

Helseth argues that the Old Princeton thinkers, such as Alexander, Hodge, Warfield, and Machen, were not rationalists (as many claim today) but had a nuanced epistemology including subjective and emotional factors. I think he and they are right, and that Helseth is also right in deriving this epistemology from Scripture and the Reformed theological tradition. His argument is cogent, and it clears away the debris of unjust criticism so that we can again be delighted in the insights of Old Princeton Calvinism. As it turns out, the Old Princetonians are an attractive alternative to the confusions of modern liberalism and postfoundationalism.

—**John M. Frame**, J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

Challenging the prevailing academic views can be a lonely place. Paul Kjoss Helseth seems not only comfortable with the challenge, but adequate to the task. Armed with primary sources from major Old Princeton scholars, Helseth critically examines the prevailing notions of academic “orthodoxy” concerning the religious epistemology of Machen, Hodge, and Warfield and finds them wanting. Helseth . . . then develops the insights of Princeton theology and its challenge of nineteenth-century theological liberalism to challenge contemporary trends prevalent in postconservative theology. While not everyone may share his assessment of this particular trend, Helseth is conscientious enough in his critique that all disagreement must be equally thoughtful. While standing outside of the academic mainstream can be a lonely place, I suspect that soon this “voice calling in the wilderness” will be received as a clarion call joined by many.

—**Todd Bates**, Associate Professor of Philosophy, California Baptist University, Riverside, CA

At last—a book that gets the Princeton theology right! Helseth’s “unorthodox proposal” challenges the commonly held view that Alexander, Hodge, and Warfield compromised their Reformed theology by a commitment to Scottish Common Sense philosophy that rationalized their theology and apologetics and stressed head over heart in Christian living. Helseth’s treatment is scholarly,

patient, and careful. He has read the Princetonians widely and with great care to rescue their “holistic epistemology” from the charge that they were “the purveyors of an essentially humanistic philosophy rather than the champions of Reformed orthodoxy.” This book not only corrects an injustice to the Princetonians but also argues persuasively that “contemporary evangelicals would be much better off if they did theology more like the theologians at Old Princeton Seminary.”

—**David B. Calhoun**, Professor Emeritus of Church History,  
Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis

Paul Helseth is to be commended for challenging a common but wrong-headed interpretation of the theologians of Old Princeton Theological Seminary and attempting to set the record straight. His familiarity with the primary sources, his more accurate reading of Alexander, Hodge, Warfield, and Machen, and his superior scholarship enable him to dismantle the prevailing view and to demonstrate that these theologians were not the blind captives of Common Sense Realism that the “orthodox” view has portrayed them to be. Rather, Helseth shows from their own words that these Princetonians were faithful to a genuinely Reformed epistemology. In the process, he shows as well that the misguided prevailing view has been used in the service of a growing departure from a truly evangelical theology and the movement toward a neoliberalism that is as dangerous as the old liberalism. This book offers a much-needed corrective to both current historical scholarship and current theological directions. I recommend it highly on both counts.

—**Terry A. Chrisope**, Professor of History and Bible,  
Missouri Baptist University, St. Louis

The question of how we should interpret Old Princeton epistemology and theological methodology is a watershed issue in the current battles between conservative and postconservative evangelicals. Paul Helseth convincingly shows that, rather than accommodating wholeheartedly to Enlightenment rationalism and Scottish Common Sense philosophy, the Princetonians articulated their epistemology well within their Reformed

tradition. The Old Princeton theologians believed that the soul is a unity of mind, will, and emotions; thus, apprehension of truth is not only a cognitive activity, but a moral one as well. This “unorthodox” interpretation of the Old Princeton theology flies in the face of the current consensus on Old Princeton and has serious implications for the legitimacy of many postconservative evangelical commitments. Helseth has done his readers a great service with his careful research and insightful analysis of one of the most hotly contested issues in evangelicalism today.

—George Coon, Associate Professor of Theology and Church History, Calvary Baptist Seminary, Lansdale, PA

From time to time a book comes along that reverses a widely shared paradigm. This wonderful study is such a volume. It presents a much-needed corrective to the “orthodox” interpretation of the Old Princeton theology, which is that Common Sense Realism and rationalism so shaped the approach of Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and their peers that they often sounded more like Enlightenment thinkers than Calvinists. In his characteristically careful and thorough manner, without denying some appropriation of the prevailing philosophy by these giants, Helseth shows that they were theologians of the heart, in essential continuity with the Reformation approach. In the bargain we are given a sane look into the relation of Kuyper and Warfield, Machen and Van Til, and much more. The book is especially timely in that postconservative evangelicals often claim that Old Princeton elevated ideas at the expense of piety. Helseth puts that view to rest, in a powerful plea for right doctrine alongside fervent piety. This is essential reading for all who care about that balance.

—William Edgar, Professor of Apologetics, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

Helseth has engaged in a compelling and thorough reexamination of the theologically rooted epistemology of the Old Princetonians, and then used the results to offer a winsome and penetrating critique of the so-called postconservative evangelical movement. He

demonstrates convincingly that the giants of Old Princeton were not—contra much scholarly consensus—simply beholden to modern and Enlightenment thinking. Rather, the Old Princetonians were true Augustinians and stand in the line of the best of Reformed thinking, including their thinking on the nature of knowledge, whether of God or of the created order. Like Augustine, Hugh of St. Victor, Calvin, and Pascal, the Old Princetonians repeatedly argue that knowledge in the truest sense is always related to—and dependent on—the state of one’s heart. Helseth shows that “right reason” is rooted in being rightly related to the risen Jesus. Helseth also demonstrates that at the end of the day, it may not be the postconservatives who offer the most compelling way for evangelicals, young or old, to resist and counter the acids of modernity. He demonstrates, paradoxically, that one of the most promising roads to be traveled in attempting to faithfully and properly follow Christ in our modern and so-called postmodern world might actually take one right through New Jersey.

—**Bradley G. Green**, Associate Professor of Christian Studies,  
Union University, Jackson, TN

I have followed Paul Helseth’s development of this research for almost fifteen years. His abilities and analysis remain, even if we quibble over a few matters, among the most impressive in this field. In *Right Reason*, he attempts, and I believe largely succeeds, to rehabilitate an important aspect of Reformed epistemology in America. Rather than repeating the often-incorrect caricatures of some of the strongest Princeton leaders, Helseth has cut through the mist in order to clearly present their thinking on key epistemological matters. He does for these Princetonians what Richard Muller has done for Calvin’s successors. We need this corrective, and I am deeply thankful for Dr. Helseth’s research and fine work in this needed volume.

—**David Hall**, Senior Pastor, Midway Presbyterian Church,  
Powder Springs, GA

Not very long ago, evangelical Protestants in the United States regarded the theology of Old Princeton Seminary as a source of

wisdom and inspiration because of its scholarly rigor and theological depth. Today's evangelicals often view Old Princeton in a very different and antagonistic light, as wooden, rationalistic theologians who have little to teach those living in postmodern times. Paul Helseth believes this is an unwelcome development and defends the Princeton theologians, Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, Benjamin Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen, as thoughtful students of Scripture and defenders of orthodox Christianity whom evangelicals need to read and heed. This is a timely defense of Old Princeton and thoughtful challenge to the confusion that bedevils contemporary evangelical theology.

—**D. G. Hart**, Adjunct Professor of Church History,  
Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, CA

Paul Helseth's book is a notable example of intellectual reclamation and recovery. By careful research the author shines a critical new light on the oft-repeated claim that Princeton theology was deeply in debt to Enlightenment rationalism, and especially to the Common Sense philosophy of Thomas Reid. Helseth claims that its roots lie not in the Enlightenment, but in the Augustinian anthropology of the Puritans and of Reformed orthodoxy. Thorough and persuasive, Helseth sensitively and knowledgeably discusses the issues of faith and reason, particularly in relation to apologetics, and then assesses the strength of the critique of postconservative orthodoxy against the Princeton theology.

—**Paul Helm**, Teaching Fellow, Theology and Philosophy,  
Regent College, Vancouver, BC

*“Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* is a major accomplishment on many fronts. Historically Paul Helseth advances the four-decade reassessment of Old Princeton theology. Philosophically he demonstrates that Princeton advocates Alexander, Hodge, Warfield, and Machen, by rejecting speculation and emphasizing the moral aspects of “right reason,” are more fully allied with the Reformers and Augustine than with their Enlightenment predecessors. Apologetically Helseth contends that evidentialism and presuppositionalism may have more in common than previously acknowledged.

And his trenchant analysis of postconservative rejection of Princeton contributes substantially to contemporary evangelicalism. *Right Reason* is well worth reading to follow Helseth's intriguing themes, skillfully woven together.

—**Andrew Hofferker**, Professor of Church History Emeritus,  
Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS

Unlike so many who never take the necessary time and effort to grapple with the Old Princeton theologians and instead rely on hand-me-down opinions, Paul Helseth has coupled a close reading of Old Princetonians with great sensitivity to their concerns and the context in which they wrote. Helseth demonstrates over and over again that much of what has been written about Old Princeton stands in need of major revision. Anyone wanting a reliable analysis of the Old Princetonians should be directed to Paul Helseth's work.

—**Gary L. W. Johnson**, Senior Pastor,  
Church of the Redeemer, Mesa, AZ

In spite of the daunting title, "*Right Reason*" and *the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal*, this book is a not-to-be-missed discussion of the spirited modern debate within evangelicalism with regard to the nature of truth and the place of doctrine. Helseth elegantly and convincingly argues for the biblical and Reformed nature of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century theological orthodoxy and shows how contemporary postconservative evangelicalism, in misrepresenting as rationalism the great achievement of our Princeton fathers, inadvertently exposes itself as a contemporary version of the very liberalism that Hodge, Warfield, and Machen brilliantly unmasked in their day.

—**Peter Jones**, Director, truthXchange; Scholar-in-Residence and Adjunct Professor, Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, CA

Helseth urges postconservative and conservative evangelicals alike . . . to heed Old Princeton's critique of theological liberalism. He corrects widespread misconceptions about the Princetonians' thought and applies that thought to an incalculably important controversy of today.

This thoroughly researched and insightfully argued work merits the attention of all thinking evangelicals.

—**Dennis W. Jowers**, Associate Professor of Theology & Apologetics, Faith Evangelical College & Seminary, Tacoma, WA

*Right Reason* is both a stinging and stunning defense that the Princetonians shared in the theological and epistemological assumptions of the Reformers rather than accommodating their theology to the Enlightenment rationalism of Scottish Common Sense Realism of their day. The book comprehensively demonstrates that the Princetonians were not Enlightenment rationalists, an allegation so often leveled by postconservatives. Consequently, Helseth demonstrates that the current debate between conservatives and postconservatives over the role and purpose of doctrine is actually a debate about the very nature of Scripture. Helseth has given the church an incredible gift. *Right Reason* is an outstanding achievement marked by thoroughness and fair scholarship, all in a readable, accessible presentation.

—**David Mappes**, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA

There are those in contemporary evangelicalism who see Old Princeton and what it represents as a relic of a bygone era. Days gone and, thankfully in their view, forgotten. I am mystified. More importantly, Professor Helseth is mystified, and in this book he shows rather deftly how the Princetonians are woefully misunderstood and misinterpreted and too readily and easily cast aside. Helseth further shows how—once the Princetonians are understood rightly, once this critical concept of “right reason” is understood correctly—the Princetonians are a healthy and worthy model for theologians today. Ignore what people claim that the Princetonians said, and read this book to find out what they really said.

Next to the writings of the Princetonians themselves—the grand works of Hodge, Warfield, and company—this is the best and the most important book on Old Princeton ever written.

