

# **Faith and Reason in The Classical Apologetics of Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin and John Owen**

Now Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.  
(Heb. 11:1)

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts .WCF 1:5

## Introduction

Passion: men are passionate about many things; for are we not creatures of passion? Men have been passionate about life, about war, about sports, about race, about politics, to name but a few things. Yet passion, when married to theology, has produced many great movements, ideas, denominations, and practices--all for good or for ill. Apologetics has, no less than any other subject matter, been subjected to passion. Men of passion have claimed much regarding their particular apologetic perspectives. And passionate apologists have all too often claimed that their position is the correct position not only in terms of its imaging of Scripture but also in its imaging a given historical tradition.

In the early 1980s, John Gerstner, R.C. Sproul, and Arthur Lindsley published a book which was undeniably very passionate about its claims. The book was entitled *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics*.<sup>1</sup> These three men claimed to be restoring and defending the *classical* and *rational* mode of apologetics, a mode which has been handed down to us from our Reformed and Evangelical forefathers, from men such as, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, to William Paley, Samuel Clark, B.B. Warfield and the Princeton men who went before Warfield, and many others. These writers assume that the apologetic model they delineate is the same as that taught uniformly by all these men. What is more, they say this in the light of their direct repudiation of the presuppositional school of apologetics as taught by other passionate men, such as Cornelius Van Til, Greg Bahnsen, and John Frame.

Which is right? Who is right? Which apologetic school has that claim to historical verity? Which one? That is the question this paper will seek to address. It's aim is to present an introductory discussion detailing the historical position of three men: Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and John Owen. This paper will lay out some of their basic ideas, and compare these ideas with the apologetic model presented by Sproul, Gerstner and Lindsley (for ease of citation, I will henceforth refer to these three as SGL).

What I want to show in this paper is that both the persuppositional and classical apologetic traditions have continuities with the traditional Augustinian apologetic model. Let me first state my thesis provocatively and then explain it briefly. If I said, "Thomas Aquinas was a presuppositionalist" I am sure many would strongly object. They would strongly object because they are reading Thomas in the light of 17th Century Rationalism, and 18th Century Enlightenment epistemologies. That epistemology is the rationale of foundationalism. Strong claims, I realise. What is foundationalism? Foundationalism entails at least two things. It entails, firstly, the claim that all beliefs must be proportionate to the evidence,<sup>2</sup> and secondly, that all beliefs, in order to be rational, must be grounded finally upon foundational beliefs that are incorrigible.

Ronald Nash gives us a good working definition and explication of foundationalism:

Foundationalism is a particular model or picture of human knowledge. It is one of several ways of looking at such related topics as belief, rationality, and justification. The key analogy in the foundationalist picture of knowledge is a structure of such as a building where various upper levels or stories are supported by lower stories. The entire structure is supported by a set of beliefs that serves as the foundation of the entire superstructure....

According to foundationalism, then, noetic structures should be thought of as hierarchies in which every belief is either basic or derivative (non-basic). Derivative beliefs are those that are grounded on or dependent in some way on more basic beliefs. Basic beliefs are those not derived from or dependent upon other beliefs. In order for a belief to be rational, it must either be a basic belief or be justified by its relation to a basic belief.

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<sup>1</sup>R.C., Sproul (*et al*), *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1982).

<sup>2</sup>This claim alone is not objectionable as it is also a foundational objection men like Aquinas, Calvin and Owen made against probabilistic arguments as a ground for faith.

Every noetic structure contains such basic beliefs that are not derived from or dependent on other beliefs. These beliefs can be said to make up the *foundation* of that particular noetic structure.<sup>3</sup>

Foundationalism as an epistemological rationale arose in the early 17th century. The undeniable father of foundationalism is Rene Descartes. It was his desire to establish the necessary epistemic connection between internal thought and external reality. It may be said that since his time, philosophical endeavour has simply been about taking up where he left off (and failed) seeking to establish such a necessary connection between thought and reality. The impact of foundationalist thinking has been profound. It was the warp and woof of Anglo-American empiricist philosophy.

Where does this lead us in terms of *classical apologetics*? I will argue that the apologetic model of SGL is an expression of a foundationalist epistemology which has little to no continuity with men like Aquinas, Calvin and Owen. I say “little to no continuity” cautiously and yet provocatively. I grant that in many ways the apologetic model of SGL has continuities with Aquinas, Calvin and Owen, but I would argue that has more to do with the content of the faith defended, not so much with the central method and rationale of that defence. The issue for Aquinas, Calvin and Owen comes to this: what is the relationship between faith and reason? What is the proper ground of one’s faith? Is it an extra Biblical proposition, proposed as proof or argument, deductive or inductive, that God exists, for example? Is it God’s own self-verifying testimony through and in his written word? For Aquinas, Calvin and Owen, it can only be the latter. They all argue that the ground of one’s faith is the authority of God, and that alone. Never can the ground of one’s faith be externally derived proofs or arguments. However, these arguments have value, not to ground my faith, but only to either confirm my faith, that is, shore it up, in other words, or to rebut objections that may be posed by unbelievers. They are arguments which, when the human mind considers without bias, obligate assent and render the person culpable for any rejection of God. They can supply true knowledge that God exists but they can never form the basis of belief in God or belief in the word of God as divinely inspired and authentic. What this means is that these three men would have rejected foundationalism completely and without hesitation. For them, faith is grounded on the self-attesting revelation of God in the word of God. For these men, the idea that we must establish foundational truths, which are by definition extra-Biblical, upon which we derive a hierarchy of beliefs which finally communicate to us a certain and undeniable belief in God and in the word of God as inspired and authentic would have been rejected without hesitation. But this is the very model proposed to us by the modern day classical apologists, such as SGL, and even the earlier 19th century, or turn-of-the-century theologians such as Dabney and Warfield (to name but a few).

I have indeed laboured these introductory remarks purposefully because of the very nature of this topic and of my own argument. My aim here is to paint a clear picture of the underlying issues in order to make crisp the contrasts I want to make in the body of this paper. What are the issues and what will be my method? As I read Aquinas, Calvin, and Owen, there are dominant thematic continuities in their writings. Two of them I want to address. These two themes interpenetrate each other. They are like threads in a fabric and I want to unravel these two threads in order to explicate their position in the light of the modern apologetic model as presented to us by SGL and others. These two themes are, one, the definition of knowledge, as distinct from opinion and faith, and two, the proper foundation of faith. I will argue that given these two elements in the theology of Aquinas, Calvin and Owen, that what we nowadays call presuppositionalism has a greater degree of continuity with the true classical model of apologetics than does the method we presently call classical apologetics. My structure will be as follows. I will first make it clear what SGL teach, for there is some confusion in regard to this. I have encountered classical apologists who have denied that they are operating with a foundationalist epistemic grid. Then I will present an introductory outline of Aquinas’ understanding of knowledge, faith and opinion, in relationship to the true and proper ground of faith. Then I will present Calvin’s understanding of the true and proper ground of faith. After this I will interact with B.B. Warfield, demonstrating that his interpretation of Calvin at this point is in error. Then I will present the method of John Owen who, I would argue, is the most explicit and cogent of the three in this regard. Then I will close with some summary historical comments.

At the outset, let me acknowledge some major weaknesses of this paper. Due to self-imposed parameters, this paper does not intend to supply any detailed explication of natural theology, as taught by Aquinas, Calvin and Owen. It is clear

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<sup>3</sup>Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1988), p., 80. [Emph., Nash.]

that in the making of books on the knowledge of God in Calvin's thought there is no end. Given the restrictions upon this paper it would be impossible to detail Aquinas', Calvin's, and Owen's natural theology. Here I will present only summaries and certain concessions. It is hoped that in what is positively presented, a sounder grid by which we can judge the natural theology of Aquinas, Calvin and Owen will be made explicit. The concession is that in terms of natural theology, the modern day classical apologist may have the greater degree of continuity with these three men than does the modern day presuppositionalist. The paper will return to this point as it progresses. Furthermore, it must be remembered that this paper will not be an exhaustive explication of Aquinas', Calvin's and Owen's theology in regard to the topic at hand. Furthermore, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the masses of amount discussion of these topics as located in the masses of secondary sources; admittedly this is a drawback. Rather, my aim here is primarily explicate the primary sources. Finally, I want to note that this paper labours with extensive quotations because it wants to present a documentary history of the issues and arguments. It is hoped that by setting side by side the various quotations and arguments, the issues will become self-evident.

### *Rational Apologetics.*

Today there are many books available that seek to demonstrate that faith in God is *rational*. By rational they mean, as opposed to *fideistic*<sup>4</sup>. By rational, they mean, grounded, objective, not dependent ultimately upon prior theistic precommitments. By fideism, they mean the opposite of this. Take for example this defective definition by Netland. First he cites Lesslie Newbigen as saying:

The framework which I devise or discern is my ultimate commitment or else it cannot function in the way intended. As such a commitment, it must defend its own claim to truth over against other claims to truth... At the risk of wearisome reiteration I must repeat the simple truth that no standpoint is available to any man except the point where he stands; that there is no platform from which one can claim to have an "objective" view which supersedes all the "subjective" faith-commitments of the world's faiths; that every man must take his stand in the arena, on the same level with every other, and there engage in the real encounter of ultimate commitment with those, who like him, have staked their lives on their source of vision of the truth... Jesus is for the believer the source from which whom his understanding of the totality of experience is drawn and therefore the criterion by which other ways of understanding are judged.

Then Netland adds his own summary:

Newbigen's statements occur in the context of discussion of broader missiological issues and perhaps should not be pressed for epistemological significance, but they illustrate graphically the epistemological bankruptcy of fideism: If indeed each of our worldviews reduces to one or more "faith-commitments" or presuppositions, and if there is no "objective" perspective, no neutral criterion, from which to evaluate other competing worldviews, then surely all talk of "truth: in reality calls for a radical reinterpretation. Furthermore, given Newbigen's premises it is difficult to see how he can, in the same paragraph in which he rejects the possibility of neutral criteria and objective perspectives, advocate defence of the Christian truth claim over against other claims to truth and assert that Jesus is the "criterion by which other ways of understanding are judged." After all, why Jesus and not Buddha?<sup>5</sup>

Immediately before this, Netland states that he uses the terms fideism and presuppositionalism interchangeably.<sup>6</sup> In this way, fideism is seen as the rejection of any claims to objectivity and the surrender to an ultimate relativism. To avoid relativism, one must secure common ground which is justified apart from recourse to theistic precommitments. However,

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<sup>4</sup>What is fideism? How is it defined? It is defined in so many ways. For many today it is a shibboleth, which is cried up and down the philosophical landscape to scare away reasonable men.

<sup>5</sup>Harold A. Netland, *Apologetics, Worldviews, and the Problem of Neutral Criteria*, in *Trinity Journal*, 12 (1991), pp., 44-45. It seems to me that Netland is engaging in a simple "stacking of the deck" fallacy. C.f. SGL, p., 247 for similar claims regarding bias and relativism.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p., 44.

Netland's definition is defective, for it is doubtful that fideism must be defined in such a limited manner. Moderate fideists, and others who are opposed to a foundationalist ground for faith, are not advocating relativism, or the loss of criteria to judge between disparate truth claims, or that faith was without, completely, objective arguments. What is denied, as will be shown, is that these objective arguments can never be the true and proper ground of faith. Historically this form of fideism has been labelled *moderate fideism*, as taught by Augustine and others.

SGL also state regarding fideism, that it is:

...the *leap of faith* syndrome which *refuses* to ground faith in any *rational* proof or evidence. Not only is rational evidence unnecessary to the fideist, it is undesirable as well, signaling a kind of intrusion of pagan categories of thought into the pristine purity of faith.<sup>7</sup>

SGL argue, in this light, that Scripture alone cannot ground itself:

The bible is not proven to be the Word of God because it says so and the Spirit is not known to be the Spirit of God because he is said to say so. This first point--that we know the Bible is the Word of God because it says so-- has a glaring weakness as an argument. The argument would seem to take two forms. First the *Bible* is the Word of God because it, the Bible, says that it is the Word of God. Not *any* book that says it is the Word of God is the Word of God, but this particular book. Suppose we ask, "why is that true only of *this* book?" One cannot simply answer, "Because." There must be some reason. But whatever reason is given is fatal to the case, because then one is not believing the Bible is the Word of God because it says so but for some *other* reason.<sup>8</sup>

SGL go on to state that they do not deny that the Bible has any evidential power within itself. They acknowledge the abundant evidential value of "its majesty of style, the heavenliness of its content, its marvelous inner coherency, and detailed consistency, its symmetrical pattern of truth and so on." These, note SGL, are all "indicators or evidence (*indicia*) of its lofty claims for itself."<sup>9</sup> Yet they are keen to stress, however, what they are arguing is: "that the Biblical claim is an insufficient argument for its own inspiration. The claim must be vindicated, not merely presupposed to be true."<sup>10</sup>

What is more, what these men say here is in line with earlier 19th century American Reformed theology. For example, Dabney makes the point in a manner that strikes home his claims:

The claim which the Scriptures address to us, to be the one authentic and authoritative revelation from God, is addressed to our reason. This is clear from the simple fact, that there are presented to the human race more than one professed revelation; and that they cannot be authoritative witnesses to their own authority prior to its admission. It appears also from this, that man is required not only to obey but to believe and love the Bible. Now he cannot do this except upon evidence. The evidences of inspiration must, therefore, present themselves to man's reason; to reason to be employed impartially, humbly, and in the fear of God. He who says he believes, when he sees no proof, is but pretending or talking without meaning.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in the apologetic enterprise, its mission is to discover objective rational ground which does not depend upon any faith precommitments. From this need for objectivity flows the need to establish a common ground. SGL seek to define this "common ground":

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<sup>7</sup>SGL, p., 34. [Emph., mine.] Note the sting in their words.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p., 139.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. P., 140.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>R.L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1972), p., 141.

