the later dogmaticians," and Pannier: "In any case Calvin has not written a single word which can be appealed to in favor of *literal* inspiration." Cf. Cramer, *Nieuwe bijdragen*, 103. Cf. Pannier, *Le témoignage du Saint-Esprit*, 200.

¹⁷⁴ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 61.

¹⁷⁵ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 63-64. The term "dictation" was used at the time to express rather the effects than the mode of inspiration. According to Cramer, Calvin borrowed the term from the current ecclesiastical usage. Cramer, *Nieuwe bijdragen*, 114.

¹⁷⁶ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 65.

¹⁷⁷ As for instance in his commentary on Matthew 27,9, Matthew 23,35, or Acts 7,16. Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 65.

the Scriptures and the trustworthiness of their teaching as a revelation from God rested on historical-critical grounds, but his conviction that there was nothing human mixed with the Scriptures rested on the ground of the teaching of Scripture itself that claimed to be the Word of God. In other words: on the first grounds “Calvin was led to trust the teaching of the Scriptures as a divine revelation: and he therefore naturally trusted their teaching as to their own nature and inspiration.”¹⁷⁸ As we will still see this distinction is important for the understanding of Warfield’s view of the *testimonium* of the Spirit.

The testimony of the Spirit is necessary, because God’s special revelation in Scripture does not provide the entire cure of our “sin-bred blindness.” Therefore Calvin places the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* side by side with it. Scripture provides only the objective side of the cure; the subjective side is provided by the *testimonium*. To Warfield’s disappointment Calvin in his concept of the *testimonium* focused on the work of the Spirit regarding the authority of Scripture and not on the work of the Spirit regarding saving faith in a broader sense.¹⁷⁹ This preoccupation was due to the controversy with Rome. According to Warfield, this subject, however, is only one application of the general doctrine of faith and therefore Calvin’s doctrine of the *testimonium* must be treated as a special application of Calvin’s doctrine of faith and not as an isolated doctrine.¹⁸⁰

It is not Calvin’s question how the Scriptures may be proved to be from God. “If that had been the question he was asking, he would not have hesitated to say that the testimony of the Church is conclusive of the fact.”¹⁸¹ According to Warfield, the divine origin of Scripture can be proved objectively by the evidences. Next to the testimony of the church Calvin had enough other “irresistible rational arguments” to prove it. In the doctrine of the *testimonium* Calvin was not dealing with the rational evidence of the divine origin of Scripture, but with true faith. The attestation of Scripture that he was seeking was not meant for the intellect only, but for the whole soul. Warfield identifies the testimony of the Spirit to the Scriptures with the testimony of the Spirit in faith. Faith that lays hold of Christ is the product of the Holy Spirit in the heart, and “it is one of the exercises of faith to lay hold of the revelation of this Christ in the Scriptures with assured confidence.”¹⁸²

Calvin described the nature of the testimony of the Spirit with “great exactitude” as a secret, internal, and inward action of the Holy Spirit, illuminating believers to perceive the divine character of Scripture. Warfield refers to the sentence in the *Institutes* that is so cardinal for this study:

We may call this ‘an inward teaching’ of the Spirit which produces ‘entire acquiescence in the Scriptures,’ so that they are self-authenticating to the mind and heart. [...] Precisely what is produced by the hidden internal operation of the Spirit on the soul is a new spiritual sense

¹⁷⁸ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 67.

¹⁷⁹ In Warfield’s phrasing Calvin deals with the accrediting of Scripture and not with the assimilation of the contents of Scripture. Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 71.

¹⁸⁰ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 72. Faith lays hold of Christ and “it is one of the exercises of this faith to lay hold of the revelation of this Christ in the Scriptures with assured confidence.” Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 76.

¹⁸¹ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 72.

¹⁸² Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 76.

(*sensus*, I.vii.5, *med.*) by which the divinity of Scripture is perceived as by an intuitive perception.¹⁸³

Warfield rephrases this first sentence of *Institutes* 1.7.5. He says that the *testimonium* is an inward teaching of the Spirit that produces acquiescence in the Scriptures so that they become self-authenticating to the mind and heart. Warfield depends on the translation of John Allen:

Let it be considered then, as an undeniable truth, that they who have been inwardly taught by the Spirit, feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture, and that it is self-authenticated, carrying with it its own evidence, and ought not to be made the subject of demonstration and arguments from reason; but it obtains the credit which it deserves with us by the testimony of the Spirit.¹⁸⁴

Warfield emphasizes that no conclusions based on reasoning or proofs can compare in clearness or force with this conviction. It is instinctive and immediate and finds its ultimate ground in the Holy Spirit. This instinctive conviction is a *persuasio*, or rather a *notitia*, or rather a *sensus*. It is an instant conviction not induced by arguments, but by direct perception. It is a direct perception in accord with the highest reason, in which the mind rests.

As we have implanted in us by nature a sense which distinguishes between light and darkness, a sense which distinguishes between sweet and bitter, and the verdict of these senses is immediate and final; so we have planted in us by the creative action of the Holy Spirit a sense for the divine, and its verdict, too, is immediate and final.¹⁸⁵

Then Warfield turns to a description of the mode of the *testimonium*. The testimony is not an immediate and propositional revelation, nor is it an ungrounded or blind conviction, but “an illumination of our minds, by which we are enabled to see God in the Scriptures, so that we may reverence them as from Him.”¹⁸⁶ Only in the conjunction of Word and Spirit can God’s revelation to the sin darkened mind be effective.

Calvin’s formula here is, The Word and Spirit. Only in the conjunction of the two can an effective revelation be made to the sin-darkened mind of man. The Word supplies the objective factor; the Spirit the subjective factor; and only in the union of the objective and subjective factors is the result accomplished. The whole objective revelation of God lies, thus, in the Word. But the whole subjective capacitating for the reception of this revelation lies in the will of the Spirit.¹⁸⁷

Warfield rejects the common idea that the testimony of the Spirit creates an ungrounded faith in the divinity of the Scriptures, as if according to Calvin believers “are assured of the divinity of Scripture and the truth of its contents quite apart from all other evidence.”¹⁸⁸ For Warfield there is no antithesis between the evidences and the

¹⁸³ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 78.

¹⁸⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, trans. Allen, 80. It is also due to Allen’s translation that Warfield interprets the result of the testimony as an intuitive perception. “We esteem the certainty that we have received it from God’s own mouth, by the ministry of men, to be superior to that of any human judgment, and equal to that of an intuitive perception of God himself in it.” The use of the verb *intueor* in the Latin phrase *non secus ac ipsius Dei nume illic intueremur* does not demand this etymological translation.

¹⁸⁵ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 79.

¹⁸⁶ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 81.

¹⁸⁷ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 82-83. Warfield adds that the doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit implies the doctrine of election, because the saving knowledge of God is not meant for “men at large, but specifically for His people.” Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 83.