—**Stephen J. Nichols**, Research Professor of Christianity and Culture, Lancaster Bible College, Lancaster, PA

This book needed to be written in order to reinvigorate the evangelical view of the inspiration of Scripture as held by Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen. Written in that way, it now needs to be read and recognized by those who claim to know and share this as the “Princeton view.” When this presentation is known, it will not be possible to dismiss the Princeton view as simply an outworking of Scottish Common Sense philosophy. It will be acknowledged as drawn from the Scriptures and intended as the biblical view of inspiration.

Buy this book!

—Roger Nicole, Professor of Theology Emeritus,  
Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

Paul Helseth’s detailed and careful arguments against the received view of Old Princeton’s epistemology are convincing and possess the conceptual precision to break the stale impasse in evangelical hermeneutics and epistemology and to open up refreshing lines of research.

—Walter J. Schultz, Professor of Philosophy,  
Northwestern College, St. Paul

Grounded in painstaking and thorough engagement with the writings of Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and B. B. Warfield, as well as today’s debates about them, Paul Helseth’s *“Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind* issues an important challenge to the dominant way of reading the Old Princetonians—a reading that has deeply influenced many interpretations of contemporary evangelicalism. Emotions can run deep in debates about these interpretations, and these emotions occasionally surface when Helseth responds to charged statements by some postconservatives. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that scholars on all sides of these questions will give careful and sober attention to Helseth’s contention that the Princetonians—far from being in hock to Enlightenment rationalism—held a view of “right reason” deeply indebted to classic lines of Augustinian and Reformed thought. Helseth’s argument in *“Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind* deserves a careful reading by all who are concerned about the important questions regarding the Princetonians



and their place in understanding the past, present, and future of the evangelical church.

—**Bradley N. Seeman**, Assistant Professor of Philosophy,  
Taylor University, Upland, IN

Old Princeton theology and epistemology is often caricatured as modernistic rationalism, with no room for the crucial elements of subjective experience. But in this careful study, Paul Helseth persuasively argues that the Princetonians saw the reception of truth as involving the “whole soul,” apprehended by the regenerate with “right” (or saving) reason and uniting both head and heart. Helseth not only overturns a historical misunderstanding, but also undermines a common narrative used to explain the development of North American evangelicalism. In addition, his work provides a practical and theological corrective for the life of the church and the academy today. I hope it will be widely read and appropriated.

—**Justin Taylor**, Managing Editor, *ESV Study Bible*

I confess I have trouble containing my enthusiasm over the publication of *Right Reason*, but why should I try? In these pages, Paul Helseth has done a fantastic job of defending the theology and theologians of Old Princeton, and has done so in a way that demonstrates their continuing relevance in these days of postorthodoxy.

—**Douglas Wilson**, Pastor of Christ Church and Senior Fellow,  
New Saint Andrews College, Moscow, ID

This book is overdue. The apologetic task as understood by the Old Princetonians is too often mischaracterized and too seldom investigated with thoroughness and care. Helseth has read the primary sources more thoroughly and more carefully than most and has provided a needed corrective. His *Right Reason* deserves a wide hearing and will serve well toward a more accurate understanding of the Princetonians’ robust doctrine of man and sin and corresponding apologetic outlook. Heartily recommended.

—**Fred G. Zaspel**, Pastor, Reformed Baptist Church, Franconia, PA



“Right Reason”  
*and the*  
Princeton Mind



“Right Reason”  
*and the*  
Princeton Mind

AN UNORTHODOX PROPOSAL

PAUL KJOSS HELSETH

  
P U B L I S H I N G  
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This book is dedicated  
in the hope of the resurrection  
to  
Hovald Kjoss Helseth  
September 17, 1934–January 3, 2007  
and  
Torger Kjoss Helseth  
June 5, 2008

It is because we cannot be robbed of God's providence that we know, amid whatever encircling gloom, that all things shall work together for good to those that love him. It is because we cannot be robbed of God's providence that we know that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ—not tribulation, nor anguish, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword. . . . Were not God's providence over all, could trouble come without his sending, were Christians the possible prey of this or the other fiendish enemy, when perchance God was musing, or gone aside, or on a journey, or sleeping, what certainty of hope could be ours? "Does God send trouble?" Surely, surely. He and he only. To the sinner in punishment, to his children in chastisement. To suggest that it does not always come from his hands is to take away all our comfort.<sup>1</sup>

1. B. B. Warfield, "God's Providence Over All," in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 2 vols., ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 1:110.





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# Foreword:

## JOHN D. WOODBRIDGE



Voltaire (1694–1778), the famous French *philosophe*, sparkled as a brilliant and witty conversationalist in the *salons* of Parisian women of letters and at the *Café Procope* in Paris. During the so-called “Enlightenment,” Voltaire often starred at center stage in European culture. Not only did he write popular plays (*Irene*, 1778) and pen provocative essays and fascinating stories (*Candide*, 1759), but he battled against social injustice and intolerance (the Calas Affair, 1762–65). As a prolific wordsmith, he bequeathed to later generations an astonishing legacy of fifteen million words.

Voltaire often used his remarkable literary gifts to criticize contemporary Christians, especially those he deemed “superstitious,” hypocritical, or power hungry. After all, it was they who peopled the “Age of Superstition,” the other age besides the “Age of Lights” (*Siècle des lumières*) in which Voltaire said he lived. He worried that defenders of the Christian faith remained so powerful in the eighteenth century that they might thwart the advance of the “Age of Lights” that he and other *philosophes* were promoting with missionary zeal. The article *Philosophe* in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* drew a sharp distinction between *philosophes* and Christians: “Reason is to the *philosophe* what grace is to the Christian. Grace determines

the Christian to act; reason determines the *philosophe*.” In 1769, Diderot complained to David Hume about Christianity’s residual influence among their contemporaries: “Ah, my dear philosopher! Let us weep and wail over the lot of philosophy. We preach wisdom to the deaf, and we are still far indeed from the age of reason.” By the 1770s, Voltaire bemoaned the fact that the “philosophic” movement devoted to the propagation of *la philosophie* was in noticeable retreat.

As a worldly wise gadfly, Voltaire spread his criticisms around—beyond the ranks of European Christians. For example, on occasion he launched sharp barbs at historians. One barb was especially painful. Probably with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, he wrote: “History is a bag of tricks we play on the dead.” In this brief dictum, Voltaire reduced the study of history to malicious tomfoolery.

Most historians, even radical postmodernists, bristle if aware of Voltaire’s charge. They shudder at the characterization that they are purposeful “tricksters” who manipulate their subjects from the past for personal advantage or to enjoy a playful whim. After all, do not many historians carefully eschew misrepresentations of the “facts”? Do they not try to eliminate or minimize the influence of personal biases from overpowering and distorting the way they relate historical narratives? Do they not assume their “accounts” or “discourses” contain at least a modicum of “truth”? Even the most radical postmodernist historians—those who have abandoned the quest to practice “objective history” and compare the doing of history to the writing of propaganda—believe their own analyses are somehow “reliable.” Ironically, a number of postmodernists who dispute the very existence of “truth” have become publicly vexed and angry when the “truthfulness” of their own pronouncements is challenged or questioned.

As for Voltaire’s claim that “History is a bag of tricks,” this rebuke does not fully represent his final judgment on the discipline of history. After all, he was a serious historian himself. He devoted five years to researching and writing *The Age of Louis XIV* (1751)—a landmark historical piece. He apparently believed he had represented the royal actors in his story in a reliable manner.

Despite the postmodern onslaught of the last four decades, many historians still pursue and practice a chastened form of “objective history.” They admittedly invoke less precise standards for what constitutes “objectivity” in historical writing than the precise measurements natural scientists employ to describe their “objective,” repeatable experiments. Sometimes historians cite as a heuristic stopgap measure their commitment to peer review as a means to protect them from slipping into radical personal subjectivity in historical writing. Historical articles and books generally undergo a robust review process before they are deemed worthy contributions to the scholarly world. Expert reviewers for university presses and scholarly journals are charged to offer ostensibly fair-minded assessments of the quality of manuscripts submitted for publication. Then, after publication, works are further reviewed in scholarly journals. Reviewers often point out weaknesses and strengths of the publication and sometimes note suspect ideological proclivities of the author—biases that might compromise or jade the “truthfulness” of the book’s central contentions.

Should well-respected reviewers concur that a particular study is genuinely superlative, their approval might propel the book toward becoming a “standard,” authoritative source on the topic it addresses. Other historians who read the positive reviews may conclude that so persuasive and conclusive is the book’s coverage and central argument that the need no longer exists to do further research in the field. Did not distinguished reviewers of the volume, the quality control gatekeepers for the historians’ guild, put seals of approval on the newly minted “standard” interpretation?

With the passage of time, a consensus in favor of the “standard” interpretation may grow even stronger among historians. Additional studies may appear that seem to confirm its basic premises. The new “standard” interpretation takes on the allure of a historical “orthodoxy”; that is, a received interpretation that knowledgeable scholars in the field should adopt regarding the topic under consideration. The “orthodoxy” can become so ingrained in the collective consciousness of the historical community that few historians ever contemplate doubting its validity.

In this context, any enterprising scholar who should dare to offer an alternative, “unorthodox proposal,” to the effect that the “orthodox” interpretation may need serious revision, undertakes a daunting challenge. To gain a respectable hearing, he or she must offer compelling evidence and arguments in support of the claim. Longstanding “orthodoxies” of historical interpretation are not easily dislodged.

This brings us to the present study by Professor Paul Kjoss Helseth, an accomplished theologian, philosopher, and historian. In his “Unorthodox Proposal,” Professor Helseth, writing in the respected tradition of a gatekeeper reviewer, challenges the validity of one of the most influential “orthodox” interpretations related to the history of American evangelicalism and fundamentalism. Helseth has an especially keen mind and a gracious spirit. He does not believe the historians who created this “orthodox” or consensus interpretation did so with malicious intentions à la Voltaire. Moreover, Helseth recognizes that some of the arguments sustaining the “orthodox” interpretation possess merit. At the same time, his close textual reading of pertinent primary sources leads him to conclude that in aggregate, the “orthodox” interpretation should be reconsidered and his “unorthodox” proposal should replace it. No postmodern historian or partisan of Voltaire’s silly sally against historians, Helseth assumes that his mustering of substantial documentary evidence should still count for something in convincing readers they ought to give his “unorthodox proposal” a fair hearing.

What is the “orthodox” historical interpretation Professor Helseth calls on scholars to reconsider, if not jettison? He contests the “orthodox” proposal that the Presbyterian professors at Old Princeton Seminary (1812–1929) betrayed traditional Reformed theology by their alleged claim that human reason was in certain significant ways unaffected by the fall. The proposal suggests the Princetonians were prompted to accept this anti-Augustinian teaching owing to the supposed influence of Common Sense Realism and Baconianism in shaping their theology.

The origins of this “orthodox” historiography date back to at least the 1950s. In a seminal article, “The Scottish Philosophy and

American Theology,”<sup>1</sup> Professor Sydney Ahlstrom of Yale University laid out the interpretation in a cogent manner. Thereafter numerous distinguished historians adopted it, added to it, and converted it into an “orthodox” historical interpretation.

For self-identified Reformed Christians, the implications of the interpretation are no less than staggering. This is particularly the case for Reformed Christians who have appreciated and appropriated elements of the theological reflections of the Old Princetonians. The thesis suggests that if Reformed Christians embrace aspects of the Old Princetonians’ theology, they thereby become doctrinal innovators, philosophically “modernists”—and betrayers of critically important doctrines of the Reformed faith. Believing that these are in fact the entailments of espousing the theology of the Old Princetonians, a number of commentators have criticized the “Old Princetonians’ theology” in very severe terms. Little doubt exists that the theological reputation of the Old Princetonians has suffered gravely in consequence.