Dabney's claims are striking in the light of the overwhelming testimony of the early Reformed regarding the word of God's autopoietic nature.

The question of common ground, a place where believer and unbeliever can stand on equal terms and engage in meaningful discourse, is a controversial and complex one. If we consider common ground to mean a common perception and perspective of reality, then obviously no such common ground for discussion exists between believer and unbeliever. From the believer's vantage point every aspect of life, every bit of experience, every dimension of reality, is understood and interpreted from a theological perspective.<sup>12</sup>

At first glance this definition is perplexing. It becomes apparent that what they appear to mean is that there is foundational commonality between the believer's and unbeliever's knowledge. For they say, "The believer looks at a flower and knows that it is a daffodil as simply and accurately as an unbeliever identifies that flower as a daffodil. It would appear that both enjoy a univocal understanding of the daffodil."<sup>13</sup>

They then note that for the believer, however, the flower is perceived and known in terms of a wider theological conception of God and this created order. Whereas, antithetically, the unbeliever sees the flower and interprets it in the light of an opposing atheological conception of reality. And yet, SGL note:

From a different perspective, however, there is a common ground, namely the whole of creation. Believer and unbeliever live in the same universe. Each sees the same phenomena. The unbeliever and the believer can agree that two and two are four, and that certain principles of deduction are valid while others are invalid. Thus a kind of common ground is established.<sup>14</sup>

Having assumed the validity of this sort of foundational commonality, they then seek to delineate a set of 'first principles' which form the foundation of faith. These first principles are: The validity of the law of non-contradiction; The validity of the law of causation; and, The basic reliability of sense perception.<sup>15</sup> These first principles are the "building blocks" of their natural theology<sup>16</sup> on which God's existence is established. The logic works like this: These first principles are seen as self-attesting, and which enable the establishment of a sound natural theology, via such arguments as the cosmological argument, the ontological argument and the teleological argument.<sup>17</sup> These "proofs" prove, deductively and inductively, the existence of a *unitary*<sup>18</sup> God, who is both *personal* and *creative*, to the exclusion of any other theistic alternatives (e.g. Polytheism). This God then validates and grounds miracles. And here is an important step to note and which I want to stress.

Regarding miracles, SGL make the following important statement:

Natural theology shows that there is a God. If there is a God, miracles are possible. If a God exists who created the world and operates it, there can be no doubting that he can modify his *modus operandi*. On the other hand, if we did not know that there is a God, we would have to step into an irrational view of the operation of nature by chance. Miracles, if they could be defined, would have no significance in such a framework. They would be chance occurrences, as everything else would be, and could prove nothing but a chance occurrence among chance occurrences.

John W. Montgomery does not seem to understand this, for he writes, "we may properly infer his [Christ's] deity from his resurrection." What Montgomery is saying here is that, since Christ conquered death by his resurrection and gives us the gift of eternal life, "no more worthy candidate for deity is in principle imaginable

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<sup>12</sup>SGL, p., 70.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p., 71.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p., 72.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p., 90.

<sup>17</sup>As noted in my introduction, it is not my intention to detail natural theology, either in terms of the teaching of Aquinas, Calvin, Owen or in terms of SGL's apologetics. I will assume a basic understanding of this from the reader.

<sup>18</sup>By this I do not mean unitarian.

than the one who conquers death on mankind's behalf." Montgomery says that Christ's own explanation of his own resurrection was, "he rose because he is God." According to Montgomery, miracles prove, first, the existence of God, and, second, the existence of Jesus Christ, as God. We have already shown, however, that miracles cannot prove God. God, as a matter of fact, alone can prove miracles. That is, only on the prior evidence that God exists is a miracle even possible.<sup>19</sup>

SGL then note that Montgomery errs when he concedes: "Granted the proof will never reach 100%, (faith will have to jump the gap, from plausibility to certainty)..."<sup>20</sup> SGL note that probability is not a problem in and of itself, for even probability *requires* belief.<sup>21</sup> They deny that probability only makes belief possible, but that it also makes it obligatory.

Now we are in a position to bring all this together in terms of what SGL are building up to. Having established God's existence and the actuality or possibility of miracles, in linear fashion they outline 6 steps:

- (1), It is virtually granted that the Bible (not assumed to be inspired) contains generally reliable history.
- (2), The Bible records miracles as part of its generally reliable history.
- (3), These miracles authenticate the Bible's messengers and their message.
- (4), Therefore, the Bible message ought to be received as divine.
- (5), The Bible message includes the doctrine of its own inspiration.
- (6), Therefore, the Bible is more than a generally reliable record. It is a divinely inspired record.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>SGL, p., 146. I want to note at this point that there is a little problem in the logic here. How is it known with certainty that an alleged miracle worker is really from God, and not from, say, the devil? After all, even the Bible apparently acknowledges demonic miracles on occasion. Here the recourse of SGL is telling. The substance of their response to this is to very problematically argue that the Bible says that such demonic miracles are impossible. They assert this upon the theological grounds of the Bible; cf pp., 156-161. They assert that all that the devil can do is to perform tricks. Yet, how does one discern between trickery and miracle? And how this is not question begging and circular escapes me. For they must equally establish the impossibility of alternative sources of miracles upon neutral and objective grounds, else they have not established the objective certainty that Christ's miracles have their source in God, and God alone. If I am standing before a man who allegedly performs miracles, I even see what looks to be miraculous, how can I know, with the type of objectivity SGL claim can only make my faith rational, that this man is from God, indeed, the God of the Bible? I can't appeal to the Bible and then *a priori* preclude the possibility any other source for miracles. SGL want to respond to this by suggesting that I can compare this miracle worker's claims with previously authenticated claims of previous miracle workers. And if so subsequent claimants are in line with earlier than I can be assured. But that also depends upon the assumption of the impossibility of alternative sources of miracles. Yet also, Hume's critique of induction must punch away at SGL's logic. For what of the very first miracle proposed to man? If I were that man, or if I was confronted with the very first man who purported to be from God, how could I objectively know he was truly from God? If SGL are right, then faith does not even get to first base, and never was rationally justified. What is more, what of the claims of prophets who never performed a miracle? Am I still obligated to heed their message? On what objective grounds would I be rational for doing so, and culpable for not doing so?

One other point should be noted. Speaking of the witch of Endor, SGL's precommitment to their self-confessed rationalist *a priori* commits them to even suggesting: "We admit, however, that we cannot *prove* this narrative to be merely phenomenological and that, though strictly forbidden by God as an abominable art, is a possible natural art not necessitating miraculous power." Yet Biblically speaking, that is not an option. It is clear that even the witch herself was terrified at the rising of Samuel. She herself was shocked by what she saw. Therefore, we are warranted to conclude that if this was Samuel, he was manifested by the power of God, not that necromancy is a natural art.

<sup>20</sup>Cited by SGL, p., 148.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p., 141.

Now we are in a position to bring all this together. For SGL and the classical apologists before them the logic is clear. The word of God alone cannot be allowed to be self-attesting, in that it cannot ground its own authority. Rather, it needs to be grounded in something external to it. For this is the only proper way to articulate a *rational* basis for faith, and it is the only way to avoid *irrationalism*. These external grounds are called the first principles of the laws of thought. These first principles are self-attesting and auto-veridical. From these natural theology is generated. Natural theology then establishes that God exists, who in turn grounds miracles, which in turn ground the miracle worker as being from God (because of the impossibility of false miracle working). These miracle workers then ground the inspiration of the word. In short, this is a step-ladder, in which each rung of the ladder is grounded in the one below it. That is, to use more sophisticated philosophical terminology, classic theistic foundationalism. Each level either inductively or deductively grounds the level above. At no point are either Word or Spirit self-attesting, and even though there are certain *indicia* within Scripture that do have evidential value, they are not enough to properly ground faith in a rational manner. Therefore, I must but conclude that this model of apologetics is in form an expression of a foundationalism.

#### Response 1: Thomas Aquinas.

Regarding Thomas' teaching on this, there are a number of issues which are interrelated. In regard to nature and grace, one issue is: what can be known? This is a fundamental issue. For Thomas, only that which pertains to the realm of nature can properly be said to be *known*. For him, that which pertains to grace cannot properly be known. For that which pertains to grace can only be apprehended by faith, thus the *matters of faith* cannot be said to be known. The second, which flows from the first, is the question of the relationship of scientific knowledge, understanding, opinion and faith. Thomas, following Aristotle, creates a dichotomy between scientific knowledge, which establishes understanding, thus securing and producing knowledge, on the one hand, and faith, which is based solely on the authority of divine revelation, on the other hand. He then juxtaposes these against opinion. The third issue is that the sole and proper ground of faith is the revelation of God alone, not external arguments, not things that can be properly known by scientific demonstration or probable arguments. The value of these external arguments lies in their ability to confirm faith and to rebut objections. The fourth issue is the nature and role of faith and reason in relation to assurance of salvation or, stated another way, whence comes the certitude of one's salvation. What is the basis of one's faith? Is one's faith based upon reason, the things that are "known" or is it based on revelation? Hence, is it knowledge, properly speaking, or rather assent of the will, as moved by divine initiating grace?

Let me first cite Thomas' own introductory comments. Speaking of the nature and extent of sacred doctrine, he remarks:

It was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science built up by human reason. Firstly, indeed, because man is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason: "The eye hath not seen, O God, besides Thee, what things Thou hast prepared for them that wait for Thee" (Is. 66:4). But the end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation. Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors. Whereas man's whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation. It was therefore necessary that besides philosophical science built up by reason, there should be a sacred science learned through revelation.

Reply to Objection 1. Although those things which are beyond man's knowledge may not be sought for by man through his reason, nevertheless, once they are revealed by God, they must be accepted by faith. Hence the sacred text continues, "For many things are shown to thee above the understanding of man"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>ST., 1.1.1



And again:

This science [i.e., sacred doctrine] surpasses other speculative sciences; in point of greater certitude, because other sciences derive their certitude from the natural light of human reason, which can err; whereas this derives its certitude from the light of divine knowledge, which cannot be misled: in point of the higher worth of its subject-matter because this science treats chiefly of those things which by their sublimity transcend human reason; while other sciences consider only those things which are within reason's grasp... This science can in a sense depend upon the philosophical sciences, not as though it stood in need of them, but only in order to make its teaching clearer. For it accepts its principles not from other sciences, but immediately from God, by revelation. Therefore it does not depend upon other sciences as upon the higher, but makes use of them as of the lesser, and as handmaidens<sup>24</sup>

And again in magisterial language, he notes:

As other sciences do not argue in proof of their principles, but argue *from* their principles to demonstrate other truths in these sciences: so this [sacred] doctrine does not argue in proof of its principles, which are the articles of faith, but from them it goes on to prove something else; as the Apostle from the resurrection of Christ argues in proof of the general resurrection (1 Corinthians 15). However, it is to be borne in mind, in regard to the philosophical sciences, that the inferior sciences neither prove their principles nor dispute with those who deny them, but leave this to a higher science; whereas the highest of them, viz. metaphysics, can dispute with one who denies its principles, if only the opponent will make some concession; but if he concede nothing, it can have no dispute with him, though it can answer his objections. Hence Sacred Scripture, since it has no science above itself, can dispute with one who denies its principles only if the opponent admits some at least of the truths obtained through divine revelation; thus we can argue with heretics from texts in Holy Writ, and against those who deny one article of faith, we can argue from another. If our opponent believes nothing of divine revelation, there is no longer any means of proving the articles of faith by reasoning, but only of answering his objections - if he has any - against faith. Since *faith rests upon infallible truth*, and since the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated, it is clear that the arguments brought against faith cannot be demonstrations, but are difficulties that can be answered.

Reply OBJ 1: Although arguments from human reason cannot avail to prove what must be received on faith, nevertheless, this doctrine argues from articles of faith to other truths.

Reply OBJ 2: This doctrine is especially based upon arguments from authority, inasmuch as its principles are obtained by revelation: thus we ought to believe on the authority of those to whom the revelation has been made. Nor does this take away from the dignity of this doctrine, for although the argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest, yet the argument from authority based on divine revelation is the strongest. But sacred doctrine makes use even of human reason, *not, indeed, to prove faith* (for thereby the merit of faith would come to an end), but to make clear other things that are put forward in this doctrine. Since therefore grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, natural reason should minister to faith as the natural bent of the will ministers to charity. Hence the Apostle says: "Bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Hence sacred doctrine makes use also of the authority of philosophers in those questions in which they were able to know the truth by natural reason, as Paul quotes a saying of Aratus: "As some also of your own poets said: For we are also His offspring" (Acts 17:28). Nevertheless, sacred doctrine makes use of these authorities as extrinsic and probable arguments; *but properly uses the authority of the canonical Scriptures as an incontrovertible proof*, and the authority of the doctors of the Church as one that may properly be used, yet merely as probable. *For our faith rests upon the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books, and not on the revelations* (if any such there are) *made to other doctors*. Hence Augustine says (Ep. ad Hieron. xix, 1): "Only those books of Scripture which are called canonical have I learned to hold in such honor as to believe their authors have not erred in any way

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<sup>24</sup>ST., 1.1.5.

in writing them. But other authors I so read as not to deem everything in their works to be true, merely on account of their having so thought and written, whatever may have been their holiness and learning."<sup>25</sup>

Later he says that faith is in a specific sense a *first truth*:

The object of every cognitive habit includes two things: first, that which is known materially, and is the material object, so to speak, and, secondly, that whereby it is known, which is the formal aspect of the object. Thus in the science of geometry, the conclusions are what is known materially, while the formal aspect of the science is the mean of demonstration, through which the conclusions are known.