¹⁸⁸ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 84.

testimonium. The fact that the *indicia* are insufficient apart from the *testimonium* does not mean that the *testimonium* is sufficient apart from the *indicia*. The Spirit testifies through the *indicia*. “It is a complete misapprehension of Calvin’s meaning, then, when it is suggested that he represents the *indicia* of the divinity of Scripture as inconclusive or even as ineffective.”¹⁸⁹ It is wrong to compare the testimony and the evidences as if they stand on the same plane; they move in different orbits. “The *indicia* are supreme in their sphere; they and they alone give objective evidence. But objective evidence is inoperative when the subjective condition is such that it cannot penetrate and affect the mind.”¹⁹⁰ The subjective condition of the sinful soul makes them ineffective, but in themselves they are effective to extort the confession of the divinity of Scripture even against one’s will and to render him without excuse, convincing his intellect of Scripture’s divinity. Calvin is often misapprehended because the precise reason for which he affirms the *indicia* to be ineffective is neglected. “There is only one thing, which he says they cannot do: that is to produce ‘sound faith.’”¹⁹¹ This failure is due to the subjective condition of the soul.

According to Warfield, the *indicia* work together with the testimony of the Spirit or rather the Spirit takes away the sinful blindness of the intellect so that the *indicia* are recognized. Through the *indicia* of the divinity of Scripture the soul is brought into confidence in that divinity. He must admit that “in treating of the *indicia* Calvin does not, however, declare this in so many words.”¹⁹² Warfield does not conceal that he regrets this omission. It looks as if they only function after faith has formed itself under the testimony of the Spirit. “On their part in forming faith under the operation of the testimony of the Spirit he does not appear explicitly to speak.”¹⁹³

Warfield is of the opinion that Calvin implicitly had in mind that the soul reached faith in Scripture through these *indicia* under the testifying operation of the Spirit. He quotes *Institutes* 1.8.13: “The *indicia* ‘are alone not sufficient to produce firm faith in it, till the heavenly Father, discovering His own power therein, places its authority above all controversy.’”¹⁹⁴ Calvin must have thought of the *indicia* as co-working with the testimony of the Spirit, because the *testimonium* does not have the nature of a revelation, but of a confirmation of the revelation, especially when this is taken in connection with his teaching that Scripture is self-authenticating. The Spirit of God imparts to us a sense of divinity.

Such a sense discovers divinity only where divinity is and only by a perception of it – a perception which of course rests on its proper *indicia*. [...] The senses do not distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter – to use Calvin’s own illustration (I.vii.2) – save by the mediation of those *indicia* of light and darkness, whiteness and blackness, sweetness and bitterness, by which these qualities manifest themselves to the natural senses; and by parity of reasoning we must accredit Calvin as thinking of the newly implanted spiritual

¹⁸⁹ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 85. Warfield objects against the common interpretation in which the *indicia* are subordinated to the witness of the Spirit. Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 85, n. 60. Cf. Köstlin, ‘Calvin’s Institutio,’ 413.

¹⁹⁰ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 85-86, n. 60.

¹⁹¹ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 87.

¹⁹² Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 88.

¹⁹³ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 88.

¹⁹⁴ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 89.

sense discerning the divinity of Scripture only through the mediation of the *indicia* of divinity manifested in Scripture.¹⁹⁵

Tasting and seeing that the Scriptures are divine means recognizing a divinity present in them and recognition implies perception of *indicia*, according to Warfield's interpretation of Calvin. He admits, however, that Calvin has not developed this side of his subject as fully, "as might be wished." Warfield tries to fill in the missing links by drawing some general implications from Calvin's concept.

After dealing with the mode of the *testimonium* Warfield discusses the object of the *testimonium* and the relationship between the *testimonium* and the religious life in the third part of the article. Warfield says that Calvin did not depend on the testimony of the Spirit but on scholarly, historical-critical grounds for the determination of the canon or for the establishment of the text of Scripture.¹⁹⁶ The opinion that Calvin appealed to the *testimonium* is held by those who promote a free attitude towards Scripture and only acknowledge as authoritative Scripture what spontaneously commends itself to the "immediate religious judgment" as divine.¹⁹⁷ Thus the *testimonium* is not related to Scripture as a whole, but only to some isolated truths in Scripture. This view, according to Warfield, often is connected with the view that the *testimonium* consists of the creation in the soul of a blind faith that is not motivated by reasons and grounds. Warfield's emphasis on the evidences and his connection of them with the *testimonium* must be understood against the background of the debate with this liberal interpretation of the *testimonium*, in which the *testimonium* was identified with the subjective and personal religious judgment.

The testimony of the Spirit does not determine immediately such scholarly questions as those of the canon and text of Scripture, but is an operation of the Spirit of God on the heart, or "regeneration considered in its noëtic effects."¹⁹⁸ For Calvin the recognition of the Scriptures as divine is just one of the effects of the renewing operation of the Spirit of God on the heart.¹⁹⁹ Logically this recognition is the first effect of the regenerating operation of the Spirit; Calvin would have said that faith in Christ presupposes faith in the Scriptures, rather than that we believe in the Scriptures for Christ's sake.²⁰⁰ On the other hand, this does not imply that it is chronologically first;

¹⁹⁵ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 89. In one of the footnotes Warfield says that the *indicia* are conclusive for unbelievers, who may be convinced of the apostolic origin, the canonical authority and the divine character of Scripture by the presentation of rational evidence which will compel their assent. The faith of believers ultimately rests on the same evidence, the only difference lies in the *testimonium*, by which the subjective condition of the soul is so repaired that they accept the *indicia* that unbelievers reject. Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 125, n. 99.

¹⁹⁶ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 92.

¹⁹⁷ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 92. As examples of this opinion Warfield cites Köstlin: "The certainty that the Scriptures really possess such authority, rests for us not on the authority of the Church, but just on this testimony of the Spirit," and Pannier: "If the Holy Spirit attests to us that a given book is divine, He in that very act attests that it forms a part of the rule of faith, that it is canonical." Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 90-91, n. 62. Cf. Köstlin, 'Calvin's Institutio,' 417. Cf. Pannier, *Le témoignage du Saint-Esprit*, 202.

¹⁹⁸ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 102-103.

¹⁹⁹ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 106.

²⁰⁰ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 107.

Warfield thinks that we are nearest to Calvin if we recognize faith in the revelation of which Christ is the substance and faith in Christ as the substance of this revelation as arising together in the soul. In this way efficacious grace or regeneration is the fundamental principle in Calvin's soteriology and therefore he is eminently the theologian of the Holy Spirit.²⁰¹

The testimony of the Spirit does not operate in a "naturalistic" way, but is supernatural. The testimony of the Spirit is delivered through our consciousness, "but it remains distinctively the testimony of God the Holy Spirit and is not to be confused with the testimony of our consciousness."²⁰² With a reference to Romans 8,16, Warfield emphasizes that the *testimonium* is a co-witness along with the witness of our spirit, but also that they are distinguishable. "The testimony of the Holy Spirit is not delivered to us in a propositional revelation, nor by the creating in us of a blind conviction, but along the lines of our own consciousness."²⁰³ Warfield closes this part of the article with a summary of his interpretation of Calvin:

That His people may know Him, therefore, God lovingly intervenes by an objective revelation of Himself in His Word, and a subjective correction of their sin-bred dullness of apprehension of Him through the operation of His Spirit in their hearts, which Calvin calls the Testimony of the Holy Spirit.²⁰⁴

The Scriptures are accredited to us as the revelation of God by the *testimonium*. Without it they remain without effect on us. The true Protestant principle is embodied in the testimony of the Spirit and it is superior to both the so-called formal and the so-called material principles. "For it takes the soul completely and forcibly out of the hands of the Church and from under its domination, and casts it wholly upon the grace of God."²⁰⁵

In the fourth part of the article Warfield gives some historical remarks on the concept of the *testimonium*. He discusses the church fathers and especially Augustine, and states that his position on the knowledge of God is essentially the same as Calvin's. Nevertheless, where Calvin introduced the doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit, Augustine had spoken of the knowledge of God as attainable only in the Church. Next Warfield discusses the other Reformers and shows the development of the concept of the *testimonium* in the subsequent editions of the *Institutes*.