The late George H. Williams, professor of church history at Harvard Divinity School, was once asked what trait he thought should characterize a historian. His answer was quite surprising. He replied that among other traits, a historian should be generous. This generosity would exhibit itself when a historian defends the reputation of people in the past who can no longer defend themselves. Perhaps Williams’s own academic career during which he called for a more sympathetic understanding of Anabaptists provides a superb example of what a historian’s generosity may look like in action.

In one sense, Professor Helseth’s study is also a work of generosity. In it, he calls on readers to reassess the validity of the “orthodox” interpretation regarding the Old Princetonians by giving his own “unorthodox” proposal a fair hearing. Should readers do this, they may discover a very persuasive new read of what the Old Princetonians actually believed regarding reason’s powers and the way theology should be constructed. Readers may become convinced that the Old Princetonians did not betray their Reformed tradition

1. *Church History* 24 (1955): 257–72.

## FOREWORD

but amplified it. In this study, Professor Helseth makes a formidable argument that such really is the case. Perhaps in decades ahead, his “unorthodox” proposal regarding the Old Princetonians may become the new “orthodox” proposal. Should this occur, it would signal a major historiographical revolution in American religious studies devoted to the history of evangelicalism and fundamentalism. It would constitute no small historical corrective, one that is needed. It would also represent a generous accomplishment in exonerating the reputations of the theologians at Old Princeton Seminary from unfortunate and misleading accusations.



# Preface



## A Tendentious Analysis?

A number of years ago I had the privilege of interacting with a prominent evangelical historian about the role of “right reason” in the Princeton Theology. In one e-mail exchange, this historian—a giant in the field with a well-earned reputation for competence and scholarly integrity—encouraged me to remember that there is a difference between real historical analysis and tendentious historical analysis. Whereas real historical analysis attempts to interpret a “historical situation” dispassionately, tendentious analysis often supplants real analysis, often in a duplicitous attempt to garner historical support for a particular proposal “for how theology should look [now].” In short, this scholar—a leading architect of the standard interpretation of the Princeton Theology who was skeptical of the thesis I was then and am now defending—was gently admonishing me “to differentiate historical assessment from theological construction” as I pursued a line of inquiry that is, at least as far as the standard interpretation of Old Princeton is concerned, nothing if not “unorthodox.”

While I appreciated this historian’s counsel and am willing to acknowledge that I think contemporary evangelicals would be much better off if they did theology more like the theologians at Old Princeton Seminary, I have yet to be convinced that the substance of the

proposal that follows is grounded in a tendentious—and therefore suspect—analysis of Old Princeton. In fact, I remain convinced that the forthcoming analysis is a needed corrective to a historiographical consensus that is itself grounded in a tendentious reading of the Princeton theologians, a reading that more and more scholars are recognizing is far too eager to view the Princetonians against the backdrop of Scottish Common Sense Realism and far too reluctant to consider the paradigm-shifting implications of Old Princeton’s holistic epistemology. Since this reluctance and the historical analysis that follows from it continue to have a profound impact on how much of contemporary evangelical theology in fact “looks [now],” at least some now suggest that the architects of the historiographical consensus—along with their theological allies—should ask themselves whether and to what extent their concern for tendentious analysis cuts both ways. Indeed, in light of the fact that the consensus of critical opinion is now being used, as Part Two of the forthcoming discussion attempts to make clear, to justify constructions of theology that some insist are barely Christian let alone faithfully evangelical, many are now asking—I think legitimately—whether it is time to revisit what has come to be regarded as the “orthodox” assessment of Old Princeton. Are the more progressive proposals that are currently being offered “for how [evangelical] theology should look [now]” really justified, these scholars are asking, by an interpretation of the Old Princetonians that is looking increasingly tenuous? Lest that question sound much more combative than I (and others) intend for it to sound, let me make it clear that to the extent that the study that follows has been compromised—despite my best efforts to the contrary—by historical eisegesis, then it is my prayer that the substance of the analysis will, to that extent, be rejected.

### **About the Dedication**

This book is dedicated to my father, Hovald Kjoss Helseth, who died of cancer on January 3, 2007, and to my first son, Torger Kjoss Helseth, who was stillborn on June 5, 2008. The last few years have been difficult for my immediate and extended family for a number of significant reasons. We have been refined by the bitter providence of

## PREFACE

God and learned a number of good but difficult lessons along the way. Two of the most painful trials have been the death of my dad, a man for whom I had and still have profound respect and affection, and the death of Torger, the son I will come to know in the new heavens and the new earth. The Warfield quote at the bottom of the dedication page is an indication of the depth of the influence that the theologians at Old Princeton Seminary have had on my worldview. I have come to love not just the Old Princetonians, but more importantly the God of the Old Princetonians, who is, as far as I can tell, the God of the Bible, the God whose hope-giving promises are yes and amen in Jesus.



# Acknowledgments



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# Introduction: An Unorthodox Proposal



## The Question

J. Gresham Machen is widely regarded as having been the leading spokesperson for Princeton Theological Seminary's Reformed orthodoxy during the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century. At a time when many within the denominational power structures of North America were calling for denominational unity on the basis of the accommodation of doctrine to the theological and philosophical presuppositions of modern biblical and historical scholarship, Machen, holding fast to the theological and philosophical presuppositions of the Princeton Theology (a major nineteenth- and early twentieth-century North American school of Reformed thought), was uncompromising in his condemnation of this growing trend. Denominational unity on the basis of doctrinal accommodationism cannot be tolerated, he argued, because doctrines are not merely the changing symbolic expressions of an ineffable subjective experience. Rather, they are the objective foundation upon which the Christian life is based, for they both participate in and provide a truthful witness to the historical facts that ground and shape the Christian religion.<sup>1</sup>

1. Machen insists that doctrines set forth the meaning of the facts upon which the Christian way of life is based. According to Machen, "The primitive Church was concerned not merely with what Jesus had said, but also, and primarily, with what Jesus had done. The world was

Given Machen's commitment to the objective rather than the merely subjective nature of religious truth, the question arises as to what was the driving force behind his repudiation of theological liberalism. Was his repudiation of liberal accommodationism informed by a theological commitment to the epistemological assumptions of the Reformed tradition? Or was it informed by a philosophical commitment to a kind of Enlightenment rationalism that came to reign in modern America, as many believe? Since the publication of Sydney Ahlstrom's seminal analysis of the influence of Scottish Common Sense Realism on the development of North American theology, the historiographical consensus has clearly been that Machen was a practitioner of the "Old Princeton" approach to apologetics, and as such indebted to epistemological assumptions that are diametrically opposed to those of the Reformed tradition.<sup>2</sup> The problem with the Princeton Theology, so the argument goes, is that while it made a show of orthodoxy, in fact it was built on an accommodation of theology to the epistemological assumptions of an essentially humanistic philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Those who concur with this analysis conclude that Machen's views are more or less suspect because

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to be redeemed through the proclamation of an event. And with the event went the meaning of the event; and the setting forth of the event with the meaning of the event was doctrine. These two elements are always combined in the Christian message. The narration of the facts is history; the narration of the facts with the meaning of the facts is doctrine. These two elements are always combined in the Christian message." J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990; 1923), 29. Note that I am using the word "objective" in this study not in the sense of Enlightenment foundationalism, i.e., to suggest that neutral, comprehensive, mathematically indubitable knowledge is possible for finite human beings, but in the much less ambitious sense that affirms that at least some true knowledge of real states of affairs in the "world as it is" is possible for finite human beings, the influence of culture notwithstanding.

2. Cf. Sydney Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *CH* 24 (1955): 257-72.

3. Critics contend that this accommodation is evident in a number of places, including the understanding of language that informs Old Princeton's understanding of doctrine. A helpful discussion of this point can be found in John Stewart's incisive analysis of Charles Hodge. According to Stewart, Hodge endorsed "a language structure rooted in Scottish realism. That linguistic commitment enabled Hodge to construct a coherent description of the actual cultural realities of the everyday, common sense world: reliable human testimonies in law, business, and politics; a confidence in the historicity of past events and precedents, including creedal traditions; a vehicle for human community and communication; and an accessible language for reasonable scientific and religious discourse." John W. Stewart, *Mediating the Center: Charles Hodge on American Science, Language, Literature, and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1995), 58.



he stood in a tradition that they suppose is “utterly rationalistic,”<sup>4</sup> for they are convinced that the “source”<sup>5</sup> of Old Princeton’s commitment to the objective nature of religious truth is found in the (perhaps unwitting) endorsement of assumptions that are bound inextricably to the mind-set of “the modern scientific revolution.”<sup>6</sup>

## An Unorthodox Proposal

While this conclusion appears at first glance to be justified because it seems to offer a plausible explanation for Machen’s rather uncompromising defense of what he regarded as the objective foundations of the Christian religion, the question remains as to whether or not it in fact is justified. Were Machen and his predecessors at Old Princeton Seminary really the purveyors of an essentially humanistic philosophy rather than the champions of Reformed orthodoxy? Was the driving force behind their theological labors, in other words, an understanding of religious epistemology that supplants the epistemological assumptions of the Reformed tradition with those of an “alien philosophy”?<sup>7</sup>

The study that follows is grounded in the conviction that the reigning (or “orthodox”) interpretation of the Princeton Theology cannot stand because it ignores the moral rather than the merely rational nature of the Princetonians’ thought. When Old Princeton’s religious epistemology is interpreted within a context that regards the “faculties” or “powers” of the soul as the functional manifestations of a unitary whole rather

4. William Livingstone, “The Princeton Apologetic as Exemplified by the Work of Benjamin B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen: A Study in American Theology 1880–1930” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1948), 342. See also Ernest Sandeen, “The Princeton Theology: One Source of Biblical Literalism in American Protestantism,” *CH* 31 (1962): 307–21.

5. George Marsden, “Understanding J. Gresham Machen,” *PSB* 11, 1 (1990): 57. See also George Marsden, “J. Gresham Machen, History, and Truth,” *WTJ* 42 (1979): 157–75.

6. George Marsden, “The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 241.

7. This is the general theme of John Vander Stelt’s *Philosophy and Scripture: A Study of Old Princeton and Westminster Theology* (Marlton, NJ: Mack Publishing, 1978). According to Andrew Hoffercker, Vander Stelt’s treatment is “the most comprehensive, and critical, study of Scottish influence at Princeton.” Andrew Hoffercker, “Benjamin B. Warfield,” in *The Princeton Theology*, Reformed Theology in America, no. 1, ed. David Wells (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 81.

than as essentially autonomous substances that have the ability to act independently of one another,<sup>8</sup> it becomes clear that the Princetonians were not Enlightenment rationalists whose confidence in the mind led them to ignore the import of the subjective and the centrality of experience in religious epistemology. Rather, they were more or less consistently Reformed scholars who insisted that these kinds of factors play a critical role in every attempt to lay hold of what God has revealed, because laying hold of what God has revealed is something that is done by whole persons, not by autonomous faculties or powers.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, they insisted that “right” assessments of revealed truth are grounded in more than merely rational analyses of objective evidence, for they recognized that the operation of the intellect involves the “whole soul”—mind, will, and emotions—rather than the rational faculty alone.<sup>10</sup>

8. On the “faculty psychology” see, for example, Lefferts Loetscher, *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism: Archibald Alexander and the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983), 168; Norman Fiering, “Will and Intellect in the New England Mind,” *WMQ* 29 (1972): 515–58. According to Bruce Kuklick, many North American theologians embraced the “faculty psychology” so they could respond to Edwards’s work on the freedom of the will. “The Scots and their disciples in the United States,” he argues, “shifted discussion [on the freedom of the will] from the Edwardsean functionalist view of the mind to a three-substance view.” This “faculty psychology” held that “the mind had three functions, not two, and they were more clearly separated into ontological faculties. The understanding was not so much an activity as a substance that *did* the cognizing. So also the will, which was divided into a substance capable of *affection*, which might include sensation and emotion; and the will *proper*, which was the capacity for choice, or a substance that often clearly had what was known as a power to the contrary. Thus, in human behavior the reason (or understanding or cognition) set out goals; the affections provided the motives; but the will made action possible.” Bruce Kuklick, “The Place of Charles Hodge in the History of Ideas in America,” in *Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work*, ed. John W. Stewart, James H. Moorhead (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 72.; see also Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America: 1720–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 52.