Accordingly if we consider, in faith, the formal aspect of the object, it is nothing else than the First Truth. For the faith of which we are speaking, does not assent to anything, except because it is revealed by God. Hence the mean on which faith is based is the Divine Truth. If, however, we consider materially the things to which faith assents, they include not only God, but also many other things, which, nevertheless, do not come under the assent of faith, except as bearing some relation to God, in as much as, to wit, through certain effects of the Divine operation, man is helped on his journey towards the enjoyment of God. Consequently from this point of view also the object of faith is, in a way, the First Truth, in as much as nothing comes under faith except in relation to God, even as the object of the medical art is health, for it considers nothing save in relation to health.<sup>26</sup>

Many things can be discerned from these quotations alone. Firstly, sacred doctrine for Thomas functions analogically as a first principle from which one does not argue *to*, but *from*. Secondly, we can see that for Thomas faith is grounded in and upon the revelation of God alone, not any revelation made to other doctors (teachers) nor upon natural reason. Here it is clear, for example, that the actuality of the *prime mover* as established by the Philosopher cannot form the basis of one's faith in God.

Again and again he drives this point home:

The reasons employed by holy men to prove things that are of faith, are not demonstrations; they are either persuasive arguments showing that what is proposed to our faith is not impossible, or else they are proofs drawn from the principles of faith, i.e. from the authority of Holy Writ, as Dionysius declares (Div. Nom. ii). Whatever is based on these principles is as well proved in the eyes of the faithful, as a conclusion drawn from *self-evident principles* is in the eyes of all. Hence again, theology is a science, as we stated at the outset of this work (I, 1, 2).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>ST., 1.1.8 [Emph., mine.] . One translation of this passage from the Summa reads, "Just as sciences do not argue to prove their own principles, but argue from their principles to prove other things which the sciences include, so neither does this [sacred] doctrine argue *to prove* its principles, which are articles of faith, but argues from these to prove other things..." *Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, ed and trans., by A.M., Fairweather (London: SCM Press, 1954).p., 45. [Emph., mine.] The merit of faith would be lost because Aquinas believed that if reason was the basis of faith, then faith would not be a free act, it would be a natural consent of the mind (assent). Discursive thought, or reasoning from premises to conclusions, is not the cause of the assent of faith (that is the property of the will), yet such reasoning can accompany the assent of faith; (De Veritate, XIV, A1, ad 6), cited in Norman Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1991), p., 57-58. For Thomas, it is as if assent to scientific knowledge entails an intellectual obligation. Hence this assent is not "free," not meritorious and therefore not faith. Conversely, if faith was grounded in demonstration (scientific knowledge) it is not longer faith, for faith is in this way annulled and destroyed. Centuries later, Owen would also reaffirm this very point.

<sup>26</sup>ST., 2-2ae.1.1.

<sup>27</sup>ST., 2-2ae.1.5. [Emph. mine.]

And again: "The articles of faith stand in the same relation to the doctrine of faith, as self-evident principles to a teaching based on natural reason..."<sup>28</sup>

How it is that Thomas can believe all this is because of a complex of ideas which he derived from Augustine and from classical Greek thought. For Thomas, nature and grace are realms which are epistemologically discrete. Though he holds that we can reason from effect to cause, that can only take us so far. The matters of faith are expressions of grace as they penetrate the realm of nature. Nature can never ascend to grace, alone and unaided. Furthermore, for Thomas, knowledge is carefully defined to preclude things believed by faith. At this juncture, Thomas follows Aristotle and Plato in his understanding of the distinction between knowledge and opinion.<sup>29</sup> These philosophers held that there is scientific knowledge which is demonstrable and which can be known through the senses, and then there is opinion, which is uncertain and only probable. Thomas' input into this relationship is to add to that dynamic the role of faith. For faith, says Thomas, though it is like opinion, for it is based upon authority, does obtain full certitude. For Thomas, scientific knowledge is true knowledge, or stated differently, knowledge, properly speaking. But the articles of faith are not "known" by demonstration through the senses, but are accepted and received upon the authority of God himself. Thomas concedes that, normally speaking, to argue from authority was considered the weakest form of proof. However, given that the articles of faith are based upon God himself, in this instance, our certitude exceeds that certitude obtained via scientific knowledge. Thomas:

Faith implies assent of the intellect to that which is believed. Now the intellect assents to a thing in two ways. First, through being moved to assent by its very object, which is known either by itself (as in the case of first principles, which are held by the habit of understanding), or through something else already known (as in the case of conclusions which are held by the habit of science). Secondly the intellect assents to something, not through being sufficiently moved to this assent by its proper object, but through an act of choice, whereby it turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other: and if this be accompanied by doubt or fear of the opposite side, there will be opinion, while, if there be certainty and no fear of the other side, there will be faith.

*Now those things are said to be seen which, of themselves, move the intellect or the senses to knowledge of them. Wherefore it is evident that neither faith nor opinion can be of things seen either by the senses or by the intellect.*<sup>30</sup>

And again:

All science is derived from self-evident and therefore "seen" principles; wherefore all objects of science must needs be, in a fashion, seen. Now as stated above (4), it is impossible that one and the same thing should be believed and seen by the same person. Hence it is equally impossible for one and the same thing to be an object of science and of belief for the same person. It may happen, however, that a thing which is an object of vision or science for one, is believed by another: since we hope to see some day what we now believe about the Trinity, according to 1 Cor. 13:12: "We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face": which vision the angels possess already; so that what we believe, they see. On like manner it may happen that what is an object of vision or scientific knowledge for one man, even in the state of a wayfarer, is, for another man, an object of faith, because he does not know it by nevertheless that which is proposed to be believed equally by all, is equally unknown by all as an object of science: such are the things which are of faith simply. Consequently faith and science are not about the same things.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>ST., 2-2ae.1.7.

<sup>29</sup>C.f., Dewey J. Hoytenga, Jr. *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga* (Albany, NY: 1991), pp., 1-34. Hoytenga discusses the evolution of the definition of knowledge in Plato's thinking. But eventually, it is clear that the definition articulated in the Meno, for example, became the dominant definition in later Medieval and Reformed theology.

<sup>30</sup>ST., 2-2ae.1.4. [Emph., mine.]

<sup>31</sup>Summa Theologiae, 2-2ae.1.5.

This relationship is summed up in the famous postulate “I believe in order to understand.” This postulate has been greatly misunderstood in the past. Augustine took this phrase from the Latin Vulgate translation of Isaiah 7:9, which reads: “unless you believe, you will not understand at all.” The idea which lies behind this dictum is this: What is known and apprehended by understanding and what is known and apprehended by faith are compartmentally discrete entities. As noted, like Socrates and Aristotle before him, Thomas held that understanding, which is knowledge, is demonstrably known through the senses, and is to be distinguished from opinion. Thomas:

I answer that, As stated above (I-II, 62, 4, ad 2) two of the intellectual virtues are about contingent matter, viz. prudence and art; to which faith is preferable point of certitude, by reason of its matter, since it is about eternal things, which never change, whereas the other three intellectual virtues, viz. wisdom, science {In English the corresponding 'gift' is called knowledge} and understanding, are about necessary things, as stated above (I-II, 57, 5, ad 3). But it must be observed that wisdom, science and understanding may be taken in two ways: first, as intellectual virtues, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. vi, 2,3); secondly, for the gifts of the Holy Ghost. If we consider them in the first way, we must note that certitude can be looked at in two ways. First, on the part of its cause, and thus a thing which has a more certain cause, is itself more certain. On this way faith is more certain than those three virtues, because it is founded on the Divine truth, whereas the aforesaid three virtues are based on human reason. Secondly, certitude may be considered on the part of the subject, and thus the more a man's intellect lays hold of a thing, the more certain it is. On this way, faith is less certain, because matters of faith are above the human intellect, whereas the objects of the aforesaid three virtues are not. Since, however, a thing is judged simply with regard to its cause, but relatively, with respect to a disposition on the part of the subject, it follows that faith is more certain simply, while the others are more certain relatively, i.e. for us. Likewise if these three be taken as gifts received in this present life, they are related to faith as to their principle which they presuppose: so that again, in this way, faith is more certain.<sup>32</sup>

Faith can be called knowledge, but scientific knowledge cannot be called faith:

Knowledge can have two meanings; sight or assent. When it refers to sight it is distinguished from faith. Thus, Gregory says: “things seen are the object not of faith, but of knowledge.” According to Augustine, those things “which are present to the senses or the understanding” are said to be seen. But those things said to be present to the understanding which are not beyond its capacity.

But, in so far, as there is certainty of assent, faith is knowledge, and as such can be called certain knowledge and sight. This appears in the first Epistle to the Corinthians (13:21): “We see now through a glass in a dark manner.” And this is what Augustine says” If it is not unfitting to say that we know that also which we believe, to be most certain, it follows from this that it is correct to say that we see with our minds the things which we believe, even though they are not present to our senses.<sup>33</sup>

We must now address the question that naturally comes to mind: If understanding obtained by demonstration, producing knowledge, is superior to opinion based upon authority, what is the value of faith? The answer is complex. Thomas recognized that the human mind is wounded and darkened by sin. The fall, while not annihilating the mind, darkened and diminished its powers. As he says:

It is necessary for man to accept by faith not only things which are above reason, but also those which can be known by reason: and this three motives. First, in order that man may arrive more quickly at the knowledge of Divine truth. Because the science to whose province it belongs to prove the existence of God, is the last of all to offer itself to human research, since it presupposes many other sciences: so that it would not be until late in life that man would arrive at the knowledge of God. The second reason is, in order that the knowledge of God may be more general. For many are unable to make progress in the study of science, either through dullness of

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<sup>32</sup>S.T., 2-2ae.4.8.

<sup>33</sup>*Truth*, 14,2 ad 15m, as cited in Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, & Contemporary Protestant Thought* (Washington DC: Christian University Press: 1985), p., 19.

mind, or through having a number of occupations, and temporal needs, or even through laziness in learning, all of whom would be altogether deprived of the knowledge of God, unless Divine things were brought to their knowledge under the guise of third reason is for the sake of certitude. For human reason is very deficient in things concerning God. A sign of this is that philosophers in their researches, by natural investigation, into human affairs, have fallen into many errors, and have disagreed among themselves. And consequently, in order that men might have knowledge of God, free of doubt and uncertainty, it was necessary for Divine matters to be delivered to them by way of faith, being told to them, as it were, by God Himself Who cannot lie.<sup>34</sup>

This then naturally leads us to the issue of assurance of salvation. For Thomas, faith arises as God moves the will, which in turn moves the intellect:

I answer that, As stated above (I-II, 114, 3,4), our actions are meritorious in so far as they proceed from the free-will moved with grace by God. Therefore every human act proceeding from the free-will, if it be referred to God, can be meritorious. Now the act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God, so that it is subject to the free-will in relation to God; and consequently the act of faith can be meritorious.<sup>35</sup>

Thomas, in this same section, goes on to elaborate some important distinctions:

Two things may be considered in science: namely the scientist's assent to a scientific fact and his consideration of that fact. Now the assent of science is not subject to free-will, because the scientist is obliged to assent by force of the demonstration, wherefore scientific assent is not meritorious. But the actual consideration of what a man knows scientifically is subject to his free-will, for it is in his power to consider or not to consider. Hence scientific consideration may be meritorious if it be referred to the end of charity, i.e. to the honor of God or the good of our neighbor. On the other hand, in the case of faith, both these things are subject to the free-will so that in both respects the act of faith can be meritorious: whereas in the case of opinion, there is no firm assent, since it is weak and infirm, as the Philosopher observes (Poster. I, 33), so that it does not seem to proceed from a perfect act of the will: and for this reason, as regards the assent, it does not appear to be very meritorious, though it can be as regards the actual consideration...<sup>36</sup>

The following comment is important enough to set off by itself:

The believer has *sufficient* motive for believing, for he is moved by the authority of Divine teaching confirmed by miracles, and, what is more, by *the inward instinct of the Divine invitation*: hence he does not believe slightly. He has not, however, sufficient reason for scientific knowledge, hence he does not lose the merit.<sup>37</sup>

Elsewhere he again refers to an inner instinct: “To have the faith is not part of human nature, but it is part of human nature that man's mind should not thwart his *inner instinct*, and the outward preaching of the truth. Hence, in this way, unbelief is contrary to nature.”<sup>38</sup>

Thus for Thomas, reason does not cause or effect faith, nor is faith grounded on or based upon reason; for our belief is grounded upon divine authority as expressed in the divine invitation.<sup>39</sup> However, for Thomas, it is not the case that

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<sup>34</sup>ST, 2-2ae.2.4.