Warfield also deals with the position of Schleiermacher, admitting that a revival of the doctrine of the *testimonium* was set on foot by him as a reaction to rationalism.

But after all, his revival of it was rather the revival of subjectivity in religion than of the doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit as the basis of all faith: and it has borne bitter fruit in a widespread subjectivism, the mark of which is that it discards (as 'external') the authority of those very Scriptures to which the testimony of the Spirit is borne.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 107.

²⁰² Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 110. In a footnote Warfield rejects the position of Claude Pajon (1626-1685) of the Academy of Saumur who explained the *testimonium* as merely the effect of the *indicia* of divinity in Scripture on the mind. Warfield calls this position deistic.

²⁰³ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 110-111. "The Holy Spirit does not work a blind, an ungrounded faith in the heart." B.B. Warfield, 'Introduction to Francis R. Beattie's *Apologetics*' (1903), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, 93-105, 99.

²⁰⁴ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 113.

²⁰⁵ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 115.

²⁰⁶ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 124-125. He adds that the continued influence of the doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit is not to be sought in the school of

Warfield's fear of subjectivism is the reason why he rejects the *testimonium* as the ground of faith.

He closes his historical survey with the Reformed confessions and especially the Westminster Confession of Faith. He says that in this confession the several grounds on which we recognize the Scriptures to be from God are noted and that yet the supreme importance of the witness of the Spirit is safeguarded.²⁰⁷ The confession points out the external testimony of the Church that induces us to a high esteem for Scripture and the internal testimony of the characteristics of Scripture that abundantly evidence it to be the Word of God. Finally it notes the testimony of the Spirit that does not add new evidence, but secures a deeper conviction and that does not operate independently of the Word with its characteristics, but by and with the Word. "Here we have the very essence of Calvin's doctrine, almost in his own words, and with even more than his own eloquence and precision of statement."²⁰⁸

5.4.2 Warfield's reception of Calvin

This extensive summary of Warfield's article on "Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God" begs for an evaluation. Warfield is congenial with Calvin and desires to explain his "doctrine" as carefully as possible, but he admits that he goes beyond Calvin and systemizes his thoughts.

1. Warfield places the *testimonium* of the Spirit in the broader context of the general and special knowledge of God. He distinguishes three phases or aspects in God's revelation: an innate knowledge of God strengthened by the manifestation of God in nature and providence, an objective revelation of God in Scripture necessary because of sin, and a subjective operation of the Spirit enabling sinful man to receive this revelation. These elements all come from the *Institutes* where they are not developed into an integral system. According to Warfield, this is due to the fact that Calvin dealt with only one aspect of faith and that he dealt with faith itself in the third book of the *Institutes*. It is clear that Warfield develops Calvin's concept into a system that goes beyond Calvin. The tensions in the *Institutes* are caused by the shifting emphasis. First Calvin only had to deal with the Catholic position and that of Radical Reformers, later he also faced skeptical humanists.

Warfield interprets Calvin along the lines of the subject-object dichotomy. This becomes clear in his definition of the *testimonium*, as a subjective operation on the soul, by which it is opened for the objective revelation of God. Scripture only provides the objective side of the cure; the subjective side is provided by the *testimonium* of the Spirit. For Calvin the majesty of Scripture and the testimony of the Spirit are more intimately related than for Warfield. Warfield reads the first chapters of the *Institutes* as a compressed apologetic treatise and this leads to an over-systemization of Calvin. The term "apologetic" has a meaning in Warfield's context that is strange to Calvin's thought.

Schleiermacher, but among the true successors of Calvin like William Cunningham, Charles Hodge, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck.

²⁰⁷ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 129. Warfield refers to his earlier article on the Westminster doctrine of Scripture.

²⁰⁸ Warfield, 'Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,' 130.

2. Warfield refers to the *indicia* when he describes the mode of the *testimonium*. The testimony is not a propositional revelation or a blind conviction, but an illumination of the mind. It is a secret, internal, and inward action of the Spirit, illuminating us to perceive the divine character of Scripture. It is instinctive and immediate and finds its ultimate ground in the Holy Spirit. It is an instant conviction not induced by arguments, but by direct perception, that is in accord with the highest reason, in which the mind rests. Warfield explains what he means by “in accord with the highest reason” referring to the *indicia*. The Spirit makes use of the *indicia*, which are as such conclusive and effective. Only the subjective condition of the sinful soul makes them ineffective and therefore there is only one thing that the *indicia* cannot do: that is to produce faith. To Warfield’s regret Calvin did not declare this in so many words, but implied that the *indicia* worked together with the *testimonium*, because the *testimonium* was not a revelation, but a confirmation of the revelation. Warfield relates this implication to the self-authenticating character of Scripture. Just as the senses only distinguish light from darkness, white from black, and sweet from bitter through the *indicia* of light and darkness, whiteness and blackness, sweetness and bitterness, so the newly implanted spiritual *sensus* discerns the divinity of Scripture only through the *indicia* of divinity manifested in Scripture. This does not mean that Warfield sees the *testimonium* as a rational or intellectual conclusion from the *indicia*.²⁰⁹ “It is only because our spirits have been renewed by the Holy Spirit that we see with convincing clearness the *indicia* of God in Scripture, that is, have the Scriptures sealed to us by the Spirit as divine.”²¹⁰

When Warfield explains the *testimonium* as an instinctive, immediate, and inward action of the Spirit he stands close to Calvin. When Warfield insists on the *indicia* the Spirit uses in this *testimonium* and says that it is in accord with “the highest reason,” he unites what Calvin separated: the evidences for the unbelievers and the *testimonium* for believers. Warfield uses the orthodox Reformed term *indicia* to interpret Calvin, whereas the term was not used by Calvin for the arguments for the authority of Scripture. According to Calvin, for believers these arguments only served as a posterior confirmation, while for Warfield they are an essential part of the *testimonium*.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Dowey says that Warfield elevates the *indicia* to a level of importance equal to that of the text of Scripture itself. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God*, 116. According to Warfield, however, the *indicia* are given with the text of Scripture. It is the sweetness of Scripture that makes it taste sweet. Hoffercker criticizes Dowey at this point. W.A. Hoffercker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield*, Phillipsburg (NJ) 1981, 105. Parker offers the same criticism as Dowey. Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 9. Cf. Riddlebarger, ‘The Lion of Princeton,’ 124, n. 125.

²¹⁰ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 105.

²¹¹ Cf. Cf. Hoffercker, *Piety and Princeton*, 107. Hoffercker mistakenly says that for Warfield the *indicia* chronologically precede the *testimonium*. Hoffercker, *Piety and Princeton*, 108, 109. Warfield says that the *indicia* logically come first. J. Murray explains the relationship between the *autopistia* of Scripture, the *testimonium* of the Spirit, and the evidences in the same way as Warfield. He remarks on the term “self-authenticating”, that Calvin “must be referring to that evidence which the Scripture inherently contains of its divine origin, character, and authority, the evidence which demonstrates that it is God himself who speaks in it. It is only those who are inwardly taught by the Spirit who perceive this evidence and only from them does it receive the credit it deserves. But it should be equally clear that the evidence by which Scripture authenticates itself is the evidence it contains and not the internal testimony.” J. Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty*, Grand Rapids 1960, 50.