Throughout this study, I am not absurdly denying that the Princetonians often referred to the various “faculties” or “powers” of the soul. What I am suggesting is that they did not regard these “faculties” or “powers” as ontological substances that have the ability to act independently of one another, but as particular functions of a unitary thinking-feeling-willing whole. For example, as we will see in Chapter Four, Machen argues that “what we call the will is just the whole man willing, as what we call the intellect is the whole man thinking, and what we call the feelings is the whole man feeling.” J. Gresham Machen, “Sinners Saved by Grace,” in *The Christian View of Man* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965; 1937), 236.

9. For a discussion of the impact of the demise of this emphasis on the wholeness of the person on the study of psychology at Princeton College and elsewhere, see Bryan M. Maier, *The Separation of Psychology and Theology at Princeton, 1868–1903: The Intellectual Achievement of James McCosh and James Mark Baldwin* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

10. In his analysis of Charles Hodge’s ongoing “quest for the harmony of science and religion,” John Stewart argues that “purpose, benevolence, and rationality were the deep assumptions of

In response to those who suggest that Old Princeton's understanding of the theological enterprise was grounded in the accommodation of assumptions that find their genesis in a rather naïve form of Enlightenment rationalism, the following chapters argue that whatever Enlightenment assumptions the Princetonians did embrace altered the form more than the substance of their theology, and that despite what the consensus of critical opinion would have us believe, the religious epistemology of the Princeton theologians was principally informed by anthropological and epistemological assumptions that are consistently Reformed.<sup>11</sup> As such, the following chapters call for

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Hodge's approach to scientific agenda." In an intriguing footnote in this analysis, Stewart notes: "I suspect that larger doctrinal commitments of the Augustinian-Calvinist tradition surface in these three characteristics. Doctrines of creation and redemption are equally rooted in God's sovereignty in the Reformed tradition and, I suspect, Hodge's doxological science merely extended those Reformed convictions to encompass teleology, benevolence, and rationality." Stewart, *Mediating the Center*, 25–26. In my estimation, Stewart's suspicions are correct and—assuming Hodge's approach to science is representative of his colleagues at Old Princeton—point to the reason why the reigning interpretation of the Princeton Theology must be significantly qualified if not abandoned.

11. Please note the important qualifications in this sentence. I am not suggesting that the Scottish philosophy had no impact whatsoever on the substance of Old Princeton's Reformed commitments or that Scottish Common Sense Realism was totally irrelevant to the Princetonians' religious epistemology. Thus I am not denying that in a certain sense, what John Stewart says about Charles Hodge is true of the Princetonians in general, namely, that their theology was "conditioned and nuanced by political and cultural realities peculiarly American." Stewart, *Mediating the Center*, 112. Rather, what I am suggesting is that we ought not to overestimate the impact of the Scottish philosophy on Old Princeton, for this impact, I would argue, was largely held in check by the Princetonians' classically Reformed commitments despite the fact that they were—as all of us are—children of their time to one degree or another. For an example of how the epistemological assumptions of Scottish Realism had a negative impact on the theology of Charles Hodge, see how his appeal to "the consciousness of men" leads him to be surprisingly critical of the doctrine of *concursum* in *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989; 1871–73), 1:603–5.

See also Mark Noll's contention that "Hodge's ad hoc use of common sense moral intuition as a building block of his theology" is seen "most clearly" in his revision of the Federal Theology's understanding of the relationship between the sin of Adam and the guilt of his posterity. Mark A. Noll, "Charles Hodge as an Expositor of the Spiritual Life," in *Charles Hodge Revisited*, 202, 205. According to Hodge, the guilt and/or righteousness of a covenant head is reckoned to the members of a covenant neither because there is a "mysterious identity" between the two parties of the covenant, nor because the covenant relationship is the basis for a transfer of moral "turpitude" or "excellence" from one party to the other, but because there is a forensic relationship between the covenant head and those who are "in" him. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980; 1886), 178. The Federal Theologians typically "added their conception of a covenant solidarity with Adam to the Augustinian conception of natural solidarity as it had been sanctioned by Calvin and his immediate followers."

a fresh (or “unorthodox”) interpretation of the Princeton Theology and its relevance to the historiography of North American Christianity by building on the insightful analyses of scholars such as Andrew Hoffercker and David Calhoun. Whereas Hoffercker has successfully challenged the notion that the Princetonians were indifferent to the subjective and experiential components of the Christian religion,<sup>12</sup> and Calhoun has demonstrated conclusively that the Princetonians “never allowed Scottish Common Sense Philosophy to stand by itself or to determine their theological outlook,”<sup>13</sup> the following chapters

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George Hutchinson, *The Problem of Original Sin in American Presbyterian Theology* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972), 102; for discussion that is relevant to Noll’s critique of Hodge, see pages 5–9, 28–35, 109. Hodge separates liability to blame (*reatus culpae*) from liability to punishment (*reatus poenae*) by subordinating the natural relationship to the federal relationship, and by rejecting outright the notion of “a kind of Platonic unity of human nature acting in Adam.” Noll, “Charles Hodge as an Expositor of the Spiritual Life,” 202. As a consequence, he insists that those who are “in” Adam are not finally condemned for the imputed guilt of Adam’s first sin alone, for the guilt that is imputed is penal, not moral. It does not entail, in other words, “criminality or moral ill-desert, or demerit, much less moral pollution, but the judicial obligation to satisfy justice.” Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:194; cf. Hodge, “Review of an Article in the June Number of *The Christian Spectator*, entitled ‘Inquiries Respecting the Doctrine of Imputation,’” *BRPR* 2 (October 1830): 433.

According to Hodge, the justification for conceiving of the relationship between the sin of Adam and the guilt of his posterity in this fashion becomes immediately clear when we consider the person of Christ. We can continue to maintain that Jesus was sinless, Hodge argues, only by supposing “that the federal, and not the natural union is the essential ground of the imputation; that the sense in which Adam’s sin is ours is a legal and not a moral sense and that the sense in which we sinned in him is that in which we act as a representative and not a literal sense.” Hodge, “The First and Second Adam,” *BRPR* 32 (April 1869): 367. For Hodge, then, Jesus was sinless not because the corruption of sin was not transmitted to him by means of natural generation, but because Adam did not represent him in the original covenant of works; Adam was not his covenant head. Note that Noll accounts for Hodge’s separation of liability to blame from liability to punishment—and the “ingenious distinction between imputed sin (which only grace could overcome) and actual sinning (which condemned people to hell)” that is entailed in it—by pointing to a nominalist tendency in Hodge’s thought, a tendency that Noll believes is grounded in common sense rather than in Scripture or in faithfulness to the classically Reformed understanding of the unity of the race in Adam. Noll, “Charles Hodge as an Expositor of the Spiritual Life,” 204, 202.

12. Scholars who recognize that the Princetonians were not rationalists are indebted in one way or another to Andrew Hoffercker for his seminal work on the place of the subjective in the Princeton Theology. While Hoffercker believes that Scottish Common Sense Realism played an important role in the Princeton Theology, nevertheless he establishes that “Not only is this subjective element present [in the Princetonians’ thought], but the omission of it renders . . . interpretations of [their] thought as a whole radically incomplete.” Andrew Hoffercker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed; and Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 157, 159–60, 157).

13. David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, vol. 2, *The Majestic Testimony, 1869–1929* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 414.

call the prevailing historiographical consensus into question by establishing that Old Princeton's religious epistemology focused much more on the heart than it did on the head. Indeed, they establish that the Princetonians—while certainly “distinctively American” in a contextual sense<sup>14</sup>—nevertheless were neither scholastic rationalists nor Enlightenment humanists, but more or less consistently Reformed theologians who stood in the epistemological mainstream of the Reformed tradition while self-consciously opposing what they regarded as the “great intellectual drift”<sup>15</sup> of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>16</sup>

## An Entrenched Bias

As such, the forthcoming chapters suggest a promising perspective for interpreting the Princeton Theology, one that helps to explain, among other things, why Charles Hodge would conclude his famous discussion of the inductive theological method by insisting that, “The question is not first and mainly, What is true to the understanding, but what is true to the renewed heart?”<sup>17</sup> They also challenge the tendentious nature of historical analysis that reflexively overestimates the influence of Scottish Common Sense Realism on the theologians at Old Princeton Seminary. Representative of such analysis is E. Brooks Holifield's recent survey of the history of theology in America. In this otherwise remarkable contribution to the study of American intellectual history, Holifield argues that Charles Hodge's critique of Nathaniel William Taylor and Charles Finney

14. Stewart, *Mediating the Center*, 13; cf. 112–13.

15. Stewart, “Introducing Charles Hodge to Postmoderns,” in *Charles Hodge Revisited*, 22.

16. At no point in this study do I want to suggest that the Princetonians were always perfectly consistent in putting their Reformed commitments into practice. I want to suggest that they were “more or less” consistently Reformed in their actual doing of theology. For those who might conclude that I am conceding too much by granting this point, what I am simply saying is that the Princetonians, while essentially Reformed in practice, nevertheless were not perfectly Reformed in practice. At this point I would ask any reader who might imagine that he is perfectly consistent in his own doing of theology to cast the first stone.

17. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:16. This is one of the passages Calhoun cites to establish that Hodge “gave great importance to the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit, not as a substitute for external revelation but as a guide in determining what the Bible teaches.” Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 2:405.

signified an alternative reading of Scottish mental philosophy. Hodge made a portion of his case against Finney, for instance, by arguing that direct acts of volition lacked the power to govern emotions and affections. The argument against New Haven depended not only on biblical exegesis but also on an appeal to “consciousness,” through which the Princetonians tried to ground a distinction between acts and dispositions, and between liberty and ability. When Hodge found “moral propensities, dispositions, or tendencies, prior to all acts of choice,” or when he contended that the will was always determined by “the preceding state of mind,” he was offering a particular reading of the Scottish philosophy. The philosophical views suffused the theological judgments.<sup>18</sup>

While Holifield does not deny that Hodge’s critique was also informed by “a reassertion of an older Calvinist piety,” nevertheless he gives pride of place to “philosophical difference[s]”<sup>19</sup> for explaining Hodge’s repudiation of the New Haven Theology. Indeed, he privileges philosophical explanations for understanding the theological judgments of the Princeton theologians on matters relating to the nature of free agency, and thereby reinforces the prevailing assumption that Scottish Realism’s conquest of Old Princeton was complete. But why, one wonders, does Holifield assume—particularly in this context—that philosophical factors have more explanatory power than theological factors do? Why does he insist, in other words, that “philosophical views suffused the theological judgments” when—given the clear presence of theological judgments that can only be described as standard Reformed fare—he just as easily could have argued that “theological judgments suffused his philosophical analysis”?<sup>20</sup> I would suggest that the answer is found in a bias

18. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 383–84. See also Holifield, “Hodge, the Seminary, and the American Theological Context,” in *Charles Hodge Revisited*, 103–28.

19. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 384.