<sup>35</sup>ST., 2-2ae.2.9.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid. Fairweather translates the key line from this passage in this way: “the believer has sufficient *reason* for believing...” p., 257.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 2-2ae.10.1. His language here echoes the later language Calvin would use in regard to the innate sense of divinity in every man.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 2-2ae.4.8. [Emph., mine.]

reason has no place at all. Rather, he holds that reason can establish, not faith itself, but the preambles of faith.<sup>40</sup> Reason can also be used to refute the heretics and the gainsayers. But more important, reason can confirm faith in the following way:

As stated above (9), the act of faith can be meritorious, in so far as it is subject to the will, not only as to the use, but also as to the assent. Now human reason in support of what we believe, may stand in a twofold relation to the will of the believer. First, as preceding the act of the will; as, for instance, when a man either has not the will, or not a prompt will, to believe, unless he be moved by human reasons: and in this way human reason diminishes the merit of faith. On this sense it has been said above (I-II, 24, 3, ad 1; 77, 6, ad 2) that, in moral virtues, a passion which precedes choice makes the virtuous act less praiseworthy. For just as a man ought to perform acts of moral virtue, on account of the judgment of his reason, and not on account of a passion, so ought he to believe matters of faith, not on account of human reason, but on account of the Divine authority. Secondly, human reasons may be consequent to the will of the believer. *For when a man's will is ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof*; and in this way human reason does not exclude the merit of faith but is a sign of greater merit... when a man has the will to believe what is of faith on the authority of God alone, although he may have reasons in demonstration of some of them, e.g. of the existence of God, the merit of his faith is not, for that reason, lost or diminished.

The reasons which are brought forward in support of the authority of faith, are not demonstrations which can bring intellectual vision to the human intellect, wherefore they do not cease to be unseen.

But they remove obstacles to faith, by showing that what faith proposes is not impossible; wherefore such reasons do not diminish the merit or the measure of faith. On the other hand, though demonstrative reasons in support of the preambles of faith [The Leonine Edition reads: 'in support of matters of faith which are however, preambles to the articles of faith, diminish,' etc.], but not of the articles of faith, diminish the measure of faith, since they make the thing believed to be seen, yet they do not diminish the measure of charity, which makes the will ready to believe them, even if they were unseen; and so the measure of merit is not diminished.<sup>41</sup>

Here Thomas' closing remarks demonstrate that he does not consider that a faith which *not* grounded upon external reasons suffers or is defective as a result.

Regarding the preambles of the faith, it must be noted that these do not form, for Thomas, a preconditional foundation of faith, or a foundational prelude to faith. When Norman Geisler says "it is as essential that people be convinced that there is a God before they trust in him as it is that a groom be convinced that there is a bride standing at the altar with him before he says 'I do,'" <sup>42</sup> he speaks not for Thomas, but for something Thomas would have rejected. What Geisler says here reflects the shift in thinking regarding the role of natural theology from the 17th century onwards. In this line of thought, natural theology becomes the necessary precondition to faith. However, odd it is that Thomas should say this:

Things which can be proved by demonstration are reckoned among the articles of faith, not because they are believed simply by all, but because they are a necessary presupposition to matters of faith, *so that those who do not know them by demonstration must know them first of all by faith.*<sup>43</sup>

It seems odd that Aquinas would assert that the preambles do not have to be known by demonstration if he thought that they were necessary preconditions to faith in God, and the articles of faith. And again he says:

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 1.2.2.

<sup>41</sup>2-2ae.2.10 (Emph., mine.)

<sup>42</sup>Norman Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion* (2nd., ed.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1988), p., 93.

<sup>43</sup>ST., 2-2ae.1.5.

We must note... that a thing can be the object of belief in two ways. In one it is such absolutely, that is, it exceeds the intellectual capacity of all men who exist in this life, for instance, that there is a trinity and unity of God, and so on. Now, it is impossible for any man to have scientific knowledge of these. Rather, every believer assents to such doctrines because of the testimony of God to whom these things are present and by whom they are known. A thing is, however, an object of belief not absolutely, but in some respect, when it does not exceed the capacity of all men, but only of some men. In this class are those things which we can know by means of demonstration, as that God exists, or is one, or has no body, and so forth. There is nothing to prevent those who have scientific proof of these things from knowing them scientifically and others who do not understand the proofs from believing them.<sup>44</sup>

For Thomas then, the preambles of the faith are concerned with the content of faith, not the act of faith. Vos sums up this difficult point well:

The preambles are concerned with those matters that must be true if the content of faith itself is to be true, but they are not themselves purely matters of faith, (inasmuch as they can be proved by reason alone). Thus the articles of faith speak of God as creator, Trinity, and so on, but if these are true, then it must be the case that God exists, that he is one, and so on. Such matters, which are implied or assumed by the articles of faith and which at least some individuals can prove to be true by reason alone, are what Aquinas calls “preambles to faith.” We might also note that there is not a single passage in which Aquinas discusses the preambles that in any way suggests that we must understand them before we will be able to believe.<sup>45</sup>

To conclude, let Thomas’ own words suffice:

It is necessary for man to accept by faith not only things which are above reason, but also those which can be known by reason: and this for three motives. First, in order that man may arrive more quickly at the knowledge of Divine truth. Because the science to whose province it belongs to prove the existence of God, is the last of all to offer itself to human research, since it presupposes many other sciences: so that it would not be until late in life that man would arrive at the knowledge of God. The second reason is, in order that the knowledge of God may be more general. For many are unable to make progress in the study of science, either through dullness of mind, or through having a number of occupations, and temporal needs, or even through laziness in learning, all of whom would be altogether deprived of the knowledge of God, unless Divine things were brought to their knowledge under the guise of faith. The third reason is for the sake of certitude. For human reason is very deficient in things concerning God. A sign of this is that philosophers in their researches, by natural investigation, into human affairs, have fallen into many errors, and have disagreed among themselves. And consequently, in order that men might have knowledge of God, free of doubt and uncertainty, it was necessary for Divine matters to be delivered to them by way of faith, being told to them, as it were, by God Himself Who cannot lie.<sup>46</sup>

Once again, we find in Thomas statements that clearly belie the type of foundationalist apologetics of SGL, (*et al*). In this quotation, he notes that on account of the very fallibility of proofs and of philosophers, faith is required, and therefore we can rightly infer that for Thomas natural theology can in no wise a manner form a necessary precondition for faith in God.

By now it is clear that it is impossible to imagine Thomas as presenting a foundationalist model of apologetics.

Response 2: John Calvin.

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<sup>44</sup>Truth, 14,9 cited in Vos, pp., 71-72.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., Vos, p., 87.

<sup>46</sup>ST., 2-2ae.2.4.

I have laboured with the complexity of Thomas Aquinas because it is important to return to the sources. A mythology regarding Thomas' doctrine of faith in relation to reason has arisen over the last two or three centuries that clearly misrepresents the man's teaching regarding the warrant for faith. Nor has John Calvin's own teaching on this matter gone undisputed. Whereas with Aquinas, I laboured to analyse his doctrine of faith in relation to knowledge and opinion, the strategy with Calvin will be different. However, both strands will be resumed again in the discussion of Owen. Calvin, unlike Owen, and especially unlike Aquinas, did not leave us with a systemic treatment of knowledge, faith, and opinion. I will present a brief outline of some of his key ideas regarding faith. Then my aim will be to target his teaching regarding the sufficiency of Scripture alone to ground and warrant faith. For Calvin, I will argue, the rationality of the Christian faith is grounded solely upon the self-attesting word of God. Indeed, Calvin, strongly chastises those who would seek to obtain any other foundation in order to ground faith. He will even call this attempt *foolish*.

After presenting an outline of Calvin's position, I will briefly interact with B.B. Warfield's understanding of Calvin on the *indicia* and authority of Scripture. I will argue that Warfield misreads Calvin at this crucial point. The main locus of study of Calvin in regard to the sufficiency of Scripture is the heart of his discussion on the sacred scripture. This is an integral part of his discussion of the knowledge of God as creator (Book 1). The two sections under review here are, chapter 7, "Scripture must be confirmed by the witness of the Spirit. Thus may its authority be established as certain; and it is a wicked falsehood that its credibility depends upon the judgment of the church," and again, chapter 8 "So far as human reason goes, sufficiently firm proofs are at hand to establish the credibility of Scripture." Interestingly, the order seems to be reversed here, for if I were writing these chapters I would discuss chapter 8 before I would discuss chapter 7. Once again I grant that Calvin accepted the validity and place of natural theology. He clearly conceded that men could know many truths derived from natural theology. Though, the exact nature of what is learnt from natural theology in Calvin's doctrine has not gone without dispute. It is beyond the parameters of this paper to discuss this aspect of his teaching. The focus here is to discuss his treatment of the self-attesting word of God and the witness of the Spirit, in and of themselves, and in relation to rational proofs for the authority of Scripture. I will argue that Calvin directly repudiates the foundationalist methodology of SGL (*et al*).<sup>47</sup>

What is faith for Calvin? Calvin, after some consideration, defines faith, thusly: "Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."<sup>48</sup> For Calvin, faith rests upon the word of God, "but we say that the Word itself...is like a mirror in which faith may contemplate God," but should it perchance turn,

away even in the slightest degree from this goal toward which it should aim, it does not keep its own nature, but becomes uncertain credulity and vague error of mind. The same Word is the basis whereby faith is supported and sustained; if it turns away from the Word, it falls. Therefore, take away the Word and no faith will then remain.<sup>49</sup>

In regard to faith, knowledge and understanding, Calvin, again:

When we call faith "knowledge" we do not mean comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception. For faith is so far above sense that man's mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it. Even where the mind has attained, it does not comprehend what it feels. But while it is persuaded of what it does not grasp, by the very certainty of its persuasion it understands more than if it perceived anything human by its own capacity.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>It is important to note that the quotations from Calvin (below) must be read carefully. Due to constraints it is not practical to recite every relevant quotation in response to the claims of Warfield.

<sup>48</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans., by F.L., Battles, ed., by J.N., McNiell), (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), vol., 1, p., 551. Henceforth, cited in the following format: *Institutes*, 3.2.7.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.2.6.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.2.14. What will surprise many is that for Calvin, there is an echo of the Thomist nature-grace distinction. For the things of nature are known scientifically and naturally, while grace is known by faith.



Vos notes here that by comprehension, Calvin means understanding, and by assurance he means certitude.<sup>51</sup> Further, like Thomas, faith can be called knowledge, when that knowledge is apprehended by faith.<sup>52</sup> And again, for Calvin, faith cannot rest in anything which is probable: “We add the words ‘sure and firm’ in order to express a more solid constancy of persuasion. For, as faith is not content with a doubtful and changeable opinion, so is it not content with an obscure and confused conception; but requires full and fixed certainty, such as men are wont to have from things experienced and proved.”<sup>53</sup> Now, it cannot be that when modern classical apologists claim that faith is grounded or based upon probable arguments they are reflecting Calvin and the Reformed tradition, even the classical tradition, at this point. Note also Calvin’s contrast between the faith induced by proof attained through understanding and the faith induced by trust upon God’s word.

Moving on, the first thing to note is that it is granted that Calvin’s discussion Scripture’s authority is set within the wider context of the claims of Rome to be the only infallible determiner of Scripture. That argument is well known, the authority of Scripture is derived from the authority of the church of Rome. But noting this does not deny the force of the inferential value of Calvin’s claims in specific reference to modern debate about the warrant of faith. First Calvin states the obvious: “Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard.”<sup>54</sup> What follows in his discourse is the establishment of this claim.

His aim is to demonstrate that Scripture itself bears its own self-evident stamp of the divine, marking it in a manner that is self-evidencing, and therefore needing no secondary and external sources to ground its authority. His first clear salvo to this end is his statement:

As to their question — How can we be assured that this has sprung from God unless we have recourse to the decree of the church? — it is as if someone asked: Whence will we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their colour, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.<sup>55</sup>

The implication of this statement is quite pregnant with meaning. The perception of whiteness, the taste of sweetness can be considered as basic beliefs. If I am having a perception of whiteness, or a taste of sweetness, I can hardly deny with any soundness of reason that I am not indeed having a perception of whiteness or a taste of sweetness. Nor would I need, as most would concede, to recourse to an external and secondary source to ground and make rational my perceptions of whiteness and sweetness. Clearly these sensual perceptions are self-attesting or self-evidencing. Scripture, says Calvin, has the same epistemic veridicality as these very basic perceptions.

Moving on through these sections, Calvin now comes to discuss the witness of the Spirit with even more clarity and assertiveness. Contrary to the modern classical apologists, Calvin, like Aquinas before him, and Owen will say after him, one’s faith can not be anything less than 100% certain. There can be no element of doubt. “Certainty” in Calvin cannot in anyway be grounded in the probable, but only in the absolutely certain. Calvin: “We ought to remember what I said a bit ago: credibility of doctrine is not established until we are persuaded *beyond doubt* that God is its Author.”<sup>56</sup> From this he then says clearly:

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<sup>51</sup>Vos., p., 4.

<sup>52</sup>Institutes, 3.2.14.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 3.2.15.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 1.7.1. I will avoid discussing or citing sections of Calvin that explicitly involve him in his attempt to repudiate Rome’s claims regarding Scripture. I will seek to only highlight those sections which have a wider inferential value. I know that if I do focus on those parts of his treatise that are specifically relative to his rebuttal of Rome, it may be argued that he, indeed, does not speak to the issues raised in our time.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 1.7.2.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 1.7.4. [Emph., mine.]