Warfield's perception of Calvin at this point is influenced by Reformed orthodoxy and especially by the Westminster Standards. The development that we have traced in chapter 4 comes to a completion in Warfield's theology.

3. The Greek word αὐτόπιστος occurs only once in Warfield's oeuvre in a translation of Heppie. This does not mean that the idea of the *autopistia* of Scripture is absent from his mind. He says that the revelation of God is its own credential; Scripture needs no other light than its own. The self-authenticating character of Scripture is related to the *testimonium*, because the *testimonium* renders the Scriptures self-authenticating for believers via the *indicia* of the divine origin of Scripture.

Warfield rephrases the quotation from *Institutes* 1.7.5, skipping Calvin's explanation of the word αὐτόπιστος that Scripture should not to be made the subject of demonstrations and arguments from reason. This part of the sentence functions as a definition of αὐτόπιστος for Calvin. For Warfield the Greek term is problematic, because he does believe that the authority of Scripture should be demonstrated by arguments. The term αὐτόπιστος in its original philosophical meaning does not fit well in Warfield's doctrine of the authority of Scripture, and thus Warfield's difficulty with the term αὐτόπιστος shows exactly where he differs from Calvin. In one of his other articles he translates the quotation as follows:

Let it be considered, then, an undeniable truth, that they who have been inwardly taught of the Spirit, feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture, and that it is self-authenticated carrying with it its own evidence ... equal to that of an intuitive perception of God himself in it.²¹²

Again the phrase on demonstration and arguments from reason is missing. For Warfield self-authenticating means that Scripture proves itself by the *indicia*. The translation of αὐτόπιστος by Allen is important here: "that it is self-authenticated, carrying with it its own evidence." This fits in with Warfield's idea that the divinity of Scripture can be proved by the evidences (*indicia*). For Warfield the testimony of the Spirit consists in the enlightening of the mind to draw the right conclusion from these evidences; therefore he identifies the *autopistia* of Scripture with the *indicia*. This can be partly explained from Allen's translation, but Warfield also skips the clause in Allen's translation that says that Scripture "ought not to be made the subject of demonstrations and arguments from reason."

For Calvin Scripture is accepted as αὐτόπιστος through the *testimonium* that gives a certainty that is beyond all proof and demonstration. For Warfield Scripture is self-authenticating because of the *indicia* and although this is conclusive objectively, the *testimonium* is necessary because of the subjective blindness of the soul. The *testimonium* does not prove the Scriptures, because they are already proved by objective evidences. For Warfield the evidences are fundamental, and the *testimonium* is additional. For Calvin the *testimonium* is fundamental and the evidences are additional.

The *autopistia* is not a confessional statement of the authority of Scripture as it was for Calvin or a logical necessity as it was for the Reformed orthodox, but it is an objective and demonstrable characteristic of Scripture. This is strange because *autopistia* and demonstration logically exclude each other. Although the development of Reformed orthodoxy comes to a completion in Warfield's emphasis on the *indicia*, this

²¹² B.B. Warfield, 'Calvin and the Bible' (1909), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 1, 397-400, 400. Except for a single word this quotation corresponds with the translation of Allen.

concept also reveals a difference between the Reformed orthodox and Warfield. They accepted Scripture as the foundation of the theological science and stated that it necessarily must be self-convincing. Warfield starts in a neutral position and proves the *autopistia* of Scripture although he acknowledges that without the *testimonium* this proof will not convince unbelieving sinners.

The term “*autopistia*” is neglected by Warfield and therefore belongs between brackets. This negligence is significant, because the fact that this term is difficult for Warfield and that he interprets it in a way that is far from Calvin’s concept is a key to the understanding of his position on the authority of Scripture.

4. According to Warfield, Calvin accepted the books of the Bible as canonical on the ground of a scholarly investigation and not of the *testimonium*. This is not the same as saying that the authority of Scripture rested on this investigation, for Warfield makes a distinction between the acceptance of the canon based on critical grounds and the acceptance of the authority of Scripture based on its claim that it is the Word of God. In Warfield’s view the *testimonium* does not answer the question how the Scriptures may be proved to be from God. The first and most important ground for the acceptance of the canon is the authority of the church as a means by which Scripture is handed over to us.²¹³ Warfield states that Calvin would not have hesitated to call the testimony of the church conclusive of the fact that the Scriptures are divine, if that was the question in *Institutes* 1.7.²¹⁴ But the question is not the determination of the canon, but the ground for true faith. Warfield’s statement that Calvin is not asking how the Scriptures may be proved to be from God, is a misunderstanding that rests on the presupposition that for Calvin Scripture is proved to be from God by the evidences. Calvin clearly says that the divine origin of the canonical Scriptures can only be known through the *testimonium*.²¹⁵

5. Finally, the question must be faced why Warfield interprets Calvin in this objective way, struggling to do justice to the *Institutes* and trying to bring all the elements in Calvin’s thought into one system. Warfield does not take into account that Calvin dealt with different fronts in the subsequent editions of the *Institutes*. Warfield is influenced by Reformed orthodoxy and by his apologetic reading of Calvin. Warfield’s interpretation of Calvin shows his gift as a systematic theologian, but it does not do justice to Calvin’s context. If we simply reject his interpretation without trying to understand Warfield’s context and explain why he interprets Calvin in this way, we make the same mistake and do no justice to Warfield.

Warfield’s rejection of the *testimonium* as ground for the canon and his emphasis on the *indicia* must be understood against the background of growing influence of Schleiermacher in America.²¹⁶ In a review he says: “The old Protestant doctrine of the

²¹³ “Calvin, like the simple believer, has a definite book – the Bible – in his hands and treats it as all of a piece – of course, in Calvin’s case, not without reasonable grounds for treating it as all of a piece: in other words, the canon was already determined for him before he appealed to the testimony of the Spirit to attest its divinity.” Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 101, n. 71.

²¹⁴ Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 72.

²¹⁵ “For they mock the Holy Spirit when they ask: Who can convince us that these writings came from God?” Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.1, *OS* 3, 67. Warfield explains this phrase away. Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 94.

²¹⁶ According to Hoffecker, Warfield’s position can be understood only in light of the inroads that subjectivism had made in Christian theology. “Schleiermacher’s theology is Warfield’s

testimonium Spiritus Sancti to the authority of the Scriptures is, as is usual among the ‘critical’ writers, misconceived in the interests of a merely subjective grounding of the authority of the Scriptures.”²¹⁷ Through the Spirit’s regenerating grace believers are enabled and led to estimate in their full validity the *indicia* of divinity in the Scriptures and so to recognize the hand of God in the book of God.²¹⁸ In the subjectivist movement inaugurated by Schleiermacher the basis of trust shifted from Scripture to Christian experience and the whole conception of an authoritative Bible was set aside. Warfield speaks of the tendency in the German churches to substitute as the seat of authority the personal inner experience of the Christian for the infallible book which the Reformers substituted for the infallible Church. Behind Warfield’s interpretation of the testimony of the Spirit lies a deep sense of the need to maintain an external source of authority for the Christian faith. He would rather emphasize the authority of the church than end in subjectivism.