20. This question is particularly relevant when one considers just how different the philosophical views of the Scottish philosophy and the theological views of Reformed theology often are despite their apparent similarities. For example, although Scottish philosophers and Reformed believers both recognize that dispositions are related to the beliefs that humans hold, they think about dispositions in significantly different fashions. Whereas Reformed believers think about dispositions in moral terms and thus relate them to the inclination of the human

that is entrenched in the historiography of the Princeton Theology, a bias that I hope to challenge in the analysis that follows.<sup>21</sup>

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heart, Scottish philosophers regard them as: (1) innate capacities with which human beings are endowed by their Creator and thus possess by nature, and (2) capacities that human beings acquire throughout life “by way of conditioning.” Thus, while Reformed believers are quite sensitive to how sin and grace shape the beliefs that we hold, such considerations do not play a major role in the Scottish philosophy. According to Nicholas Wolterstorff, “[Thomas] Reid nowhere recognizes the ways in which sin inserts itself in the workings of our belief-dispositions. He bases his epistemology on those dispositions with which we have been endowed by our Creator. He hardly recognizes how those dispositions are now intermingled with all sorts of dispositions that we have by virtue of our fallenness. In this respect, Calvin and Kuyper were more insightful.” Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Thomas Reid on Rationality,” in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, ed. Hendrik Hart, Johan Van Der Hoven, Nicholas Wolterstorff (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 66.

21. I realize that I am slicing things rather thin in this paragraph, particularly since there is a sense in which Hodge would agree with Holifield’s basic point. After all, Hodge argues that “every theology is, in one sense, a form of philosophy. To understand any theological system we must understand the philosophy that underlies it and gives it peculiar form.” Charles Hodge, “What Is Christianity?” *BRPR* 32 (1860): 121. Hodge’s mentor, Archibald Alexander, had a similar assessment of the role of philosophy. See Hodge, “Memoir of Dr. Alexander,” *BRPR* 27 (1855): 141. What I am challenging in this paragraph is not that the Scottish philosophy played at least an ancillary role in Hodge’s defense of a classically Reformed understanding of human freedom, but that this philosophy should be afforded a privileged status when explaining the substance—and not merely the form—of the theological judgment that is rendered. It seems to me that those who insist there is such a thing as objective, transcultural truth can acknowledge on the one hand that philosophical systems influence how individuals do and think about theology, and reject on the other hand that those systems adequately account for the substance of their theology. Certainly it is possible to be influenced by a philosophy without being wholly at its mercy, and thus there is no compelling reason to conclude that particular theological judgments can be explained only in terms of particular philosophical systems, especially when the theological judgments in question—such as those referred to by Holifield in the quotation above—are not necessarily bound to the categories of one philosophical system or another. A case in point serves to illustrate my concern, and it has to do with whether or not one must be a commonsense foundationalist in order to subscribe to a “Calvinistic natural theology.” In his consideration of this question, Paul Helm examines the work of two Reformed theologians who subscribe to natural theology, and then draws the following conclusion: “So here is evidence that there is only a contingent relationship between common-sense philosophy and the views of Calvinists on the place of reason in the development of natural theology. Not only is it logically possible to be a Calvinist and believe that there is a natural theology—and yet not be a Scottish common-sense philosopher—but many actually *have been* such.” Paul Helm, “Thomas Reid, Common Sense and Calvinism,” in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, 85.

In light of the fact that it is possible to endorse the view of human freedom that Hodge endorses in the block quotation above without being a Scottish realist, might it be the case that he was offering not “a particular reading of the Scottish philosophy” in his response to the New Haven theologians, but a theological judgment that is both essentially “Reformed” and capable of being defended in terms of common sense? If it is true that there is only a contingent relationship between Scottish Common Sense Realism and Hodge’s understanding of the relationship between moral character and moral activity, then why privilege that which is contingent in one’s explanation of the theological issue at the heart of the exchange?

## The Argument

Terry Chrisope has argued that the primary question that confronts modern interpreters of the Princeton Theology has to do with the role of the subjective in that theology. “The real question regarding the Princetonians,” he writes, “is not whether this element was present in their thought, but how it fit in with their other philosophical commitments.”<sup>22</sup> If the argument of this investigation is to be established, the following chapters need to demonstrate that not only did subjective concerns occupy a place of central importance in the Princeton Theology, but more importantly these concerns are the key to understanding the epistemological assumptions of the Princeton Theology in general and the Princeton apologetic in particular.

I attempt to substantiate both of these claims in Part One of this study by examining the epistemological assumptions of four of the primary representatives of the Princeton Theology.<sup>23</sup> I begin this examination in Chapter One by outlining the epistemological context within which Old Princeton’s compatibility with the Reformed tradition is found. After summarizing the formative commitments of the “evidential Christianity” that captivated the American theological mind in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I consider the work of Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge and suggest that Old Princeton’s religious epistemology is compatible with the assumptions of the Reformed tradition because its emphasis on “right reason” is moral rather than merely rational. I suggest it is grounded, in other words, not in the accommodation of one form of Enlightenment rationalism or another, but in the endorsement of the classical Reformed distinction between a merely speculative and a spiritual understanding of what God has revealed.

That the “intellectualism” of Old Princeton in fact is moral rather than merely rational, and that classically Reformed assumptions do indeed take precedence in the religious epistemology of the Princeton

22. Terry Chrisope, “The Bible and Historical Scholarship in the Early Life and Thought of J. Gresham Machen, 1881–1915” (PhD diss., Kansas State University, 1988), 99.

23. I acknowledge that the scope of my study is rather limited. It is limited, however, to the analysis of those giants who in my estimation are the best representatives of the Old Princeton tradition as a whole.



theologians, is the focus of Chapters Two and Three. In these chapters I examine the work of B. B. Warfield and show how the Princeton apologetic and the understanding of Christian scholarship that follows from it are grounded in epistemological assumptions that are consistently Reformed. While critics would have us believe that Warfield was a rationalist because he argued that the primary mission of the believing apologist “is no less than to *reason* the world into acceptance of the ‘truth,’”<sup>24</sup> these chapters establish that such a conclusion cannot be justified because Warfield retains an important role for subjective factors in his evidentialist apologetic. Whereas Warfield certainly affirms that a saving apprehension of what God has revealed entails the rational appropriation of objective evidence, he nonetheless recognizes that the quality of this apprehension is determined neither by the scholarly prowess of the perceiving mind, nor by the objective sufficiency of the evidence that is presented to one’s consciousness, but by the moral or ethical state of the knowing soul. In short, these chapters establish that the Princeton apologetic is grounded not in one form of Enlightenment rationalism or another, but in the acknowledgment that fallen sinners are absolutely dependent on the sovereign grace of God not only for salvation, but also for the “right” apprehension of revealed truth by which salvation is obtained and the kingdom of God is advanced.

In the concluding chapter of Part One I finally consider J. Gresham Machen’s critique of theological liberalism and ask whether it is ultimately grounded in theological or philosophical concerns. I suggest that the answer is found in Machen’s solution to the problem of the relationship between Christianity and culture. Through an examination of what Machen calls the “task of consecration,” I establish that the theological concerns that are manifest in Old Princeton’s understanding of “right reason” are sustained in Machen’s understanding of “true science.” I argue that since the scientific enterprise for Machen is an inherently moral enterprise involving the “whole soul,” it follows that he repudiates theological liberalism because he is convinced that it is “un-Christian,” and that it is “un-Christian” precisely because it is “unscientific.” In short, Chapter Four establishes that Machen

24. B. B. Warfield, “Christianity the Truth,” in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 2 vols., ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 2:213.

repudiates theological liberalism because he is critical of theology that is grounded in a kind of humanism that is without the moral ability to take account of all the facts that impinge on the integrity of the gospel message. As such, it serves as the transition to the discussion in Part Two, which suggests, among other things, that the conservative critique of postconservative evangelicalism is grounded in the same kinds of concerns that led Machen to repudiate theological liberalism.

In Part Two, I discuss the relevance of my proposal to the contemporary debate between conservative and postconservative evangelicals over the precise nature of the theological enterprise. In Chapters Five and Six I argue that the postconservative critique of conservative evangelicalism—which imagines that the rationalistic bent of some conservatives represents a faithful appropriation of the Princeton Theology—cannot be sustained because the Princetonians conceived of “right reason” in an Augustinian and not in a scholastic or an Enlightenment sense. I argue that the Princetonians sought to discern the difference between truth and error not by appealing to the magisterial conclusions of the rational faculty alone, but by hearing the message of the text with “right reason,” which for them was a biblically informed kind of theological aesthetic that presupposes the work of the Spirit on the “whole soul” of the believing theologian. What I suggest in these chapters, then, is that when all is said and done, the postconservative critique of conservative evangelicalism fails for the same reason that the standard critique of Old Princeton fails; it misconstrues the nature of Old Princeton’s understanding of “right reason” and then repudiates the conservative approach to theology on the basis of that misconstrual.

In the conclusion of this study I explore the relevance of my proposal to the assumptions at the heart of the ongoing debate within the evangelical camp over the role and function of doctrine. What I suggest is that despite what a growing consensus would have us believe, conservative and postconservative evangelicals are at odds not because conservatives have accommodated habits of mind that were born in the Enlightenment and embraced by those at the fountainhead of the conservative mainstream. Rather, evangelicals are at odds because conservatives are committed to the convictions of their theological

forefathers and thus refuse to conceive of moral and religious truth in what they regard as a theologically liberal sense. Indeed, they are committed to a view of moral and religious truth that stands in self-conscious opposition to those cultural forces that reduce moral and religious truth claims to little more than expressions of the subjective preferences of those who hold them, and thus their views on such matters are nothing if not out of step with the spirit of the age. As such, the discussion in the concluding chapter challenges the assumptions at the heart of postconservative evangelicalism's critique of the "received evangelical tradition"<sup>25</sup> by considering those assumptions in light of Old Princeton's insistence that the regenerate alone can reason "rightly." It concludes that the postconservative critique is dubious at best because the best thinkers in the conservative mainstream—like the best thinkers at Old Princeton Seminary—are convinced that objective doctrinal knowledge is possible not because finite human beings have the ability to lay hold of what God has revealed in an unbiased, comprehensive, and mathematically indubitable fashion. Such knowledge is possible, rather, because those who have been given eyes to see and ears to hear lay hold of this revelation in a fashion that is biased by the work of the Spirit and the formative assumptions of the biblical worldview.<sup>26</sup>

## A Consistently Reformed Perspective

In short, the study that follows examines Old Princeton's understanding of "right reason" and concludes that the Princeton theologians

25. Roger E. Olson, "Postconservative Evangelicalism: An Update after a Decade," <http://www.thedivineconspiracy.org/Z5209W.pdf>.

26. While the Princeton theologians acknowledged that the Christian religion is "founded on faith," they insisted that the faith on which it is founded "does not destroy or demand the destruction of reason, but elevates or perfects it." This is why they were convinced that believers can know, "in some degree, the great truths of religion as they are in themselves." Note, however, that although the Princetonians insisted that believers could have objective knowledge of doctrinal truths, they never presumed that believers could know these truths in "all their relations," or that they could know them precisely as God knows them. Charles Hodge alludes to the palpable tension between objective doctrinal knowledge—knowing doctrinal truths "as they are in themselves"—and mystery—truly knowing these truths, but only "in some degree"—in the following quotation: "A Christian introduced by the Spirit into the glorious temple of truth, may well be blinded by excess of light, but he can still clasp in his arms the great pillars of the faith." Charles Hodge, "Reid's Collected Writings," *BRPR* 32, 3 (1860): 509–10.

have been significantly misunderstood. According to the consensus of critical opinion, the theologians at Old Princeton Seminary were something less than authentically Reformed because they accommodated epistemological assumptions that were born in the Age of Reason. This study establishes that such an assessment must be revised if not abandoned because the Princetonians in fact conceived of reason in a fashion consistent with the assumptions of the Reformed tradition even if they were not always perfectly consistent in how they put this conception into practice. Indeed, they conceived of reason in a fashion that is moral rather than merely rational, and thus they recognized that the ability to reason “rightly” involves the “whole soul” and has to do with objective as well as subjective factors. As such, the following chapters call the justification for the postconservative project into question by challenging what has come to be an article of faith in the historiography of North American Christianity. They establish that the Princetonians simply were not rationalists by pointing to the anthropological and epistemological context within which Old Princeton’s “blend of reasoning and piety, evidentialism and fideism, defense and proclamation”<sup>27</sup> is properly understood, and thus they offer a consistently Reformed—even if unconventional—perspective from which to assess the ongoing debate between conservative and postconservative evangelicals over the precise nature of the theological enterprise.

27. Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theologians, 1812–1921* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 72.

# Abbreviations



|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| BRPR            | <i>The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review</i>    |
| BRTR            | <i>The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review</i>  |
| CC              | <i>The Christian Century</i>                          |
| CH              | <i>Church History</i>                                 |
| CR              | <i>Critical Reviews</i>                               |
| CSR             | <i>Christian Scholar's Review</i>                     |
| JETS            | <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i> |
| JHI             | <i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>                |
| JPH             | <i>Journal of Presbyterian History</i>                |
| ModRef          | <i>Modern Reformation</i>                             |
| <i>Guardian</i> | <i>The Presbyterian Guardian</i>                      |
| PJ              | <i>The Presbyterian Journal</i>                       |
| PR              | <i>Presbyterian Review</i>                            |
| PSB             | <i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>                    |
| PTR             | <i>The Princeton Theological Review</i>               |
| RTJ             | <i>Reformed Theological Journal</i>                   |
| RTR             | <i>Reformed Theological Review</i>                    |
| <i>TrinJ</i>    | <i>Trinity Journal</i>                                |
| USR             | <i>Union Seminary Review</i>                          |
| WSC             | <i>Westminster Shorter Catechism</i>                  |
| WesTJ           | <i>Wesleyan Theological Journal</i>                   |
| WMQ             | <i>The William and Mary Quarterly</i>                 |
| WTJ             | <i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>                |



# PART 1

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## “RIGHT REASON” AT OLD PRINCETON SEMINARY

If men are unaffected with the truth known it must be because they do not know it aright. . . . Did any man ever see an object to be lovely and not feel an emotion corresponding with that quality? And what unconverted man ever beheld in Christ, as represented in Scripture, the beauty and glory of God? Hence that doctrine is not true which confines depravity or holiness to the will, and which considers the understanding as a natural and the will as a moral faculty. The soul is not depraved or holy by departments; the disease affects it, as a soul; and of course all faculties employed in moral exercises must partake of their moral qualities.<sup>1</sup>

1. Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989; 1844), 63.





# 1

## The Moral Context



### Radical Rationalists?

Princeton Theological Seminary was founded in 1812 in order to defend biblical Christianity against the perceived crisis of “modern infidelity.”<sup>1</sup> Its founders took their stand between the extremes of deism on the one hand and “mysticism” (or “enthusiasm”) on the other, and resolved “to fit clergymen to meet the cultural crisis, to roll back what they perceived as tides of irreligion sweeping the country, and to provide a learned defense of Christianity generally and the Bible specifically.”<sup>2</sup> Throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries theologians from Princeton Seminary proved to be the most articulate defenders of Reformed orthodoxy in America. Their theological efforts have come under intense critical scrutiny, however, because critics are convinced these efforts were compromised by Old Princeton’s accommodation of the Scottish Realism that engulfed the churches and seminaries of antebellum America. The Princeton theologians were not immune to

1. Mark A. Noll, “The Founding of Princeton Seminary,” *WTJ* 42 (Fall 1979): 85.

2. Mark A. Noll, “The Princeton Theology,” in *The Princeton Theology*, Reformed Theology in America, no. 1, ed. David Wells (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 24.

the philosophical developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these critics insist. On the contrary, their emphasis on “science,” “facts,” and the primacy of the intellect in faith is clear evidence that they accommodated these developments despite their pretensions of orthodoxy.<sup>3</sup> Critics conclude, therefore, that the theologians at Old Princeton Seminary were not the champions of Reformed orthodoxy that they claimed to be. Rather, they were the purveyors of a theology that had been bastardized by what Gordon Jackson calls “the Enlightenment’s one-sided emphasis on reason.”<sup>4</sup>

3. John Stewart argues that it is “simply ill-informed” to maintain that the Princeton Theology “was a mere reprinting of seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy.” According to Stewart, Charles Hodge and his colleagues at Old Princeton Seminary were committed to mediating Reformed orthodoxy to a distinctively American context. One of the essential components of this “Americanized nineteenth-century Reformed theology,” he contends, is an understanding of science that is informed by what he calls the “Princeton paradigm.” The Princeton paradigm, he insists, “mixed . . . three interactive elements: 1) an epistemological grounding in the Scottish common sense realism of Thomas Reid; 2) a commitment to a ‘doxological science’ that assumed no insurmountable demarcation between science and religion; and 3) a growing notion that theology itself was understood and pursued as a science.” John W. Stewart, *Mediating the Center: Charles Hodge on American Science, Language, Literature, and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1995), 13, 21–22, 112–13.

4. Gordon E. Jackson, “Archibald Alexander’s *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, a Critical Revisiting,” *JPH* 51, 2 (1973): 143. The Dutch and Neoorthodox branches of the Reformed camp generally agree with this critique of Old Princeton, as do the postconservative evangelicals with whom I am familiar. Contemporary interpreters who endorse this critique are indebted in one way or another to Sydney Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” *CH* 24 (1955): 257–72. See, for example, Ernest Sandeen, “The Princeton Theology: One Source of Biblical Literalism in American Protestantism,” *CH* 31 (1962): 307–21; Mark A. Noll, “The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic,” in *Reckoning with the Past: Historical Essays on American Evangelicalism from the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals*, ed. D. G. Hart (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 131–53; Noll, “The Contested Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in Antebellum Calvinism,” in *Reckoning with the Past*, 200–17; John Vander Stelt, *Philosophy and Scripture: A Study of Old Princeton and Westminster Theology* (Marlton, NJ: Mack Publishing Co., 1978); George Marsden, “The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 219–64; and Steven B. Sherman, *Revitalizing Theological Epistemology: Holistic Evangelical Approaches to the Knowledge of God*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 83 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008). Older studies that are critical of the religious epistemology of Old Princeton include Ralph Danhof, *Charles Hodge as Dogmatician* (Goes, Netherlands: Oosterbaan and le Cointre, 1929); John O. Nelson, “The Rise of the Princeton Theology: A Generic History of American Presbyterianism Until 1850” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1935); William Livingstone, “The Princeton Apologetic as Exemplified by the Work of Benjamin B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen: A Study of American Theology, 1880–1930” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1948).

What, then, are we to make of this conclusion? Were the Princeton theologians “nineteenth-century positivists who did not reject theology”?<sup>5</sup> In other words, did they bend their theology into conformity with philosophical assumptions that are diametrically opposed to those of the Reformed tradition, and did they thereby compromise the integrity of their Reformed commitments? Most interpreters regard Old Princeton’s religious epistemology as evidence that such a conclusion is justified. The Princetonians’ emphasis on “science,” “facts,” and the primacy of the intellect in faith is incompatible with the assumptions of the Reformed tradition, they reason, for such emphases manifest profound indifference to the subjective and experiential components of a consistently Reformed religious epistemology. But is this assessment accurate? Are Old Princeton’s epistemological commitments in fact evidence that the Princeton theologians responded to the perceived infidelity of the age by embracing “a radical rationalism”?<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter, I argue that such a conclusion cannot be justified because it ignores the moral rather than the merely rational nature of the Princetonians’ thought. When Old Princeton’s religious epistemology is interpreted within a context that acknowledges the soul is a single unit that acts in all of its functions—its thinking, feeling, and willing—as a single substance, it becomes clear that the Princeton theologians were not Enlightenment rationalists whose confidence in the mind led them to ignore the import of the subjective and the centrality of experience in religious epistemology. Rather, they were Reformed scholars who insisted that subjective and experiential factors are of critical importance in every attempt to lay hold of what God has revealed. Indeed, they recognized that the operation of the intellect involves the “whole soul”—mind, will, and emotions—rather than the rational faculty alone, and as a consequence they insisted the ability to reason “rightly,” i.e., the ability to see revealed truth more or less for

5. Marsden, “Scotland and Philadelphia: Common Sense Philosophy from Jefferson to Westminster,” *RTJ* 29 (1979): 11.

6. Jackson, “Archibald Alexander’s *Thoughts on Religious Experience*,” 144. The word “rationalism” is used in this chapter to refer to a confidence in the mind that springs from not taking the noetic effects of sin as seriously as one should, an oversight that is supposed to have its origin in the accommodation of the assumptions of Enlightenment philosophy.

what it objectively is, namely glorious—presupposes the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit on the “whole soul” of a moral agent.<sup>7</sup>

How, then, should we approach the religious epistemology of the Princeton theologians? While the consensus of critical opinion would have us believe that the theologians at Old Princeton Seminary were less than authentically Reformed because they accommodated the formative commitments of the “evidential Christianity”<sup>8</sup> that came to dominate the American theological landscape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this chapter suggests that the Princetonnians, on the contrary, stood in the epistemological mainstream of the Reformed camp. After a brief survey of the epistemological commitments that informed the “evidential Christianity” of antebellum America, and following a cursory analysis of the challenge these commitments posed for those who claimed to be standing in the Reformed tradition, I establish the plausibility of this claim by considering the place of the new birth in the religious epistemologies of Archibald Alexander, the theologian who is rightly regarded as “the father of the Princeton Theology,”<sup>9</sup> and Charles Hodge, the foremost expositor of the Princeton Theology throughout most of the nineteenth century. What I establish, in short, is that Old Princeton’s religious epistemology is compatible with the assumptions of the Reformed tradition because it is grounded not in the Enlightenment’s overblown confidence in the epistemic competence of the rational faculty, but in the classical Reformed distinction between

7. What I am saying about “right reason” in this chapter will be explored in greater depth in Part Two of this study. For now, though, note that what I say in this chapter is similar to what Robert Hoopes says about reason in Augustine’s thought. Cf. Robert Hoopes, *Right Reason in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 64, 72, 111. Jack Rogers and Donald McKim summarize Hoopes’s discussion of Augustine as follows: “For Augustine, only the righteous could rise to an understanding of truth. Right reason was reason that acknowledged the authority of God and which functioned for moral, not speculative ends.” Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 202. On Hoopes’s treatment of “right reason,” cf. Jack Rogers, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 82–85. Ironically, it is Old Princeton’s imagined departure from Augustine’s understanding of “right reason” that gets its theologians in trouble with the likes of Rogers and McKim.

8. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 5, 173–96.

9. Donald McKim, “Archibald Alexander and the Doctrine of Scripture,” *JPH* 54, 3 (1976): 356.

a merely speculative and a spiritual understanding of what God has revealed, a distinction that clearly has more to do with moral factors than it does with rational factors alone.