Thus, the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it. The prophets and apostles do not boast either of their keenness or of anything that obtains credit for them as they speak; nor do they dwell upon rational proofs. Rather, they bring forward God's holy name, that by it the whole world may be brought into obedience to him. Now we ought to see how apparent it is not only by plausible opinion but by clear truth that they do not call upon God's name heedlessly or falsely.<sup>57</sup>

It is most natural that we desire to have a certain knowledge of the inspiration of Scripture. It is troubling when we rely on uncertain arguments that contain elements of doubt. There is always that little niggling doubt that I could be wrong. Even in terms of metaphysics, the idea that there can be a hint of metaphysical doubt can be disquieting to many. Calvin's answer to this very real and very human problem is not to simply assert the evidential value of probable arguments, but to assert the certainty of the witness of the Spirit over and against the instability of men and human reasons. These sort of assertions cannot overcome that disquiet we all have in regard to that which is merely plausible even that which is merely probable:

If we desire to provide in the best way for our consciences — that they may not be perpetually beset by the instability of doubt or vacillation, and that they may not also boggle at the smallest quibbles — we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit.

It is not that Calvin is against arguments, or that they do not have any evidential value at all: "True, if we wished to proceed by arguments, we might advance many things that would easily prove — if there is any god in heaven — that the law, the prophets, and the gospel come from him." But we are proceeding backward, says Calvin, if we seek to first ground scripture through disputation: "Yet they who strive to build up firm faith in Scripture through disputation are doing things backwards." For Calvin, there is an epistemic order here which cannot be reversed. Again, Calvin's argument is not against the use of evidences, they have their place, but they cannot produce or be the ground of certainty. Once again he is precise:

For my part, although I do not excel either in great dexterity or eloquence, if I were struggling against the most crafty sort of despises of God, who seek to appear shrewd and witty in disparaging Scripture, I am confident it would not be difficult for me to silence their clamorous voices. And if it were a useful labor to refute their cavils, I would with no great trouble shatter the boasts they mutter in their lurking places. But even if anyone clears God's Sacred Word from man's evil speaking, he will not at once imprint upon their hearts that certainty which piety requires. Since for unbelieving men religion seems to stand by *opinion* alone, they, in order not to believe anything foolishly or lightly, both wish and demand *rational* proof that Moses and the prophets spoke divinely.

Note the use of the word "opinion" and its juxtapositioning with the word "rational." I would argue that Calvin is here using words like opinion according the standard medieval and Classical Greek manner. And now he drives home the self-evidencing nature of God's revelation and the value of the witness of the Spirit:

But I reply: the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God *alone* is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.

And again, as if he is not clear enough, he says resoundingly:

Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is *self-authenticated*; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the *certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit*. For even if it wins reverence for itself

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid. This reference will apply for the next four citations.

by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit. Therefore, illumined by his power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God; but above human judgment we affirm with *utter certainty (just as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself)* that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. *We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgment may lean;* but we subject our judgment and wit to it as to a thing far beyond any guesswork! This we do, not as persons accustomed to seize upon some unknown thing, which, under closer scrutiny, displeases them, but fully conscious that we hold the unassailable truth! Nor do we do this as those miserable men who habitually bind over their minds to the thralldom of superstition; but we feel that the undoubted power of his divine majesty lives and breathes there. By this power we are drawn and inflamed, knowingly and willingly, to obey him, yet also more vitally and more effectively than by mere human willing or knowing!

God, therefore, very rightly proclaims through Isaiah that the prophets together with the whole people are witnesses to him; for they, instructed by prophecies, unhesitatingly held that God has spoken without deceit or ambiguity [Isaiah 43:10]. *Such, then, is a conviction that requires no reasons;* such, a knowledge with which the best reason agrees — *in which the mind truly reposes more securely and constantly than in any reasons;* such, finally, *a feeling that can be born only of heavenly revelation.* I speak of nothing other than what each believer experiences within himself — though my words fall far beneath a just explanation of the matter.<sup>58</sup>

Gerstner and Dabney, (*et al*) argue that a faith not founded upon solid extra-Biblical foundations is an irrational faith. Yet, Calvin clearly denies this to be so. For Calvin, the very attempt to ground faith upon external and extra-Biblical grounds is the truly irrational thing to do for such an attempt will never supply the needed certainty to overcome doubts. However, it is important to note here in a footnote to the McNeill edition of the Institutes, the Greek word *autopistos* is cited as lying behind the English translation: “self-authenticated.” The instance of this word is important, as it is a technical word in both Medieval and Protestant Scholastic theology denoting the self-attesting nature of the Scripture. It denotes that the Scripture is *trustworthy in and of itself*. This word is taken up and used time and again in later Protestant Scholastic systematics, but essentially disappears from 19th century Anglo-American systematics.

Moving on, we now come to Calvin's treatment of the role of proofs and evidences. Many a misreading of this chapter has produced a lot of misunderstanding at this point. Speaking of Scripture, it is hard to imagine how many could misread Calvin in all this, given the above statements and the following: “Unless this certainty, higher and stronger than any human judgment, be present, it will be vain to fortify the authority of Scripture by arguments, to establish it by common agreement of the church, or to confirm it with other helps. For unless this foundation is laid, its authority will always remain in doubt.”<sup>59</sup>

The “proofs” that many have adduced to defend the authority of Scripture do have value, says Calvin. For their value is firstly for the believer as aids:

Conversely, once we have embraced it devoutly as its dignity deserves, and have recognized it to be above the common sort of things, those arguments — not strong enough before to engraft and fix the certainty of Scripture in our minds — become very useful aids. What wonderful confirmation ensues when, with keener study, we ponder the economy of the divine wisdom, so well ordered and disposed; the completely heavenly character of its doctrine, savoring of nothing earthly; the beautiful agreement of all the parts with one another — as well as such other qualities as can gain majesty for the writings.<sup>60</sup>

The sense here is that once we have embraced the authority of Scripture, and once we have the testimony of the Spirit, the rational proofs are an aid to confirm our faith. The sense is that these things, for the believer, have a value as

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<sup>58</sup>Institutes, 1.7.5. [Emph., mine.]

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 1.8.1.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

subsequent “proofs” but not as foundational or logically prior proofs. Ever desirous of returning our thoughts to the proper foundation and source of our certainty, he goes on to state:

But our hearts are more firmly grounded when we reflect that we are captivated with admiration for Scripture more by grandeur of subjects than by grace of language. For it was also not without God’s extraordinary providence that the sublime mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven came to be expressed largely in mean and lowly words, lest, if they had been adorned with more shining eloquence, the impious would scoffingly have claimed that its power is in the realm of eloquence alone. Now since such uncultivated and almost rude simplicity inspires greater reverence for itself than any eloquence, what ought one to conclude except that the force of the truth of Sacred Scripture is manifestly too powerful to need the art of words?

But now note his words immediately following:

Therefore the apostle rightly contends that the faith of the Corinthians was founded “upon God’s power, not upon human wisdom” [1 Corinthians 2:5 p.] because his own preaching among them commended itself “not in persuasive words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of might” [ch. 2:4 p.]. *For truth is cleared of all doubt when, not sustained by external props, it serves as its own support.*<sup>61</sup>

Regarding the many and varied external proofs and props, I do not need to examine them in detail. Calvin notes the standard *indicia* of the authority of Scripture. These *indicia* include the antiquity of Scripture, the truthfulness of Scripture, the miracles documented in Scripture which confirm the authority of the divine messengers, the incontestability of the miracles, the fulfillment of prophecy, the marvelous preservation of the law and the prophets, the simplicity and heavenly character of and authority of the New Testament, the consent of the church, and the testimony of the martyrs, and other great confirmations, all serve to confirm and sustain the divine authority of Scripture. For Calvin, none of these evidences can be subject to dispute.<sup>62</sup> But in the end, Calvin once again returns to his main contention regarding the word’s self-authenticating nature and the Spirit’s witness.

There are other reasons, neither few nor weak, for which the dignity and majesty of Scripture are not only affirmed in godly hearts, but brilliantly vindicated against the wiles of its disparagers; yet of themselves these are not strong enough to provide a firm faith, until our Heavenly Father, revealing his majesty there, lifts reverence for Scripture beyond the realm of controversy. Therefore Scripture will *ultimately suffice* for a saving knowledge of God *only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit*. Indeed, these human testimonies which exist to *confirm* it will not be vain if, *as secondary aids* to our feebleness, they *follow* that chief and highest testimony. But those who wish to *prove* to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God are acting foolishly, *for only by faith* can this be known. Augustine therefore justly warns that godliness and peace of mind ought to come first if a man is to understand anything of such great matters.<sup>63</sup>

It seems amazing that given what he says, Calvin’s line of reasoning here could be misconstrued. Yet many have misconstrued Calvin. For example, B.B. Warfield misses Calvin’s point here almost entirely. The bottom line for Warfield, as we shall see, is the question of whether or not faith is grounded and blind. Warfield writes in the 19th century and clearly images 19th century foundationalism. In speaking of Calvin’s doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*, first, he says:

It is a persuasion which does not require reasons--that is to say, it is a state of conviction not induced by arguments, but by direct perception: it is to say, a knowledge, a direct perception in accord with the highest reason, in which the mind rests, with an assurance not attainable by reason; or to be more explicit still, it is a

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid. [Emph., mine.]

<sup>62</sup>C.f., 1.8.2-13.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 1.8.13. [Emph., mine.] Note his juxtapositioning of the words *faith* with *prove*. He is following the standard terminology which differentiates faith from that which can be rationally or scientifically demonstrated or proven.

sense which comes only from divine gift. 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 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: the spiritual man discerneth all things. Such, in briefest outline, is Calvin's famous doctrine of the testimony of the Spirit.<sup>64</sup>

At first this reads as if Warfield is about to correctly capture Calvin's teaching here. But then he shifts his attention to the manner or mode of this testimony in a more detailed way. Unfortunately, Warfield presents his readers with the following trilemma:<sup>65</sup>

Certain further elucidations of its real meaning and bearing appear, however, to be necessary, to guard against misapprehension of it. When we speak of an internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, it is evident that we must conceive it as presenting itself in one of three ways. It may be conceived as of the nature of an immediate revelation to each man to whom it is given. It may be conceived as of the nature of a *blind* conviction produced in the minds of its recipients. It may be conceived as of the nature of a *grounded* conviction, formed in their minds by the Spirit, by an act which rather terminates immediately on the faculties, enabling and effectively persuading them to reach a conviction on grounds presented to them, than produces the conviction itself, apart from, or without grounds.<sup>66</sup>

He then closes this thought with the following remark: "In which of these ways did Calvin conceive the testimony of the Spirit as presenting itself? As revelation, or as ungrounded faith, or as grounded faith?"<sup>67</sup>

Warfield discounts the idea that it is immediate revelation, he then says:

It still remains, however, to inquire precisely how Calvin conceived the Spirit to operate in bringing the soul to a hearty faith in the Word as a revelation from God. Are we to understand him as teaching that the Holy Spirit by his almighty power creates, in souls of those whom God has set upon to bring knowledge of him, an entirely ungrounded faith in the divinity of Scriptures and the truth of their contents, so that the soul embraces them and their contents with firm confidence as a revelation of God wholly apart from and in absence of all *indicia* of their divinity or of the truth of their contents.<sup>68</sup>

Warfield's own answer to this is to assert that the *indicia* are, in and of themselves, wholly insufficient to assure us of the divinity of Scripture apart from the testimony of the Spirit.<sup>69</sup> He then notes that it is a complete misapprehension of Calvin's meaning to suggest that he presents the *indicia* of the divinity of Scripture as inconclusive and ineffective. As he says:

This prevalent misapprehension of Calvin's meaning is due to neglect to observe the precise thing for which he affirms the *indicia* to be ineffective and the precise reason he assigns for this is ineffectiveness. There is only one thing which he says they cannot do: that is to produce "sound faith" (1.7.4), "firm faith" (1.7.4)--that assurance which is essential to "true piety."

In the same vein he makes his point explicit:

...there is not lacking convincing hints that there was lying in his mind all the time the implicit understanding that it is through these *indicia* of the divinity of the Scripture that the soul, under operation of the testimony of

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<sup>64</sup>BB Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, (New York: OUP, 1931), p., 79.