From this perspective it is possible that even in a misrepresentation of Calvin Warfield makes the same point as the Reformer in a different context. Calvin’s concern was to rescue the authority of Scripture of the dependence on the uncertain foundation of the authority of the church. The authority of the church is too unstable for the certainty of faith that finds rest in God alone. Warfield, however, uses the authority of the church to secure the authority of Scripture from mystical subjectivism. According to him, the term *testimonium* is completely hollowed out in the school of Schleiermacher. To secure the authority of Scripture against subjectivism, Calvin and Warfield say things that taken out of their context seem to be opposite. Warfield stresses the evidences in a way that is strange to Calvin, yet he does so in a context in which the testimony of the Spirit is used to defend a subjective position on the authority of the Scriptures, which is even stranger to Calvin. Both theologians defend the authority of Scripture and the certainty of faith against human arbitrariness.

5.5 Warfield’s Apologetics

We have seen that Warfield advocated an objective approach to the authority of Scripture. The faith of the Christian is not an ungrounded faith, but it is trust based on rational grounds. In his article “On Faith in its Psychological Aspects” Warfield admits that faith is “trust” but stresses that the act of faith includes

a mental recognition of what is before the mind, as objectively true and real, and therefore depends on the evidence that a thing is true and real and is determined by this evidence; it is the response of the mind to this evidence and cannot arise apart from it.²¹⁹

He did not mean that this consent of the mind is the mechanical result of the evidence. “There may stand in the way of the proper and objectively inevitable effect of the

immediate concern, because he replaced God as the subject matter of theology with the religious consciousness of the believer.” Hoffecker, *Piety and Princeton*, 103, cf. 101.

²¹⁷ Warfield, ‘Review of R. Seeberg, *Revelation and Inspiration*,’ 233.

²¹⁸ Warfield, ‘Review of R. Seeberg, *Revelation and Inspiration*,’ 234.

²¹⁹ B. B. Warfield, ‘On Faith in its Psychological Aspects’ (1911), in Warfield, *Works* 9, 313-342, 315. Warfield rejects the distinction of Kant between knowledge based on subjectively and objectively valid evidence and faith based on evidence that is only subjectively valid. Cf. Hoffecker, *Piety and Princeton*, 102.

evidence, the subjective nature or condition to which the evidence is addressed.”²²⁰ Sinful human beings are incapable of the act of faith, because they are incompetent or “inhabile” to accept the evidence, but renewed human beings are equally incapable of not responding to the evidence.²²¹ It is only through the Spirit that believers accept the Word of God, but they ultimately accept it because of the *indicia* and not because of the *testimonium*. Scripture’s authority can and must be proved on the common ground of the historical-critical method. The authority of Scripture does not belong to the sanctuary of saving faith, but to the outer court of the “prolegomena” of Christian theology: apologetics. This subject was so fundamental for Warfield that he rearranged the book reviews in *The Princeton Theological Review* starting with apologetic theology.²²² At the close of this chapter we will take a short look at Warfield’s perception of apologetics and his philosophical presuppositions.

5.5.1 ‘Apologetics’ (1908)

In an encyclopedia article on ‘Apologetics’ (1908) Warfield says that the theological department of apologetics is foundational for theology as a science, because its function is to investigate, explicate, and establish the grounds on which theology is possible. If theology is a true science then apologetics must establish its basis. Therefore Warfield places it at the head of the departments of theology, before exegetical, historical, systematic, and practical theology.²²³ Warfield understands apologetics as the “prolegomena” of Christian theology; preferring the term “apologetics” to “general theology” or “natural theology.” If theology has the knowledge of God as its subject, then it must begin by establishing the objective facts of the data upon which it is based.²²⁴

It is not the task of this apologetic introduction to demonstrate the truth of each Christian doctrine separately. “The business of apologetics is to establish the truth of Christianity as the absolute religion directly only as a whole, and in its details only indirectly.”²²⁵ Apologetics deals with three great topics: God, religion and revelation. There can be no theology as science of God, unless there is a God, a capacity in the

²²⁰ Warfield, ‘On Faith in its Psychological Aspects,’ 336.

²²¹ Warfield, ‘On Faith in its Psychological Aspects,’ 337-338.

²²² In 1893 a change occurs in the arrangements of the reviews of “Recent Theological Literature” in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*. First the reviews were divided into “Exegetical Theology,” “Historical Theology,” and “Systematic Theology” and the books on apologetic subjects were reviewed under the third heading, but in October 1893 the list of “Recent Theological Literature” opens with a heading on “Apologetic Theology” for the first time. *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 1893, 676.

²²³ B.B. Warfield ‘Apologetics’ (1908), in Warfield, *Works* 9, 3-21, 5.

²²⁴ Warfield ‘Apologetics,’ 7.

²²⁵ Warfield ‘Apologetics,’ 9. Nevertheless, in an article on the resurrection of Christ Warfield takes an apologetic approach, proving it to be a historical fact. “Taking all lines of proof together, it is by no means extravagant to assert that no fact in the history of the world is so well authenticated as the fact of Christ’s resurrection. And that established, all Christianity is established too.” B.B. Warfield, ‘The Resurrection of Christ, a Historical Fact’ (1884), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 1, 178-192, 191.

human mind to apprehend God and some media by which God is made known.²²⁶ These three topics only lead to a general theism. Therefore there are two other topics in Christian apologetics: Christianity and the Bible. Warfield develops these five subdivisions in his article. The first subdivision deals with theism, the second with the religious nature of human beings, the third with revelation in general as the source of all knowledge of God, the fourth with Christianity and its evidences and the fifth with the trustworthiness of the Scriptures as the documentation of the revelation of God.²²⁷ Christianity claims to be the true religion and to present the revelation of God documented in the Scriptures. Theology cannot proceed one step until it has examined this claim.

When apologetics has placed these great facts in our hands – God, religion, revelation, Christianity, the Bible – and not till then are we prepared to go on and explicate the knowledge of God thus brought to us, trace the history of its workings in the world, systematize it, and propagate it in the world.²²⁸

Warfield is aware of the opposition to his approach, but, according to him, the opposition is due to the subjectivism introduced by Schleiermacher. “The subjective experience of faith is conceived to be the ultimate fact; and the only legitimate apologetic, just the self-justification of this faith itself.”²²⁹ After Kant faith can no longer be looked upon as a matter of reasoning and does not rest on rational grounds, but is an affair of the heart, and manifests itself most powerfully when it has no reason out of itself.²³⁰

Although faith is a moral act and the gift of God, it is yet conviction passing into confidence. “All forms of convictions must rest on evidence as their ground, and it is not faith but reason which investigates the nature and validity of this ground.”²³¹ Warfield believes in a fundamental unity between faith and reason, this unity is founded on the unity of truth; God cannot speak with a double tongue. Faith is not irrational.