## The “Evidential Christianity” of Antebellum America

### *Formative Commitments*

E. Brooks Holifield has argued that “The most notable feature of American religious thought in the early nineteenth century was its rationality.”<sup>10</sup> Theologians from differing denominational backgrounds were all trying to demonstrate that rationality supported orthodoxy, he suggests, because they were all convinced “that revealed theology . . . had the sanction of the ‘understanding.’”<sup>11</sup>

But where did this conviction come from? According to historians such as Holifield, the nineteenth-century “quest” to establish the “reasonableness”<sup>12</sup> of the Christian religion was informed by two commitments, both of which played decisive roles in the rise of “evidential Christianity” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first has to do with a cluster of ideas that is closely associated with what A. C. McGiffert refers to as “supernatural rationalism.”<sup>13</sup> “Like contemporary deists, supernatural rationalists were confident that careful observation of history and nature can lead to reliable knowledge of God’s existence and attributes. Like pietists (and unlike deists), however, supernatural rationalists also believed that this natural knowledge of God is inadequate.”<sup>14</sup> They believed, in other words, that although natural revelation communicates reliable knowledge of God, only the revelation that is given in Scripture—which “is above or beyond reason’s ordinary range of discernment”<sup>15</sup>—can meet the

10. E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in the Southern Culture, 1795–1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978), 3.

11. *Ibid.*, 71.

12. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 4.

13. A. C. McGiffert, *Protestant Thought before Kant* (New York, 1912), 189, quoted in Conrad Wright, *The Liberal Christians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 5.

14. Grant Wacker, *Augustus H. Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 24–25.

15. *Ibid.*, 25.

supernatural need of the sinful soul. While supernatural rationalists were more or less confident about human rational ability and thus more or less convinced of the extent to which human beings need special revelation in order to know God rightly, nevertheless they all shared the same governing assumption: that revealed truth could be known with certainty because God had endowed human beings with the ability to apprehend this truth whether it was disclosed in nature, history, or Scripture.

If the “quest for theological rationality”<sup>16</sup> was informed on the one hand by a more or less orthodox commitment to the epistemological reliability of both general and special revelation, it was informed on the other by a more or less progressive commitment to the Scottish Common Sense Realism of Thomas Reid, the philosophical system that came to reign as “the *lingua franca* of philosophical discourse [in] early nineteenth-century Protestant America.”<sup>17</sup> According to Henry May, Scottish Realism was the primary means by which the Didactic Enlightenment came to exercise a formative influence on the American mind in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While the Didactic Enlightenment was clearly an outworking of the humanistic tendencies of the Age of Enlightenment, it was also, May argues, in part a counter-Enlightenment because it espoused “a variety of thought which was opposed both to skepticism and revolution, but tried to save from what it saw as the debacle of the Enlightenment the intelligible universe, clear and certain moral judgments, and progress.”<sup>18</sup>

What, though, did the Didactic Enlightenment in general and Scottish Common Sense Realism in particular have to offer to religious conservatives who were disturbed by many of the more radical trajectories of the Age of Enlightenment? According to George Marsden, many believers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were attracted to Scottish Realism because it affirmed the existence “of both reality and morality,” and thus supplied the philosophical justification for “both a popular intellectual defense of the faith and

16. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 5.

17. John W. Stewart, “The Tethered Theology: Biblical Criticism, Common Sense Philosophy, and the Princeton Theologians, 1812–1860” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1990), 244.

18. Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), xvi.

a clear rationale for moral reform.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, these believers found the Scottish philosophy to be compelling precisely because it offered a realistic conception of the universe that grounded a coherent response to the philosophical underpinnings of what they regarded as the rising infidelity of the age. In the first place, it challenged a perceived defect in Locke’s concept of “idea.” Whereas Locke and his followers insisted that the immediate object of every movement of the mind is an idea, the Scottish philosophers insisted that perception is a dynamic activity in which the mind establishes contact with “the real empirical lineaments of the thing itself.”<sup>20</sup> In short, the Scottish philosophers looked with scorn on Locke’s “theory of ideas” because they were convinced it left the mind without access to objective reality and thereby denied the possibility of objective knowledge. “If the only possible objects of thought are possible objects of sense or introspective experience,” the Scottish philosophers reasoned, “and if the objects of sense experience are ideas (counting ‘impressions’ as ‘ideas’), then the world becomes at once exclusively my world, its history part of my biography, and I become what is introspectively discoverable in me.”<sup>21</sup>

If Scottish Realism was compelling in the first place because it challenged Locke’s imprisonment of the mind “within its own sensations,” it was so in the second because it affirmed that true knowledge of objective reality is possible because of how our minds are constructed.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the more skeptical philosophers in the Age of Enlightenment, Scottish Realists were convinced that the “organic complex” of perception is trustworthy because the “direct intuitions” or “first principles” that inform our cognitive activity afford us direct and reliable access to the world in which we live. Since the “first principles” of common sense are “prerational” and act as “the forms that organize thought and make experience meaningful,”<sup>23</sup> the Common Sense philosophers insisted

19. George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 48, 233.

20. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 9.

21. S. A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 50–51.

22. Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians*, 115, 63.

23. Wacker, *Augustus H. Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness*, 27.

that the denial of these principles as well as of the self-evident truths manifest by them is “absurd.”<sup>24</sup> It is nonsensical, they argued, to deny the self-evident truths manifest by “the common sense of mankind,” for whether the truths disclosed are moral or whether they relate to objects in the world outside our minds, their truth is simply “forced upon us by ‘the constitution of our nature.’”<sup>25</sup> To be sure, the Scottish philosophers did not insist that the beliefs of Common Sense are held on the basis of reasoning. Rather, these beliefs “are basic beliefs, beliefs not established by arguments, but caused immediately by ‘common sense,’ or the belief-producing faculties that underlie all reasoning.”<sup>26</sup>

Finally, Scottish Realism was found to be compelling because it commended the “Baconian Philosophy”<sup>27</sup> as the means to achieving rational certainty in an age of increasing skepticism. According to Holifield, Christian evidentialists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries learned three lessons from Francis Bacon via the Scottish philosophers that accentuated the epistemological significance of facts and induction:

The first was that progress came through the observation of particular facts as a prelude to generalization. Whether the facts were construed as descriptions of natural phenomena, delineations of mental states, or readings of discrete biblical passages, the careful thinker assembled them diligently before reaching a conclusion about general laws or higher truths. The second was that theology should avoid the metaphysical, or speculative, or theoretical. Theologians were to draw inferences from the facts of consciousness and biblical revelation and to go no further. . . . The third was that the theologian, like the naturalist, should become an expert in taxonomy, the discipline of classifying the facts and ordering the classifications.<sup>28</sup>

In short, Scottish Realism was compelling to many believers because it directed their attention not to the consideration of one abstract

24. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, 114.

25. *Ibid.*, 108.

26. Marsden, “The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” 226.

27. Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science*, 3.

28. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 174–75.



philosophical concept or another, but to the analysis of the facts received by our senses. It is not through speculation but through the inductive analysis of objective data, the Scottish philosophers reasoned, that errors are avoided, knowledge of the truth is acquired, and epistemic certainty is realized.

### *Theological Implications*

As E. Brooks Holifield and Theodore Dwight Bozeman have correctly noted, the theological implications of “supernatural rationalism” and Scottish Realism were clear. By encouraging believers to affirm the reality of objective truth and the reliability of knowledge, these commitments not only “supported a natural theology in which scientific investigation of the created order disclosed the existence and nature of the Creator,”<sup>29</sup> but they also encouraged scientific investigation to be regarded as a “doxological” enterprise that “dealt in the hard currency of substantial, reliable, verifiable fact.”<sup>30</sup> As such, “evidential Christianity” offered a solution to the problem of the relationship between Christianity and culture that allowed religious conservatives to stand in the intellectual mainstream of the day without accommodating speculative hypotheses that would overtly compromise their theological commitments. Not only could they embrace modern learning for their defense of the faith, but they could do so with confidence because it seemed to substantiate everything they already believed in.

### *The Problem with “Evidential Christianity”*

According to the consensus of critical opinion, the impact of Christian evidentialism is perhaps nowhere more clearly manifest than in the peculiar approach to apologetics that was embraced by many Protestant apologists in the nineteenth century. Not only did many Protestants adapt the inductive method of Bacon “directly to the uses of biblical exegesis,”<sup>31</sup> but they also insisted that “intuition or common

29. Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians*, 121.

30. Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science*, 141. For a helpful summary of Old Princeton’s understanding of the doxological nature of science, cf. Stewart, *Mediating the Center*, 25–26.

31. Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science*, 131.

sense provided certain unquestionable starting points from which good arguments could rise to rebut skepticism, defend the existence of God, and support the truthfulness of Scripture.”<sup>32</sup> While the widespread endorsement of this approach is thought to be clear evidence that the Enlightenment’s conquest of antebellum America was complete, historians have long suspected that this conquest was perhaps nowhere as comprehensive as it was among the Reformed scholars at Princeton Theological Seminary. Indeed, ever since Sydney Ahlstrom’s seminal analysis of the relationship between the Scottish philosophy and North American theology was published in 1955, “it has become a commonplace to hold,” as Mark Noll has insightfully noted, “that Old Princeton was heavily, even uniquely, indebted to this philosophy.”<sup>33</sup>

But is there not “something ironic,” critics ask, “about the fact that among the Americans to wed themselves most permanently to Common Sense were the staunch defenders of confessional Calvinism at Princeton Theological Seminary”?<sup>34</sup> Those who endorse Ahlstrom’s analysis generally conclude that there is, because they are convinced the epistemological assumptions of Scottish Realism are opposed to those of the Reformed tradition in a number of significant ways.<sup>35</sup> Whereas

32. Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology, 1812–1921* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 34–35. An evidentialist apologetic is positive or constructive rather than defensive, for it seeks to *constrain* belief by establishing the trustworthiness of the facts with which systematic theology is concerned. Note that many evidentialists—including the Princetonians—distinguish between “historical” or “speculative” faith, and “spiritual” or “saving” faith. At least for the Princetonians, attempting to constrain belief meant attempting to constrain speculative rather than saving faith; they not only recognized that the Holy Spirit alone could constrain saving faith, but they were also aware that there could be no saving faith without first having speculative faith. On the difference between a merely speculative and a spiritual understanding of the gospel, see the forthcoming discussion. On the distinction between an apology, which is defensive, and apologetics, which is positive and constructive, cf. B. B. Warfield, “Apologetics,” *Studies in Theology*, vol. 9, *The Works of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991, 1932), 3–4.

33. Noll, “The Princeton Theology,” 21. Elsewhere, Noll notes that “many of the supposed distinctives of the Princeton Theology were simply the common intellectual affirmations of the day.” Noll, *The Princeton Theology, 1812–1921*, 62.

34. Marsden, “Scotland and Philadelphia,” 9.

35. Other scholars, of course, are not convinced that Ahlstrom’s analysis is entirely accurate. See, for example, Kim Riddlebarger, “The Lion of Princeton: Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield on Apologetics, Theological Method and Polemics” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997); Paul Helm, “Thomas Reid, Common Sense, and Calvinism,” in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, ed. Hendrik Hart, Johan Van Der Hoeven, Nicholas Wolterstorff (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 71–89.

Reformed scholars typically insist the mind has been so blinded by the fall that a saving apprehension of what God has revealed necessitates that the eyes of the mind be opened by the regenerating activity of the Spirit of God, those who accommodated “the optimism of the Scottish Renaissance” often gave the impression that the mind was essentially undisturbed by sin’s influence, and that saving faith could be practically induced through the clear presentation of objective evidences.<sup>36</sup>

Because critics are appropriately critical of such thinking, they insist that Christian evidentialism must be repudiated because it is grounded in an almost “Pelagian confidence”<sup>37</sup> in the epistemic competence of the unregenerated mind. Not only does it imagine there is no difference intellectually between the believer and the unbeliever, but more importantly it ignores the important role that subjective and experiential factors play in religious epistemology.<sup>38</sup>

36. Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” 266. Ahlstrom argues that “the humanistic orientation of the Hutcheson-Reid tradition” is the necessary consequence of the loss of “the fervent theocentricity of Calvin.” *Ibid.*, 268. Cf. Marsden, “Scotland and Philadelphia,” 10.