<sup>65</sup>I would argue that it is indeed a false trilemma

<sup>66</sup>Warfield, *Calvin*, pp., 79-80.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p., 84.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p., 85.

the Spirit, reaches its sound faith in Scripture and that he has been withheld from more explicitly stating this only by the warmth of his zeal for the necessity of the testimony of the Spirit which led him to a constant contrasting of this divine with those human “testimonies.” Thus we find him repeatedly affirming that these *indicia* will produce no fruit *until* they be confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit... It is, however, in his general teaching as to the formation of sound faith in the divinity of Scripture that we find the surest indication that he thought of the *indicia* as *co-working* [emph., mine] with the testimony of the Spirit to this result.. What the Spirit of God imparts to us, he says, is 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* [emph., mine] on its proper *indicia*.<sup>70</sup>

Now comes an amazing redefinition of Calvin’s own metaphor:

It is because Scripture “exhibits the plainest evidence that it is God who speaks in it” that the newly awakened *sense* of divinity, quickened in the soul, recognises it as divine... The senses do not distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter--to use Calvin’s own illustration...--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... To taste and see that the Scriptures are divine is to recognise a divinity actually present in scripture... implies a perception of *indicia* not attribution of a divinity not recognised as inherent.<sup>71</sup>

In essence, then, Warfield sees Calvin’s testimony of the Spirit as a testimony to the *indicia* not directly to the presence or stamp of Deity within. In a footnote he says explicitly: “And above all we must not be misled into supposing that he places miracles below the testimony of the Spirit in importance. Such a comparison is outside his argument: miracles are part of the objective evidence of the deity of Scripture; the testimony of the Spirit is the subjective preparation of the heart to receive the objective evidence in a sympathetic embrace.”<sup>72</sup> It seems to me that in terms of Warfield’s construction it is not the case that my faith is not in God, properly speaking, but rather it is in the evidences. How this is not the necessary conclusion of Warfield’s argument? For Warfield has the Spirit moving the believer to embrace the evidences, to place his faith in the evidences. All I need to do, however, is to direct the reader back to Calvin’s own comments: “We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgment may lean” and again, “Such, then, is a conviction that requires no reasons; such, a knowledge with which the best reason agrees — in which the mind truly reposes more securely and constantly than in any reasons.”<sup>73</sup>

Warfield’s understanding can be summed up by way of metaphor. Imagine I meet a man, and this man consistently tells me the truth, he consistently does good, he denies himself, he even performs miracles, and reveals things that are unknown by ordinary means. We may call these evidences certain *indicia* which evidence his divine authority. But these *indicia* alone will not produce in me a faith, firm and sound. However, the Spirit efficaciously persuades me to sympathetically embrace these *indicia*, to *rest* my faith on them. Thus the Spirit testifies to these *indicia*. And it must be noted that the messenger’s verbal testimony itself is not self-authenticating. It cannot carry with it that inherent *autopistic* quality that demands immediate assent to his authority and divinity.

Naturally there are some severe problems with this. As noted, it is not until after the Spirit has testified to the Word, and thereupon made faith firm that the *indicia* have any evidential value to the believer. Warfield, himself notes this, when he concedes that Calvin “sometimes even appears to speak of them [the *indicia*] as if they lay side by side with the testimony of the Spirit than acted along with it as co-factors in the production of the supreme effect.”<sup>74</sup> Warfield has glossed over the fact that for Calvin, the Scriptures are *autopistic*. Further, Calvin discusses the testimony of the Spirit,

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., pp., 89 and 90.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p., 90.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 86, fn., 60.

<sup>73</sup>Institutes (1.7.5).

<sup>74</sup>Warfield, *Calvin*, p., 88.

even saying that it produces certitude, before he discusses the *indicia*, and his closing comment to his discussion of the *indicia* makes no sense if Warfield is correct here.

Hoffecker explains the point well:

Warfield would have been closer to the position of the Genevan Reformer if he had established his priorities in the following order: The *indicia* never work alone to produce saving faith and while a certain case can be made for the working of the two together the correct order must be that the Spirit's testimony is prior to the *indicia* which follow and confirm the faith of the believer. Warfield's program in reality assumed that the evidences come first, and, while not usurping the place of the testimony, they give the testimony of the Spirit content.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, Kantzer has his finger on the exact point when he notes:

The crucial question, however, is rather, does the witness of the Spirit produce only the conviction which is grounded upon these evidences, or does the witness produce another more immediate conviction, not grounded on these *indicia*, which presents *par excellence* the divine judgment rendering man certain of the authority of Scripture. Calvin indicates that the latter is his own interpretation.<sup>76</sup>

Kantzer also cites Calvin as expressly arguing that faith does not depend upon miracles or any extraordinary sign, but is a gift of the Holy Spirit and is produced by means of the word.<sup>77</sup> Kantzer also well summarises the teaching of Calvin's understanding of the Spirit's testimony:

By the witness of the Spirit, moreover, there is observed a divinity already residing in the Word... The testimony of the Holy Spirit, to summarise the teaching of Calvin regarding the nature of this witness, is a divine judgment of the truth and authority of Scripture, as the word of God implanted immediately upon the mind and heart of the elect, without the instrumentality of the rational arguments, which however are fully valid and may, once the witness has performed its work, confirm the mind of the believer.<sup>78</sup>

This is not the only place where Warfield significantly departs from Calvin on this topic. Elsewhere, Warfield notes:

Let it not be said that thus we found the whole Christian system upon the doctrine of plenary inspiration. We found the whole Christian system on the doctrine of plenary inspiration as little as we found it upon the doctrine of angelic existences. Were there no such thing as inspiration, Christianity would be true, and all its essential doctrines would be credibly witnessed to us in the generally trustworthy reports of the teaching of our Lord and his authoritative agents in founding the church... Inspiration is not the most fundamental of Christian doctrines, nor even the first thing we prove about the Scriptures. These we first prove authentic, historically credible,

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<sup>75</sup>W. Andrew Hoffecker, *The Relation between the Objective and Subjective Aspects in Christian Religious Experience: A study in the Systematic and Devotional Writings of Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield*, (Michigan: University Microfilms, 1970), p., 263. C.f., K.S. Kantzer, *John Calvin's Theory of the Knowledge of God and the Word of God*, (A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Harvard University, 1950), vol., 2, p., 443.

<sup>76</sup>Kantzer, vol., 2, p., 247.

<sup>77</sup>Calvin on the Harmony of the Gospels, vol., p., 193, as cited by Kantzer, vol., 2, p., 431.

<sup>78</sup>Kantzer, vol., 2, pp., 445, and 455. Kantzer labours at length to demonstrate that this conviction and firm faith generated by the testimony of the Spirit is not a blind faith, but a true faith, such that is able to truly and properly recognise the authority of God in the Word. This concept is pivotal in a correct understanding of true faith, for in this manner only does one obtain a truly sound criteria for making judgements and from which to make truly rational judgements. And surely, if Warfield is right, how his claims not be then subject to the same criticism SGL make of Montgomery in that surely Warfield must posit a God of the gaps? For the *indica*, probabilistic as they are, are only rendered certain by the added testimony of the Spirit. Is this not what Warfield implies?

generally trustworthy, before we prove them inspired. And the proof of their authenticity, credibility, general trustworthiness would give us a firm basis for Christianity prior to any knowledge on our part of their inspiration, and apart indeed from any existence of inspiration.... we must indeed prove the authenticity, credibility, and general trustworthiness of the New Testament writings before we prove their inspiration<sup>79</sup>

And again he explicitly says:

We do not adopt the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of Scripture on sentimental grounds, nor even, as we have already had occasion to remark upon *a priori* or general grounds of whatever kind. We adopt it specifically because it is taught us as truth by Christ and his apostles, in the Scriptural record of their teaching, and as evidence for its truth is, therefore, as we have also already pointed out, precisely that evidence, in weight and amount, which vindicates for us the trustworthiness of Christ and his apostles as teachers of doctrine. Of course, this evidence is not in the strict logical sense “demonstrative”; it is “probable” evidence. It therefore leaves open the metaphysical possibility of its being mistaken. 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... we have not attained through “probable” evidence apodictic certainty of the Bible’s infallibility. But neither is the reality of the alleged phenomena inconsistent with the Bible’s doctrine, to be allowed without sufficient evidence. Their reality cannot be logically or rationally recognised unless the evidence for it be greater in amount and weight than the whole mass of evidence for the trustworthiness of the Biblical writers as teachers of doctrine.<sup>80</sup>

This last quotation is telling. For Warfield, the basis of faith is now based on probable evidence, which is so probable, so strong, that it practically amounts to the type of certainty normally reserved for deductive certainty. Nor is faith based or grounded in an *a priori* foundation, such as God’s own self-attesting word and Spirit. Furthermore, Warfield sees the evidence for faith in the authenticity of the Bible as much like a weight in a balance scale. On account of the mass of evidence, the scale is tipped in our favour. This implies that one judges worldviews in an analogical manner as one balances between weights. However, this is far from Calvin’s own teaching. In fact it reflects a very modernist confidence in the evidential value of brute fact.

SGL also discuss Calvin’s doctrine of the Testimony of the Spirit. After granting that Calvin held that the testimony of the Spirit is the ultimate basis for the believer’s certainty, they set up what is clearly a false dilemma fallacy when they say: “It would be a false inference, however, to conclude that, because the testimony of the Spirit is “more excellent” than reason, Calvin necessarily maintained an irrational basis of belief in Biblical authority.<sup>81</sup>”

This is an amazing statement from these men. Clearly, they see a faith based solely upon the testimony of God as nothing but irrational in their estimation. I find this claim startling.

From this SGL note that Calvin acknowledged the place of arguments as valuable tools which do have adequate evidential value as to silence opponents. And like Warfield they stress that the evidences will not produce saving knowledge, such can only be obtained by the testimony of the Spirit. They then note “Still it may be asked whether the Holy Spirit’s testimony moves against or beyond it [the evidences].” “Evidence,” they say, “cannot produce firm faith until the Spirit works.” “What the Holy Spirit does,” they argue, “is to take the debate “beyond the realm of controversy.”<sup>82</sup> But then the question comes to this, “do the evidences only confirm faith or can they be a preparation for it”? While admitting that Calvin does speak of the evidences as confirming faith, they note that Calvin also acknowledges that evidences can prepare faith. They cite Calvin to this effect: “Miracles avail only to prepare for piety or for its confirmation.”<sup>83</sup> Perplexingly, they then conclude that: “This kind of language supports the view that Calvin

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<sup>79</sup>BB, Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, N.J.:P&R, 1948), p., 210 and 212.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p., 219.

<sup>81</sup>SGL., p., 204.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p., 205.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.



regarded evidences as a foundation for faith.”<sup>84</sup> Such a claim on the basis of the meager evidence they cite, and in the light of his explicit contrary comments in his *Institutes* means this “conclusion” is highly dubious. For it may be that a “third thing” is available. It may be that evidences can make credible a faith, in that they can prepare the mind to a more ready reception of the claims of God, and yet not properly form the basis of faith. And indeed this is the very idea taught by later Protestant Scholastics and Thomas himself.

In the end, what motivates SGL and Warfield, even Dabney, is a precommitment to a particular definition of rationality, viz, foundationalism, that precludes anything that defies this precommitment. Yet one has to ask if this precommitment is in itself Biblical and proper. Calvin, on the contrary, is not so bound. For him, even apart from any recourse to any arguments, a faith in the *autopistic* word, and which has the added testimony of the Spirit, is in and of itself sound and rational, indeed, it is truly rational, and truly sound.

Response 3: John Owen.

Owen’s importance here cannot be understated in my estimation. For in Owen we have the mature development of the ideas as they have been set out first by Aquinas and then later by Calvin. Owen, like Calvin before him, reflects a form of modified Thomism,<sup>85</sup> in that he places Thomas’ distinctions between faith and knowledge, and the grounds of faith in relation to the evidences squarely and fairly in a Reformed anthropology. It is to be noted that Owen did grant the existence of a natural theology. His seminal work on *Biblical Theology*<sup>86</sup> devotes an entire book to the subject of natural theology. It should be noted that, Owen, like Calvin, does not articulate any of the philosophical truths in detail.<sup>87</sup> He discusses the standard arguments as set out by the Westminster Confession (1:5), and as already discerned from Calvin (above). The two key discussions found in the corpus of Owen’s works are his two writings *The Reason of Faith* (book 6 of part 1) found in *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*,<sup>88</sup> and, his other work, *On the Divine Original of the Scriptures*.<sup>89</sup>

Starting with Vol 4, *what is faith* for Owen? This is essentially the first thing he discusses. Faith for Owen is not ordinary faith in human testimony, nor is faith based upon probable argument. Speaking of faith in contrast with implicit faith (the faith that assents to tradition or human authority), he says:

Now whatever persuasion these reasons may beget in the minds of men that the things which they profess to believe are true, yet if they are alone, it is not divine faith whereby they do believe, but that which is merely human, a being resolved into human testimony only, or an opinion on probable arguments; for no faith can be of any kind than is the evidence it reflects or arises from.<sup>90</sup>

For Owen, faith must carry within it an element of infallibility. This infallibility is not inherent within the subject, as if the believer himself is infallible, but that in terms of its formal object, upon which it rests, this object must be infallible:

This divine faith is divine revelation; which being infallible, renders the faith that rests on it and is resolved into it infallible also. No man can believe that which is false, or which may be false, with divine faith; for that which renders it divine is the divine truth and infallibility of the ground and evidence which it is built upon...

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p., 206.

<sup>85</sup>I hesitate to use the term Neo-Thomism as that term is very rubbery. “Neo-Thomism” has been a label used by so many, foundationalist or otherwise.

<sup>86</sup>John Owen, *Biblical Theology* (Pittsburgh, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), Book 1, pp., 1-144.

<sup>87</sup>I grant that it is debated whether or not Calvin articulated the standard philosophical proofs for God’s existence. The reader is directed to Kantzer’s comprehensive treatment of Calvin on this point.

<sup>88</sup>John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed., by Wm H. Goold (London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1853), vol., 4, pp., 5-109. I will use this abbreviated form of citation for all works of Owen, except *Biblical Theology* (which is not included in *The Works of John Owen*).

<sup>89</sup>Ibid, vol., 16, pp., 296-337. In regard to this work, I specifically concentrat on chapters 4-6, pp., 313- 343.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., vol., 4., p., 17. For ease of reading I will modernise the spelling where it is necessary.