We believe in Christ because it is rational to believe in Him, not even though it be irrational. Of course mere reasoning cannot make a Christian; but that is not because faith is not the result of evidence, but because a dead soul cannot respond to evidence. The action of the Holy Spirit in giving faith is not apart from evidence, but along with evidence; and in the first instance consists in preparing the soul for the reception of the evidence.²³²

²²⁶ Warfield, ‘Apologetics,’ 11. Warfield finds the ground for this division in the fact that every science has to deal with a subject-matter, the capacity of the human mind to receive and reflect on this matter and the media of communication between subject matter and mind. “There could be no astronomy were there no heavenly bodies to be investigated, no mind capable of comprehending the laws of their existence and movements, or no means of observing their structure and motion.” Warfield ‘Apologetics,’ 11.

²²⁷ Warfield ‘Apologetics,’ 13-14.

²²⁸ Warfield ‘Apologetics,’ 12.

²²⁹ Warfield ‘Apologetics,’ 14. Cf. “Subjectivism is, in truth, the gulf into which all our modern theorists inevitably fall.” Warfield, ‘Review of M. Dods, *The Bible, Its Origin and Nature*,’ 126.

²³⁰ Warfield ‘Apologetics,’ 14. Warfield refers to Ferdinand Brunetière (1849-1906) a French literary critic and opponent of naturalism.

²³¹ Warfield ‘Apologetics,’ 15.

²³² Warfield ‘Apologetics,’ 15. Cf. Warfield, ‘Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God,’ 125, n. 99. “No man, no doubt, was ever reasoned into the kingdom of heaven: it is the Holy Spirit alone who can translate us into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. But there are excellent reasons

Although apologetics cannot make anyone a Christian, still it offers the systematic basis on which the Christian faith rests. “It has for its object the laying of the foundations on which the temple of theology is built, and by which the whole structure of theology is determined.”²³³ In his article on ‘The Inspiration of the Bible’ he insists on the fact that God has created us as rational creatures and that Christianity is not against reason, though its message goes above reason. The Christian scholar should give “a thoroughly trustworthy historical vindication of supernatural Christianity.”²³⁴ In an article on ‘Christianity the Truth’ (1901) Warfield says that Christianity is “the only reasonable religion, it comes forward as pre-eminently the reasoning religion. The task it has set itself is no less than to *reason* the world into acceptance of the ‘truth’.”²³⁵ It is an “aggressive religion” and when it ceases to reason, it ceases to exist.²³⁶ Apologetics not only defends Christianity, but establishes it firmly as the one absolute system of truth for all human beings.²³⁷ At this point Warfield passes his predecessors at Princeton, who used apologetics to remove preliminary doubts through the evidences of Christianity; only with Warfield it became a “full-blown preparatory science.”²³⁸

The apologetic approach is fundamental for Warfield. Christian faith is not an ungrounded persuasion, it is grounded in the highest reasons one can imagine, the supernatural reasons displayed in the revelation of God. The classification of the doctrine of Scripture as the conclusion of the apologetic introduction to theology explains Warfield’s objective approach and his emphasis on the *indicia*. For Warfield the prolegomena are not the first things to be said in theology, but the things that have to be said before theology properly starts. Whereas the discussion of the *autopistia* of Scripture as a logical necessary characteristic of the *principium unicum* of theology functioned as a foundational statement in Reformed orthodoxy, the demonstration of the *autopistia* of Scripture functions as an introduction to theology. This is due to the changing scholarly climate; the acceptance of theology as a science can no longer be taken for granted. Calvin’s decision to discuss the authority of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit in the introduction of the *Institutes*, not only leads to the separation of the authority of Scripture from the *testimonium*, but also to the exchange of the *autopistia* of Scripture for a demonstrable characteristic of self-evidence.

5.5.2 Common Sense Epistemology

Our final question regards Warfield’s philosophical and epistemological presuppositions. Although Warfield’s theology is often related to Scottish Common Sense Realism, his position cannot be interpreted as an immediate result of this philosophy. Common Sense Realism had a supreme influence over the whole field of

why every man should enter the kingdom of heaven; and these reasons are valid in the forum of every rational mind, and their validity can and should be made manifest to all.”

²³³ Warfield ‘Apologetics,’ 9.

²³⁴ Warfield, ‘Inspiration of the Bible,’ 68.

²³⁵ B.B. Warfield, ‘Christianity the Truth’ (1901) in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 213-218, 213.

²³⁶ Warfield, ‘Christianity the Truth,’ 216.

²³⁷ Hoffecker, *Piety and Princeton*, 96.

²³⁸ Hoffecker, *Piety and Princeton*, 135.

American theology in the nineteenth century. Warfield was not an exception but shared his philosophical presuppositions with liberals and Unitarians.²³⁹

Common Sense Realism was a correction of the subjective idealism of the Enlightenment. Ultimately this idealism and subjectivism lead to relativism. Warfield foresaw this consequence and refused to surrender to the subjectivist tendency of the post-Enlightenment philosophy; in his view this was the main fault of mediating theology. Though the influence of Common Sense Realism was declining in Warfield's days, he found in this Scottish philosophy an ally against the influence of the Enlightenment, for it confirmed his emphasis on the objectivity the Christian knowledge.

Common Sense Realism is an attempt to overcome the epistemological and metaphysical skepticism of the Enlightenment. The Presbyterian professor Thomas Reid (1710-1796) criticizes the rejection of the objective reality of external objects by David Hume (1711-1776) in *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*. According to him, the human mind perceives external objects through intuitive knowledge; the real existence of both objects is intuitively known. Reid's realism is an alternative to the idealism of the Enlightenment. Reid rejected the starting point of all idealism: the concept that the objects of knowledge are "ideas." Idealism ultimately is unable to prove the existence of anything outside the mind. "Ideas seem to have something in their nature unfriendly to other existences."²⁴⁰ The common method for finding truth is not deductive via hypotheses, but by accurate observation. This inductive method implies that our sensual perception is trustworthy. Though our senses can mislead us, yet we must trust that our subjective perception of an object means that the object really exists. If we see a tree, this means there is a tree, though it is possible to see a tree that does not exist. It is one of the principles of human knowledge that we normally can trust our senses.

Common Sense Realism is based on the principle that the human mind is always essentially the same. Warfield found this principle consistent with Christian theology: "all minds are of the same essential structure."²⁴¹ "There is, after all, but one "mind" to be considered, and this is the human mind; and the human mind is fundamentally much the same in modern times as it has always been, and is accessible to much the same rational and emotional appeal."²⁴² Common Sense Realism accepts the importance of the *principia* of science. In the philosophy of Reid all true knowledge is based on these first principles. The principles themselves cannot and need not to be proved. "All knowledge and all science must be built upon principles that are self-evident; and of such principles every man who has common sense is a competent judge."²⁴³ These principles constitute the axioms of a science. "There are, therefore, common principles, which are the foundation of all reasoning and all science. Such common principles

²³⁹ S.E. Ahlstrom, 'The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,' *Church History* 24 (1955), 257-272.

²⁴⁰ T. Reid, *The works of Thomas Reid*, 6th ed., ed. W. Hamilton, Edinburgh [etc.] 1863, 109.

²⁴¹ Warfield, 'Introduction to Francis R. Beattie's *Apologetics*,' 103. C. Van Til criticized this as a weak spot in Princeton's theology. Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, 229-30.

²⁴² B.B. Warfield, 'Review of J. Denney, *The Atonement and the Modern Mind*' (1904), in Warfield, *Works* 10, 102-105, 103.

²⁴³ Reid, Hamilton, *Works of Thomas Reid*, 422.

seldom admit of direct proof, nor do they need it.”²⁴⁴ Reid uses the term αὐτόπιστος to define the meaning of the axiom. Axioms are self-evident, which means that their truth is known immediately, without being deduced from any antecedent truth. They are self-evident propositions (πρότασεις αὐτοπίσται) worthy of universal credence or deserving credit on their own authority.²⁴⁵

Warfield has been accused of a rationalistic approach to the authority of Scripture.²⁴⁶ For example Warfield ends the article on ‘Inspiration’ written together with A.A. Hodge with an almost triumphant remark. “Gnosis gives place to epignosis, faith to rational conviction, and we rest in the joyful and unshaken certainty that we possess a Bible written by the hands of men indeed, but also graven with the finger of God.”²⁴⁷ Warfield would make a difference between rational and rationalistic. From Warfield’s perspective faith is rational because it is in accordance with illuminated reason. Rationalism, on the contrary, is naturalistic because it denies the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit. The tension that we have discovered in Reformed orthodoxy between the appreciation of reason as an elicitive principle of faith and the depreciation of reason as a potential instrument of human hubris carries over into Warfield’s theology.

Some nuances, however, may not be forgotten. Warfield inherited his scholarly method and his emphasis on the objective facts from his predecessors at Princeton. In his ‘Introduction’ to his *Systematic Theology* Charles Hodge defended the “inductive method” as the right method of science, giving three general assumptions. The scientist assumed the trustworthiness of his sense perceptions, he assumed the trustworthiness of his mental operations, and, finally, he relied on the certainty of the truths given in the constitution of our nature.²⁴⁸ Once the philosophical ground was laid, the scientist continued to gather and combine facts and from these facts he deduced the laws by which they were determined, Hodge illustrated this with the Newtonian law of gravity and applied the inductive method to theology. “The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his store-house of facts.”²⁴⁹ The three assumptions

²⁴⁴ Reid, Hamilton, *Works of Thomas Reid*, 230. Cf. K. Lehrer, *Thomas Reid: The Arguments of the Philosophers*, London 1991, 87. On the first principles cf. Riddlebarger, ‘The Lion of Princeton,’ 27

²⁴⁵ Reid, Hamilton, *Works of Thomas Reid*, 746. Reid refers to Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, to the commentaries on Aristotle by Themistius and Philoponus and to Proclus’ commentary on Euclid. Cf. K. Lehrer, *Thomas Reid*, 113.

²⁴⁶ A.E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism*, Leicester 1996, 58. C.R. Trueman criticizes McGrath. C.R. Trueman, ‘Review of A.E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth*,’ *Westminster Theological Journal* 59 (1997), 135-136. Trueman shows that McGrath depends on K.R. Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration: A Review and Proposal*, New York, 1987. Trembath again depends on Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*. Trueman rightly complains that the reproach of rationalism is due to inaccurate reading of primary texts and a neglect of the context. The accusation is much older; cf. W. Livingstone, ‘The Princeton Apologetic as Exemplified by the Work of Benjamin B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen: A Study in American Theology, 1880-1930’ [Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University], 1948, 186.

²⁴⁷ Hodge and Warfield, *Inspiration*, 71.

²⁴⁸ Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1, 9.

²⁴⁹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1, 10. This often quoted sentence must not be stretched too far in the sense that Scripture is only a collection of *loci probantia*. Hodge does not mean that the

for science in general also applied to theology. It is tempting to push and pull the “facts” of Scripture by exegesis until they fit into our own system. The theological system must always depend on a careful and honest exegesis of the text. “It is the fundamental principle of all sciences, and of theology among the rest, that theory is to be determined by facts, and not facts by theory.”²⁵⁰

Moreover, Warfield strongly opposed a rationalism that denied the supernatural character of Christianity and left no room for miracles in general and for the miracle of revelation in particular. He opposed this rationalism in a “rationalistic” way, showing that it was not unreasonable to subject our reason to the authority of God. Warfield’s rationalism was a defense of the Christian faith against subjectivism. It was mainly in his rejection of mysticism that he underlined the rational character of the authority of Scripture. Faith did not have a subjective basis, but an objective foundation in the revelation of God.

Finally, Warfield’s philosophy of science, the matching inductive method, and the objective epistemology were generally accepted in his scholarly context. With his emphasis on right reason he stated the Christian faith in terms of modern thought.

No one will doubt that Christians of today must state their Christian beliefs in terms of modern thought. Every age has a language of its own and can speak no other. Mischief comes only when, instead of stating Christian belief in terms of modern thought, an effort is made, rather, to state modern thought in terms of Christian belief.²⁵¹

Warfield’s “rationalistic” statements may not diminish the fact that Warfield insisted on the necessity of the new birth; our natural blindness could only be taken away by the saving work of the Spirit. For Warfield the subjective side of the faith occupied a less prominent place than for his predecessors.²⁵² Still he found that apologetics were of no consequence without the Spirit of God, for only the renewed soul had the capacity to recognize the truth. Truth was not meant for the head, but for the heart. Warfield said to his students: “And the doctrines – need I beg you to consider these doctrines not as so many propositions to be analyzed by your logical understanding, but as rather so many precious truths revealing to you your God and God’s modes of dealing with sinful man?”²⁵³ Therefore the influence of Common Sense Realism on the Princeton theologians in general and on Warfield in particular must not be exaggerated. It was balanced by a stress on religious experience and a commitment to Reformed confessional theology.²⁵⁴

Bible is a store-house of isolated truths, but that Scripture is the source and object of theology, just as nature of natural science. “The true method of theology is, therefore, the inductive, which assumes that the Bible contains all the facts or truths which form the contents of theology, just as the facts of nature are the contents of the natural sciences.” Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1, 17.

²⁵⁰ Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1, 14.

²⁵¹ B.B. Warfield, ‘Review of B.H. Streeter, R. Brook (et al.) *Foundations: A Statement of Christian Belief in Terms of Modern Thought, by Seven Oxford Men*’ (1913), in Warfield, *Works* 10, 320-334, 322.

²⁵² Noll, *Princeton Theology*, 242.

²⁵³ B.B. Warfield, ‘Spiritual Culture in the Seminary’ (1904), in Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2, 468-496, 479.

²⁵⁴ Noll, *Princeton Theology*, 31. Cf. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: Majestic Testimony*, 414.

5.6 Conclusions and Theological Considerations

Our main question for this chapter was how Warfield as a Reformed theologian responded to the results of modern science and to the historical-critical approach to Scripture and how his concept of the authority of Scripture was influenced by these new challenges. We have focused on the *autopistia* of Scripture and on the question where Warfield found the ultimate certainty of the authority of Scripture. Five aspects of his theology beg for further theological consideration:

1. Warfield approaches Scripture in a critical way. For him “criticism” is a general term for the scholarly study of the Scriptures, regardless of one’s opinions on inspiration. As a New Testament scholar he advocates textual criticism as a means to rediscover the autographic text. For the determination of the canon he refuses to draw back on the testimony of the Spirit, but chooses the apostolic origin of the New Testament writings as the foundation of their canonicity and is willing to prove this apostolic origin along historical-critical lines. The canonicity of the books can only be accepted if their apostolic origin is proved and it is circular reasoning to assume the apostolicity because of their canonicity. Warfield makes a distinction between honest unprejudiced criticism and what he calls “biblioclastic” criticism. The Scriptures claim to be the Word of God and “true criticism” leads to the conclusion that this claim is correct.