That Scripture is the word of God is infallibly true, yet the faith whereby a man believes it so to be may be fallible; for it is such as his evidence is, and no other. He may believe it to be so on tradition, or on the testimony of the church of Rome, or on outward arguments; all which being fallible, his faith is so also, although the things he assents unto be infallibly true<sup>91</sup>

Immediately we can see contrasts here. Divine faith for Owen can only rest upon an infallible divine basis and has to have within it that inherent quality of infallibility. What is more, the level of certainty that faith generates is proportionate to the certainty inherent within the evidence or object upon which it rests.<sup>92</sup> Owen then defines the formal object of faith, that which *must* be the formal object of faith:

*The authority and truth* of God, considered in themselves absolutely, are not the immediate *formal* object of our faith, though they are the *ultimate* whereinto it is resolved for we can believe nothing on their account unless it be *evidenced* unto us, and this evidence of them is in that revelation which God is pleased to make of himself for that is the only means whereby our consciousness and minds are affected with his truth and authority. We do, therefore, no otherwise rest on the truth and veracity of God in any thing than we rest on the revelation which he makes unto us, for that is the only way whereby we are affected with them; not “The Lord is true” absolutely, but “Thus says the Lord,” and, “The Lord has spoken,” is that which we have immediate regard unto. Hereby alone our minds affected with the authority and veracity of God; and by what way soever it is made unto us, it is sufficient and able to so affect us. At first, as has been shown, it was given immediately to some persons and preserved for the use of others in an oral ministry; but now all revelation as has also been declared, is contained in the Scriptures only.

He continues:

[T]he, as the only immediate, divine, infallible revelation of the mind and will of God, is the first immediate formal object of our faith, the sole reason why and ground whereon we do believe the things that are revealed with faith divine supernatural and infallible. We do believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. Why do we so do? on what ground or reason? It is because of the authority of God commanding us to do, and the truth of God testifying thereunto.<sup>93</sup>

Elsewhere he makes the same point: “The Authority of God... is the sole bottom and foundation, or formal cause, of our assenting to those Scriptures as his word.”<sup>94</sup>

Now we come to an important point. Owen then asks “*on what ground, for what reasons*, do we believe the Scriptures to be a divine revelation proceeding immediately from God, or to be that word of God which is truth divine and infallible?” He answers boldly:

It is *solely* [emph., mine] on the evidence that the Spirit of God, in and by the Scripture itself, gives unto us that it was given by immediate inspiration from God... our faith rests on and is resolved into the veracity and faithfulness of God, so it is also in this believing the Scripture itself to be the infallible word of God, seeing we do it *no other* grounds but its *own evidence* that it is so.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., pp., 17-18.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p., 51. He says: “Our assent can be of no other nature than the arguments and motives whereon it is built, or by which it is wrought in us, as in *degree* it cannot exceed evidence,” (p, 50). Using an expressive analogy he says: “And our assent unto the things revealed can be of no other kind that we give unto the revelation itself, for thereinto it is resolved, and thereunto it must be reduced; these waters will rise no higher than their fountain,” (p., 51).

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p., 19-20.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., vol., 16, p., 307.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid. p., 19-20.

Regarding the evidences, Owen makes an extremely important point:

There are sundry cogent arguments, which are taken from *external considerations* of the Scripture, that evince it on *rational* [emph., mine] grounds to be from God. All these are motives of credibility, or effectual persuasions to account and esteem it to be the word of God. And although they neither are, nor is it possible they should be, the ground and reason whereon we believe it so to be with faith divine and supernatural, yet are they *necessary* [emph., mine] unto the confirmation of our faith herein against temptations, oppositions, and objections.<sup>96</sup>

For Owen, it is not as if we merely allow the use of these external arguments, but that we ought to use them “only we do not judge them to contain the whole of the evidence which we have for faith to rest on or to be resolved into.” Arguments and evidences confirm faith, remove objections, even prepare one for faith.<sup>97</sup> Against charges that he has now embraced irrationalism, he strongly contends: “And it is but vainly pretended that their use superseded by our other assertions, as though, where faith is required, all the subservient use of reason were absolutely discarded, and our faith thereby rendered irrational.”<sup>98</sup> This alone should dispense with Netland’s claim that a rejection of foundationalism leads necessarily and inexorably to relativism. For as Owen proposes we can and do have tools by which we can refute rival religious claims, “for no man does so plead the *self-evidencing power* of the Scripture as to deny that the use of other external motives and arguments is necessary to stop the mouths of *atheists*.”<sup>99</sup>

It must be remarked that when SGL discuss the use of evidences in the presuppositional apologetic, it is clear that they misunderstand the point. For example, speaking of presuppositionalism and the use of evidences, they say that presuppositionalism entails that the “word of God is arbitrarily-- ‘that is for no reason’-- assumed.”<sup>100</sup> Yet, for Owen, there is a *reason*, and that reason is God’s own self-evincing authority. And when SGL say, “If the presuppositionalist offers any reason, he ceases to be a presuppositionalist,” they fail to note the very minor point there can be reasons that confirm faith, and there can be reasons that ground faith, or stated another way, reasons upon which faith is based. There is surely no problem with such a distinction, other than it serves to demonstrate that inadequacy of SGL’s repeated characterisation of presuppositionalism.

Later Owen counters the charge that a recourse to the sole testimony of God and of the Holy Spirit in order to properly ground faith is irrational, by answering: “But we must not be ashamed of the gospel, nor of the truth of it, because some do not understand or will not duly consider what is proposed.”<sup>101</sup> Indeed referring to the Old and New Testaments, he says, “merely on the account of their own proposal of themselves unto us in the name and majesty of God, as such-- without the contribution of help or assistance from tradition, church or anything else without themselves--we are obliged upon the penalty of eternal damnation... to receive them, with that subjection of soul which is due to the word of God.”<sup>102</sup>

The logic here is so rich that it is worth spending a few sentences unpacking it. Here I would speak to a modern classical apologist, to what they know to be true, notwithstanding questions as to how they justify that knowledge. For note, it is intuitively true that if a man rejects the word of a prophet (even in the absence of confirming miracles, as in the case of many Old Testament prophets who performed no miracles) he is thereby rendered inexcusable and liable to divine punishment. Yet if this be granted, then as Owen says, the converse must hold, that assent to this prophet’s word (even in the absence external confirmations) one must acknowledge in Scripture a sufficient evidence of its own original authority.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid. C.f., p., 47.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p., 49. C.f., the Summa, 2-2ae.1.4., where Thomas notes that evidences can sustain a general credibility for faith, thereby preparing a person for faith.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p., 21.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p., 103.

<sup>100</sup>SGL, p., 305; and for the next reference, p., 309.

<sup>101</sup>Owen, p., 55. C.f., p., 106.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., vol., 16, p., 307.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p., 335.

That is, it must be granted that assent to the word of the prophet, as word of revelation, thereby being equivalent to Scripture, is perfectly rational and justifiable--even though the formal grounds of that justification are not upon the terms laid out by a foundationalist epistemology. Why should we now step outside of that reality and claim that our faith is irrational if it is proposed merely and solely upon the authority of God alone as expressed in Scripture? For is not a man just as culpable for rejecting the claims of Scripture, as any man who may have rejected the word of a tangible prophet? And if so, then conversely, a man is warranted, with sublime rationality, for assenting to the authority of God alone as expressed in Scripture. For no Christian would surely commit himself to the point that a man, without external arguments and reasons, is actually warranted and justified in his rejection of the authority of Scripture.

Furthermore, Owen is anything less than blunt when he notes that if a faith has external arguments for its formal grounds, necessarily then Biblical faith is *destroyed*.<sup>104</sup> Again:

Wherefore, we do not nor ought only to believe the Scripture to be highly probable, or with a moral persuasion and assurance, built upon arguments absolutely fallible and human; for if this be the formal reason of faith, namely the veracity and authority of God, if we believe not with faith divine and supernatural, we believe not at all.<sup>105</sup>

Owen follows Thomas and the classical definitions of faith, knowledge and opinion to the letter. That which is demonstrated and known is not faith. As noted from Thomas (see above) a faith grounded in what is known removes the merit of faith. Nor for Owen, can that which is based upon probable arguments be called faith. For example: "It belongs unto the nature of faith, of what sort soever it be, that it be built on and resolved into *testimony*. This is that which distinguishes it from any other conception, knowledge, or assent of our minds, on other reasons and causes."<sup>106</sup> And again:

And if it be asked how I know this Scripture to be a divine revelation, to be a sword of God; I answer,--1. I do not know it demonstratively, upon rational, scientific principles, because such a divine revelation is not capable of such a demonstration... 2. I do not assent unto it, or think it to be so, only upon arguments and motives highly probable, or morally uncontrollable, as I am assuredly persuaded of many other things whereof I can have no certain demonstration... 3. But I believe it so to be with a faith divine and supernatural, resting on and resolved into the authority and veracity of God himself, evidencing themselves to my mind, my soul, and conscience, by this revelation itself, and not otherwise.<sup>107</sup>

Still driving his points home again and again, he later makes note of the three ways "whereby we *assent* unto any thing that is proposed unto us as true, and receive it as such." The first is by a principle of natural light and the first rational actings of our minds. These, for Owen, are basic, innate and necessary laws of thought, and moral knowledge between good and evil. The second is by rational consideration. Herein the mind does discursively deduce one thing from another and,

herein it is able to assent unto what is proposed unto it in *various degrees of certainty*, according unto the nature and degree of the evidence it proceeds upon. Hence it has a certain knowledge of some things; of others an opinion or persuasion, prevalent against the objections of the contrary, which it knows, and whose force it understands, which may be true or false.

The third way is by faith. "This our assent," he says, "is upon testimony whereupon we believe many things which no sense, or inbred principles, nor reasonings of our own, could either give us an acquaintance with or an assurance of."

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., vol, 4, p., 47.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p., 49.C.f., with SGL's statement that while evidence is not the cause of faith, it is, indeed, the ground of faith, (p., 194.).

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p., 53.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p., 70.

He adds, that there are different kinds of assent and varying degrees of assent, depending upon the nature of the testimony it rests upon, whether human or divine.<sup>108</sup>

It is clear that Owen is following the paradigm laid out by Thomas Aquinas,<sup>109</sup> which was taken up by Calvin. We are starting to see a picture now of a model which avoids the type of charges made by Netland, SGL, *et al*, that a faith not grounded on a foundationalist structure relativises our faith, turning it into some arbitrary will to believe.

But having said that, Owen also adds a caveat, in that these external arguments are not coercive. They will not overcome an unbiased mind:

Now these arguments are such as are able of themselves to beget in the minds of men sober, humble, intelligent, and unprejudiced, a firm opinion, judgement, and persuasion, that the Scripture does proceed from God. Where persons are prepossessed with invincible prejudices, contracted by a course of education, wherein they have imbibed principles opposite and contrary thereunto, and have increased and fortified them by some fixed and hereditary enmity against all those whom they know to own the divinity of the Scripture... these arguments, it may be, will not prevail immediately to work or effect assent.<sup>110</sup>

Importantly, he notes that even though these arguments are sufficient in and of themselves to ground rational assent to the authority of Scripture, such assent can never be described or characterised as true Biblical faith, divine and supernatural, but is rather natural faith, or historical faith. For the faith by which we believe the Scripture to be the word of God is not a mere form of moral persuasion, built upon external arguments and motives of credibility.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, Owen stresses our natural inherent depravity, which effectively *blinds* us all to the truth of God.<sup>112</sup> Only a work of renewal and illumination by the Spirit will overcome our natural resistant bias and open our minds to receive the truth proposed to us either by way of external arguments, or by way of the word of God.<sup>113</sup>

But now we need to shift our focus somewhat. Two more things need to be discussed before we can close our discussion of Owen. Firstly, what is the nature of this self-attesting quality of the word of God? That is, how is it to be described? And secondly, what is the nature of the testimony of the Spirit? Owen's own discussion of this is very enlightening. Owen notes that God reveals himself in three ways. He reveals himself in the works of creation and providence.<sup>114</sup> Secondly, God declares himself by the innate light of nature and the principles of the consciences of men. This light of nature has been indelibly implanted within the minds of men, and is accompanied by a moral instinct of good and evil.<sup>115</sup> To use a modern expression, what he is saying here is that essentially men are hard-wired to know God, or to derive a knowledge of God. Here his thinking corresponds to Calvin's *sensus divinitatus*. The third way is God's revelation in Scripture. Yet importantly, this mode of divine revelation is as self-evincing as is God's revelation in nature and in conscienceness. Just as we by an innate and necessary predisposition see God in nature and in our consciences, so by a similar innate predisposition which is implanted within us by the Spirit, see God in his word. After noting that God has so framed the world and us, that by mere contemplation of his creation, God is made known to us, and indeed,

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p., 83.

<sup>109</sup>I should add that it was Augustine who first systematically defined faith as a trust in the testimony of an authority.