Warfield does not allow critical results that contradict this claim and continually lays the burden of proof with his opponents. This defensive attitude reveals a weakness in his position. In principle his approach is neutral, but in fact the conclusion of apostolic authorship is fixed from the beginning. Warfield exposes the prejudices of others, but his own “honest criticism” can also be classified as biased. Warfield refuses to draw back in isolation and trusts that modern methods do not harm the authority of Scripture. Warfield admits that his acceptance of the New Testament canon is based on the probability that the claim of these books regarding their apostolic origin is true. The largest “bulk of evidence” cannot render the canonicity of Scripture absolutely certain. There is an intrinsic tension in this position, for Warfield tries to safeguard the objective authority of Scripture and the certainty of the Christian faith by means that principally cannot lead to that certainty.

Warfield’s struggle with historical criticism leads to the question how Reformed theology today has to deal with the results of historical-critical research and if this research is compatible with the confession of the *autopistia* of Scripture. Two extremes must be avoided; a rejection of historical-critical research leads to isolation and is not congruent with the scholarly attitude that characterizes Reformed theology. On the other hand, an uncritical acceptance of historical-criticism makes the understanding of Scripture depend on the changing results of academic theology. Reformed theology should intent to approach Scripture with an honest criticism that accepts the authority of Scripture without sacrificing the intellect.

2. Warfield surprisingly stresses the role of the church for the acceptance of the authority of Scripture. The establishment of the canon is one thing, but the acceptance of this canon as the Word of God is another. This acceptance primarily rests on the claim of Scripture that it is inspired; the canonicity of the apostolic books can and must be proved by honest criticism, but for the acceptance of this canon as the authoritative Word of God the witness of the church of all ages is of immense importance. The canon

has been passed down to us through the church. Christ gave his apostles the command to teach the church with authority and the early church accepted the authority of their writings. Unless the apostolic claim of the books is proved to be false, their authority stands. The canon has been accepted by the church of all ages and the doctrine of verbal inspiration is the doctrine of the church of all ages. In the authority of the church of all ages Warfield finds an ally against the subjectivism of the rationalistic and mystical views of Scripture in which Scripture is either subjected to reason or to the inner light; both of these views are naturalistic and reject the supernatural revelation of God.

We should not stretch this point too far as if the authority of Scripture depends on the church. His appeal to the *consensus* of the church is not an appeal to tradition, but to the church as a means of grace. The church is not the ground of the authority of Scripture, but it is an essential guidepost to find the authority of Scripture. As a mother the church teaches us to trust the Scriptures.

In our theological appreciation of the *autopistia* of Scripture we will have to take the pedagogical role of the church seriously. At this point Warfield stands close to Calvin. The *autopistia* of Scripture was introduced into Reformed theology to counterbalance the authority of the church. In Warfield's context the danger of subjectivism does not lie in an emphasis on the church, but in the individualistic and subjectivistic approach to the authority of Scripture. A revaluation of the church as mother may also be helpful for the authority of Scripture in a postmodern context.

3. The relationship between inspiration and infallibility draws our attention. Warfield adheres to the infallibility of Scripture for the historical reason that this has been the faith of all ages, for the doctrinal reason that inspiration implies infallibility, and for the polemical reason that it is unnecessary to give this position up unless errors can be proved. Warfield does not allow errors in the autographs of Scripture, because this undermines its authority. He prefers the term infallibility to inerrancy, although he does not avoid the second term altogether. His appeal to the autographs is not a cheap retreat to uncontrollable sources, but a reference to Scripture as it has been originally inspired. According to Warfield, the autographic text can be reconstructed through textual criticism, but it has not infallibly been handed down to us via the copies. Warfield's concept of inspiration can be summarized in the word *concursus*. God is not only involved in the final act of writing, but also in the process of the character-building of the writers and the historical research behind their work. He both tunes the organ and plays the music.

Theologically Warfield's concept leads to the question how the relationship between the human and divine sides of Scripture must be formulated and if infallibility is an essential characteristic of Scripture in Reformed theology.

4. Warfield accepts the results of modern science in an open attitude towards the newer views of the antiquity of the world, and the evolutionary development of life, including the human race. He rejects evolution if it excludes divine intervention but maintains that there can be no contradiction between scientific facts and the exegesis of Genesis. Warfield searches for the harmony between science and faith and does not accept a dichotomy of scientific truth and revealed truth. The hand of God in his creation does not contradict the mouth of God in Scripture. The proven results of science therefore may be taken into account in exegesis.

On the other hand, Warfield also criticizes the supposed neutrality of science, because every science is based on presuppositions. Science that excludes supernatural intervention is biased and does violence to the facts. This applies to biblical criticism as well as to natural history. Warfield is sharply aware of the role of presuppositions in science long before this becomes a common insight in the theory of science.

Warfield's attitude leads to the theological question how the results of contemporary science influence the concept of the authority of Scripture. In modernity there has been a growing tension between science and faith, and the later fundamentalists have either accepted the dichotomy or drawn back in isolation. Postmodern theories of science possibly leave more room for the acceptance of the authority of Scripture, because they acknowledge, with Warfield, that science is principally based on the presuppositions of the ruling paradigm. It is not our intention to discuss the theological implications of these theories of science, but it is an intriguing question whether they allow theology to take the *autopistia* of Scripture as a presupposition. Taking the authority of Scripture as a starting point is not less scholarly than reducing theology to a descriptive science of religions, which refuses to deal with the truth-claim of Christianity and other religions.

5. Warfield interprets Calvin along the lines of the subject-object scheme and defines the *testimonium* as a subjective operation on the soul by which it is opened for the objective revelation of God. Warfield seems to stand close to the Genevan reformer when he explains the *testimonium* as an instinctive, immediate, and inward action of the Holy Spirit; but when he insists on the importance of the *indicia* for the *testimonium* and says that the Spirit testifies through the *indicia*, Warfield unites what Calvin separated: the evidences and the *testimonium*.

Warfield's difficulty with the term *αὐτόπιστος* shows where he differs from Calvin and the Reformed orthodox. The *autopistia* is not a confessional statement of the authority of Scripture or a logical necessity, but a demonstrable attribute of Scripture. For Calvin *autopistia* and demonstration exclude each other, for the Reformed orthodox the *autopistia* of Scripture was a logical necessity, but for Warfield the authority of Scripture must be proved logically, because faith in the authority of Scripture must be in accord with the highest reason. This emphasis on *indicia* and evidences is due to his rejection of the liberal interpretation of the *testimonium* as a subjective and personal religious experience, in which the basis of trust shifts from Scripture to subjective experience.

It is not necessary to repeat the general theological question regarding the relationship between the *testimonium* and the *autopistia* of Scripture here, but Warfield's rejection of the *testimonium* as a basis for the canon shows that the subject-object split makes this relationship more complicated. Warfield's interpretation of Calvin leads to the question whether the *testimonium* can still function as the ultimate ground of faith. The subject-object dichotomy seems to make a final appeal to the *testimonium* of the Spirit for the authority of Scripture and the certainty of the Christian faith subjectivistic. As we will see, Bavinck's interpretation of Calvin leads to the same question in a different way.