<sup>110</sup>Works, vol., 4, p., 45. C.f., vol., 4, p., 55. Regarding the evidential value of miracles, Owen insightfully notes. "Yea, suppose that God should speak to us from heaven as he spake to Moses or as he spake to Christ; or from some certain place, as Numb. vii.89; how should we be able to know it to be the voice of God? Cannot Satan cause a voice to be heard in the air, and so deceive us? Or, may not there be some way (in this kind) found out, whereby men might impose upon us their delusions?...Must we not rest at last in that *to theion* which accompanies the true voice of God evidencing itself, and ascertaining the soul beyond all possibility of mistake?" Works, vol., 16, p., 318.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., vol., 4, pp., 45-47.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., pp., 56 and 58.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., pp., 55 and 57,

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., vol., 16, p., 309.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p., 310.

we are rendered inexcusable for our rejection of God in creation, yet likewise, in giving out his word to be the foundation of the world, by his Spirit, implanted within that word the very character and mark of divinity.<sup>116</sup>

Owen says it well:

And when God reveals himself,—that is, his “eternal power and Godhead,”—by “the things that are made,” the works of his creation... the reason of men, stirred up and brought into exercise thereby, does infallibly conclude, upon the evidence that is in that revelation, that there is a God, and he is eternally powerful and wise, without any farther arguments to prove the revelation to be true. So when God by his word reveals himself unto the minds of men, thereby, exciting and bringing forth faith into exercise, or the power of the soul to assent unto the truth upon testimony, that *revelation* does no less *infallibly evidence* itself to be divine or from God, without any external arguments to prove it so to be.<sup>117</sup>

Furthermore, for Owen, belief in the divinity of the word can be described in modern terms as a basic belief. Again he uses the analogy of light.

Whatever is light does so; that is, it does whatever is necessary on its own part for its manifestation and discovery... Light requires neither proof nor testimony for its evidence. Let the sun arise in the firmament, and there is no need of witnesses to prove and confirm, unto a seeing man, that it is the day. A small candle will so do. Let the least child bring a candle into a room that before was dark, and it would be a madness to go about to prove by substantial witnesses--men of gravity and authority--that light is brought in. Does it not evince itself with an assurance above all that can be obtained by any testimony whatever? Whatever is light, either naturally or morally so, is revealed by its being so. That which evidences not itself is not light.

That the Scripture is a light we shall see immediately. That it is so, or can be called so, unless it has the nature and property of light, to evidence itself as well as to give light unto others in any tolerable correspondency of speech be allowed. Whether light spiritual and intellectual regarding the mind, or natural respect to bodily sight, be firstly and properly light from whence the other is by allusion denominated, I need not now inquire. Both have the same properties in their several kinds.<sup>118</sup>

Owen then adduces a battery of verses which compare the word of God to a light, and just because some men may be so blind that they cannot see its light, this is in no way impeaches the efficacy of its light.<sup>119</sup> When we stand in the light of the sun, do we need to verify that light by an external source? No. We know that the light of the sun is shining,

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p., 312.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., vol., 4, p., 89. Here he also says well:

If I shall say to a man that the sun is risen and shines on the earth, if he question or deny it, and ask how shall I prove it, it is a sufficient answer to say that it *manifest itself* in and by its own light. And if he add that this is no proof to him, for he does not discern it; suppose that to be so, it is a satisfactory answer to tell him that he is blind; and if he be not so, that it is to no purpose to argue with him who *contradicts his own sense*, for leaves no *rule* whereby what is spoken may be tried or judged on. (p., 89).

Further, it is clear that for Owen the knowledge gleaned from nature which is spoken of in Romans 1 is not discursive and speculative, but a knowledge in men, in all men, not just a few learned philosophers. (C.f., Owen, Biblical Theology, pp., 31-32.) Thus, Owen did not consider the knowledge of God in Romans 1 to be derived via formal cosmological or teleological syllogisms.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., vol., 16, p., 320. Owen's language and argument here is strikingly similar to that of Alvin Plantinga and the "Reformed Epistemologists." This is not the only argument from analogy Owen uses. I have here adduced only the one, which is, in my mind, the most self-evincing.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., pp., 320 and 321.

immediately and basically. So too, with the light of the word of God, do we need an external reason to verify its light? No. And if men refuse to see the light of God in the word, should we now seek to validate that light upon other grounds, as if that light is not self-attesting? No. To this end he will cite 2 Cor. 4:2-6 which states that for the believer, God's light has shone into his heart,<sup>120</sup> yet whereas for the unbeliever, if they cannot see this light, it is due to a blindness and veil, but not to any defect in the light itself.<sup>121</sup> Owen:

Hence there is none of them who have gained any experiences by observation of God's dealings with them but shall, although they know not the ways and methods of the Spirit's operations by the word, yea, can say, with the man unto whom the Lord Jesus restored his sight, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." This power of the word, as the instrument of the Spirit of God for the communication of saving light and knowledge unto the minds of men, the apostle declares 2 Cor. 3:18, 4:6-6.<sup>122</sup>

Regarding the testimony of the Spirit, this testimony is not a vocal or outward testimony, nor is it apart from the word, but in and through the word does the Spirit testify. It is a testimony which communicates light. It effectually enables spiritual judgment whereby we may know the truth of God. And it imparts an infallible testimony to the word of God.<sup>123</sup> It is a testimony not to the evidences directly, but to the authority of divinity expressing itself in Scripture. "I say in general, that the Holy Spirit gives testimony unto and evinces the divine authority of the word by its power operations and divine effects on the souls of them that do believe... 'This testimony is private in the minds only of them on whom this work is wrought,' and therefore I do press it no farther, but 'he that believes has the witness in himself,' 1 Jn 5:10." Thankfully, he does press it further, for he will say of this testimony that it has greater cogency and efficacy than any other testimony,<sup>124</sup> and triumphantly, he will conclude that the effect of this testimony is such that,

*God by his Holy Spirit does secretly and effectually persuade and satisfy the minds and souls of believers in the divine truth an authority of the Scriptures, whereby he infallibly secures their faith against all objections and temptations whatsoever so that they can safely and comfortably dispose of their their souls in all their concerns, with respect unto this life and eternity, according to the undecievable truth and guidance of it.*<sup>125</sup>

#### Evaluation.

Apologetics in the 20th century. Many things have changed since Thomas, Calvin and Owen first penned their thoughts. What we now think of as Thomism is as far from true Thomism as can almost be imagined. Something has happened. Something has changed. Identifying that change is not easy. Vos notes that as a result of the Cartesian challenge the Roman Catholic Thomists pressed into service Thomistic natural theology which sought to prove that God is, to now serve as a *foundation* to belief in God. What happened was that these Catholic Thomists embraced foundationalism, marrying it to classical Thomism. Thomism thus mutated and evolved. And at some point Anglo-American Reformed apologists apparently followed suit. There is a need to document and identify this profound shift from the truly classical model of apologetics to what is now clearly a foundationalist model of apologetics. At some point, the Anglo-American Reformed embraced a secular definition of "reason" and of "rationality" and then redefined their apologetics and epistemology accordingly. On the European Continent though, the Dutch under the influence of men like Kuyper and Bavinck retained the classical perspective. Unfortunately, Thomism was now only ever seen through the lenses of the "new" and "improved" Thomism. Thus, this explains many of the severe criticisms Thomas receives at the hands of men like Van Til.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., vol., 4, p., 97.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., vol., 16, pp., 321-322.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., vol., 4, p., 98.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., vol 16, pp., 326 and 328.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., vol., 4, pp., 94 and 95.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p., 99-100.[Emph., Owen's.]

<sup>126</sup>Vos documents this incorrect attitude and the evolution of Thomism well, pp., 67-69, 91-93 and 114-115.

But more specifically, in regard to the in-house debate between classical apologists and presuppositionalists, the question must take different focus. It should be more than clear now that there are continuities and discontinuities from presuppositionalism and so-called classical apologetics. Some of these may be outlined. In regard to presuppositionalism, the major continuity is with the common opinion that the word of God is self-attesting. It is *autopistic*. It is not to be grounded in external arguments. I am sure Owen would have heartily agreed with Van Til's metaphor regarding the futility of the idea that one should prove the light of the sun by the light of a flashlight.<sup>127</sup> The light of the sun needs no further grounding arguments. However, there are two clear discontinuities between modern presuppositionalism and the truly classical position of Calvin and Owen. It is clear that the Reformed never operated by a transcendental apologetic. Nor were they opposed to evidences being stated in a non-transcendental fashion. But having said that, and though the evidences clearly were sufficient in and of themselves, and adequate to render unbelief inexcusable and culpable, the evidences could never be any basis for faith; for that would have made faith an assent to what can be seen, that is demonstrated, and that would be a contrary definition of faith as found in Hebrews 11:1. Furthermore, the depravity of the natural man meant that the evidence would never receive an impartial hearing. It would be like trying to prove that my flashlight is on to a man born blind from birth. This must have some impact upon how we view the role of evidences in relation to the claims of modern evidentialism. Thus, these evidences can never serve as a basis for faith.<sup>128</sup>

In terms of modern classical apologetics, it should be clear by now that they are not classical, that they do not image the Reformed (even Thomist or Scotian traditions) prior to the late 17th century. Rather, the modern method can only be traced back substantially to the 19th century, and specifically only to the Anglo-American theological scene at that.<sup>129</sup> Their real continuity lies with the fact that the Reformed maintained a healthy commitment to natural theology, which later men like Kuyper, Bavinck and Van Til would downplay if not deny outright. But of course here too there must be a qualifier. Classic natural theology was never presented under a foundationalist matrix or grid. It was never that the preambles of the faith were to form a necessary foundation, a preconditional set of beliefs as modern classical apologetics tend to argue. These men were not theological foundationalists. Their definition of knowledge, opinion and faith, alone, precludes them from being seriously considered as being the fathers of modern classical apologetics. Herein lies the hinge of the discontinuity between modern classical apologetics and that which is truly the classical position. The truly classical tradition rejected the foundationalist criteria of reason and reasonableness.

In terms of modern developments, there is a rich potential here. Firstly, I must call attention to an apparent evolution within modern classical apologetics. For example, William Lane Craig will argue that the testimony of the Spirit is a self-attesting witness, truly basic and needing no other foundation, and which is sufficient to rebut all objections.<sup>130</sup> I am sure John Gerstner would have objected to this. Craig can only say what he does because of the impact of the work of Alvin Plantinga and others. Further, in regard to the actual classical tradition, it is not just that we can demonstrate that belief

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<sup>127</sup>C.f., Owen, vol., 16, p., 308.

<sup>128</sup>It is relevant to note that even though there is a clear absence to discussions of the speculative proofs, these lines of argument were not ignored by the Reformed since Calvin. They figured heavily on Protestant Scholasticism on the continent and even among the English Puritans such as John Preston. But it is important to note, there is a sense where these proofs were treated in much the same way as the other evidences. As I read the Protestant Scholastic use of these proofs, they were not used to foundationally ground the preambles of the faith (they were never used to ground the word after the manner set out by Warfield and SGL). For the Reformed, unbelief was never the result of a knowing problem, but of a willing problem.

<sup>129</sup>It is important to note here that on the continent the true classical position continued to dominate in Protestant Scholasticism, c.f., Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Michigan, Baker Books, 1978), p., 25.

<sup>130</sup>William Lane Craig, *Classical Apologetics in Five Views on Apologetics*, ed by Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), p., 36-38. The reader should note Craig's reference to the distinction in the magisterial and ministerial use of reason. This distinction works to reverse the older trend see reason as a magisterial tool (see, for example, Dabney above).



in God is permissively rational, but that we can adduce positive arguments that it is positively rational. These arguments can be stated transcendentally, even in a broadly circular manner.<sup>131</sup>

#### Conclusion.

It has puzzled me for a long time now why it should be insisted upon that having been enlightened by the light of the Gospel, wherein my darkened mind is now illumined, it should be demanded that I now judge this enlightened state by the epistemic light of my former darkened state of mind. For surely, it is like a man finally making his way out of a very long and very dark cave. Now he stands in the glory of the light of day. Now he understands and sees things clearly as never before. Before he lived in the shadows with only firelight to illumine him. But now, voices from within the cave insist that he must judge the light of day by the light of the camp fires deep within the bowels of his former cave home. Why should he allow himself to be compelled to imagine that he must now judge this light of day by the terms and frames of references known only to the voices deep within the darkness? Has he not now been set free? Is it not the case that he is only now truly making sound rational judgements? Why is it that those in the cave, alone can determine what is rational, what is reasonable and what is sound? As Christians we do not do this in other areas of our thinking. In no way do I feel compelled to have my sense of morality judged by the frames of reference of the atheological world around me. At no point do I feel the sting of the charge of moral irrationality because my sense of morality does not comport with secular standards. Why, then, should I now imagine that the rationality or reasonableness of my faith be grounded in atheological criteria of what is reasonable? Furthermore, let it not be thought by any means that this is a *blind* faith, or a *leap* of faith. Rather, in the highest way conceivable, it is a profoundly *enlightened* faith. It is the enlightened, truly enlightened, response to the testimony of God in his word.

Owen states it well when he says:

This power of the word, as the instrument of the Spirit of God for the communication of saving light and knowledge unto the minds of men, the apostle declares 2 Cor. 3:18, 4:2-6. By the efficacy of this power does he evidence the Scripture to be the word of God. Those who believe find it by a glorious, supernatural light introduced into their minds, whereby they who before saw nothing in a distinct, affecting manner in spirituals, do now clearly discern the truth, the glory, the beauty, and excellency of heavenly mysteries, and have their minds transformed into their image and likeness.<sup>132</sup>

In the final analysis, Aquinas, Calvin and Owen argued that if faith is to be grounded upon demonstration, faith itself would be destroyed!

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<sup>131</sup>By that I mean this: clearly Calvin and Owen considered the evidences to be objectively valid even though atheologians may reject them. As we stand in within the circle of faith, we know they are valid and sound, because now, our reason has been set free. From within this circle, it is we who are indeed the ones making the truly rational conclusions regarding the evidences, not those outside the circle of faith.

<sup>132</sup>Owen, vol., 4, p., 98.

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