37. Rogers and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, 290.

38. According to critics such as Ernest Sandeen, Old Princeton’s preoccupation with “the external not the internal, the objective not the subjective” is nowhere more clearly manifested than in the Princetonians’ doctrine of the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Sandeen, “The Princeton Theology,” 310. Sandeen and others argue that in response to the theological and philosophical developments of the modern era, the Princetonians embraced an understanding of biblical authority that was nothing if not rationalistic. Not only did they come to regard the created order as “a precise, ‘factual,’ unalterable objective order open to unbiased cognition” (Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science*, 171), but they also insisted “that reason established the criteria for recognizing and validating the Biblical revelation itself.” Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians*, 85; see also Martin Marty, *The Irony of It All, 1893–1919*, vol. 1, *Modern American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 14, 208. Indeed, they transferred the locus of biblical authority from “that conviction of mind and heart which may be termed the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*” to those evidences they presumed could be rationally verified. Livingstone, “The Princeton Apologetic,” 184. For these critics, then, Old Princeton’s understanding of biblical authority is suspect because the Princetonians shifted the locus of religious authority from the internal to the external evidences for the authority of Scripture. They insisted the Scriptures are authoritative not “because in them God speaks to the believer in such a way as to convince him that it is God who is speaking,” but because the apologist can gather rationally compelling evidences that establish that the Scriptures are inspired and as such are the word of God.” *Ibid.*, 346.

Those who concur with this assessment of Old Princeton generally conclude that the Princetonians were not the champions of Reformed orthodoxy that they claimed to be. Rather, they were “participants in a portentous transition in the interpretation and application of the Bible.” Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians*, 96. According to these critics, the Princeton theologians “substituted a doctrine of inspiration for the witness of the Spirit” (Ernest Sandeen,

For example, critics such as George Marsden are convinced that evidential Christianity is problematic because it fails to acknowledge how much “basic first beliefs and commitments can pervade the rest of one’s intellectual activity,” thus precluding the “possibilities for objectivity.”<sup>39</sup> It is simply not true, he argues, that, “By clearly definable scientific, rational, and objective procedures, one can simply eliminate subjective or culturally conditioned aspects of knowing,”<sup>40</sup> for the “first principles” that inform the activity of the mind are themselves conditioned by a host of factors, including spiritual factors. Interpreters who are convinced that there is a difference between the epistemic abilities of the regenerate and the unregenerate therefore insist that a sound approach to apologetics must take into account not only the objective components of the Christian religion, but the subjective and “superrational” components as well. Many thus advocate a presuppositional approach to apologetics because they believe such an approach is more compatible with the assumptions of the Reformed tradition than is the kind

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*The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970], 119), human rational capacities for the “material principle” of “Old Calvinism,” namely the “cataclysmic apprehension of divine *potestas*” in Scripture, and thereby fell prey to a narrowly defined biblicism that sought to establish the authority of Scripture on rational grounds rather than on a “direct apprehension of God [in the Scriptures].” These critics conclude that although the Princeton Theology “built its fully furnished house upon the formal principle, Scripture,” nevertheless the Princetonians undermined the true basis of Scripture’s claim to religious authority by elevating the external over the internal evidences. Nelson, “The Rise of the Princeton Theology,” 7, 365. For these critics, then, it is in this subversion of Scripture’s true locus of authority that the perilous nature of Old Princeton’s “rationalistic departure from the Reformed faith becomes apparent.” Livingstone, “The Princeton Apologetic,” 346. For compelling responses to this line of argumentation, see Randall H. Balmer, “The Princetonians and Scripture: A Reconsideration,” *WTJ* 44 (1982): 352–65; John D. Woodbridge, “Biblical Authority: Towards an Evaluation of the Rogers and McKim Proposal,” *TrinJ* n.s. 1 Fall (1980): 208; John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); John D. Woodbridge and Randall H. Balmer, “The Princetonians and Biblical Authority: An Assessment of the Ernest Sandeen Proposal,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. John D. Woodbridge, D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

39. Marsden, “The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” 256–57. Note the sense in which Marsden uses the word “objective” here. While he uses it to refer to an unbiased or neutral view of reality, for the Princetonians it refers to the reality that is outside our minds and independent of our preferences and desires. Yes, the Princetonians affirm that we can have knowledge of objective reality, but as I hope to make clear, they do not necessarily affirm that we know this reality objectively.

40. George Marsden, “J. Gresham Machen, History, and Truth,” *WTJ* 42 (1979–80): 169.

of evidentialism that is typically associated with the theologians at Old Princeton Seminary.<sup>41</sup>

## The Moral Context

### *The Enduring Question*

Despite the fact that the Princeton theologians have come under heavy criticism for their assimilation of the Scottish philosophy, it is altogether clear, as Terry Chrisope has incisively argued, that “they never became [the] mere tools of this philosophy.”<sup>42</sup> That Scottish Common Sense Realism had a marked impact on the theological method of the Princeton theologians is unquestioned, even by their most uncompromising defenders.<sup>43</sup> That fact, however, cannot justify the misrep-

41. The dispute between evidentialists and presuppositionalists centers largely on the following question: Do regenerated and unregenerated human beings know “essentially alike”? Whereas evidentialists argue that they do and that the chains of apologetical reasoning should therefore begin with an appeal to the mind rather than to special revelation and faith, presuppositionalists argue that they do not, because there is “an antithesis between Christian thought, the first principles of which recognize God’s sovereignty over all creation, and *non-Christian* thought which [is] predicated on human autonomy.” George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 115; see also Marsden, “The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” 253. Because they are convinced that believers see the world much differently than unbelievers do, presuppositionalists insist that Christians should not do apologetics by piling up evidences in the vain attempt to constrain belief. Rather, they should do apologetics by arguing at the level of presuppositions and worldviews. They must convince the unregenerate that their worldview is absurd, and that human experience will ultimately make sense only with a Christian worldview. See, for example, Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, 2nd edition, ed. William Edgar (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003). As I hope to make clear, a good case can be made that these two camps often talk past one another on a number of important epistemological matters. It might be the case that a proper understanding of “right reason” would reveal more common ground between evidentialists and presuppositionalists on epistemological matters than most commentators have acknowledged.

42. Terry Chrisope, “The Bible and Historical Scholarship in the Early Life and Thought of J. Gresham Machen, 1881–1915” (PhD diss., Kansas State University, 1988), 98. While Chrisope does not deny that Scottish Realism played an important role at Old Princeton, nevertheless he insists that the Princetonians “may not have been so captive to Scottish common sense realism as some historians have contended.” *Ibid.*, 283–84.

43. For example, John Gerstner, “The Contributions of Hodge, Warfield, and Machen to the Doctrine of Inspiration,” in *Challenges to Inerrancy*, eds. Gordon Lewis, Bruce Demarest (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 352. On how Old Princeton embraced induction yet rejected the “philosophy of science consistent with the secular scientific culture of its time,” see Donald Fuller and Richard Gardiner, “Reformed Theology at Princeton and Amsterdam in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Reappraisal,” *Presbyterion* 21, 2 (1995): 89–117.

resentations of their views that have been put forward by a host of modern interpreters. This is the contention of Andrew Hoffercker in his groundbreaking study of the role of piety in the Princeton Theology. In response to historians who insist that subjective and experiential factors play little or no role in Old Princeton's otherwise intellectualistic treatment of the faith, Hoffercker demonstrates that not only do these factors have a significant impact on their thought, but more importantly that the Princeton Theology will never be understood correctly if these factors are ignored.<sup>44</sup>

So how are these factors related to Old Princeton's religious epistemology? Are they largely irrelevant to the Princetonians' understanding of knowledge, as the consensus of critical opinion would have us believe? Or, do they play an important role, and if so, what is that role? Beginning with a brief examination of the classical Reformed distinction between a merely speculative and a spiritual understanding of what God has revealed, and concluding with a cursory analysis of the place of the new birth in the religious epistemologies of Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge, the remainder of this chapter outlines the context within which the answer to this question is found. It suggests that subjective and experiential factors play a critical role in Old Princeton's religious epistemology because Old Princeton's "intellectualism" is moral, not merely rational. It has to do, in other words, with the "whole soul"—mind, will, and emotions—rather than the rational faculty alone, and for this reason it is simply wrong to conclude that the orthodoxy of Old Princeton was subverted by the Enlightenment's Pelagian confidence in the epistemic competence of the human mind.

### *Merely Speculative versus Spiritual Knowledge*

Whereas historians such as Ernest Sandeen virtually dismiss Old Princeton on the presumption that subjective and experiential factors play little or no role in the religious epistemology of the Princeton Theology, a growing number of scholars recognize that these factors do play a de-

44. Andrew Hoffercker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed; and Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).

cisive role despite the Princetonians' relentless emphasis on the primacy of the intellect in faith.<sup>45</sup> Those who concur with this assessment do so because they recognize that the intellectualism of Old Princeton must be interpreted in the same manner as the intellectualism of Calvin. According to Edward Dowey, there is an emphasis on the primacy of the intellect in faith in Calvin's thought because Calvin recognizes there can be no saving faith—and therefore no salvation—“without *knowledge*.”<sup>46</sup> But does Calvin believe that all human beings—by virtue of being rational agents—have the natural ability to know what God has revealed in a true and therefore saving sense? Does Calvin believe, in other words, that there is no more to a saving apprehension of what God has revealed than “a simple, natural perception of what God sets clearly before the mind of man”?<sup>47</sup> While a comprehensive discussion of Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is clear that he does not, because he recognizes that knowledge is a function of the “whole soul” rather than of the rational faculty alone.<sup>48</sup> In short, Calvin recognizes that apart from the work of the Spirit in the new birth the unregenerate remain blind to the saving significance of what they can rationally perceive, not because of “an intrinsic obscurity” in what God has revealed, but because the “subjective imperfection” of the sinful soul leaves them without the moral ability to see what God has revealed for what it objectively is, namely glorious.<sup>49</sup> Heinrich Heppe summarizes the nature of the case: “The unconverted can at best appropriate only a theoretical and pure external knowledge of truths of faith. As an animal can quite see the body of a man but not his spirit because it has not one itself, even the unspiritual man may see and understand the letter but not the Spirit of the Scripture.”<sup>50</sup>

45. Cf. Sandeen, “The Princeton Theology,” 310; also Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, 119. See also R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); Jonathan A. Gerstner, “Reason as Starting Point: The Rationality of Classical Apologetics,” *ModRef* 7, 1 (January/February 1998): 17–20.

46. Edward Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 172.

47. *Ibid.*, 173.

48. *Ibid.*, 3.

49. *Ibid.*, 32.

50. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson, foreword Karl Barth (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), 33.

What, then, does the work of the Spirit in the new birth entail, and how does it foster the capacity for discerning the saving significance of what the unregenerate can only rationally perceive? The regenerating work of the Spirit, i.e., Christian experience, properly understood, accomplishes this end not by operating exclusively on the rational faculty of the sinful soul—as if the rational faculty had the ability to act independently of the unitary whole of which it is a functional manifestation—but by changing the moral disposition of the sinful heart and thereby enabling the regenerated sinner to see what unregenerated sinners cannot see, namely, “the beauty and ‘sweetness’ of revealed truth.”<sup>51</sup> It is the gift of what Jonathan Edwards calls a new heart or “principle of nature”<sup>52</sup> that enables the elect to see revealed truth more or less for what it objectively is, classically Reformed scholars insist, for it is the new heart that enlightens the mind to the spiritual beauty and “sweetness” of the truth that comes to it “through the door of the understanding.”<sup>53</sup>

Given the epistemological significance of the Spirit’s regenerating activity, it follows that a spiritual or saving apprehension of what God has revealed is in classical Reformed thought not the result of a merely speculative analysis of assorted truth claims, nor is it the consequence of “a hasty, ill-considered capitulation of the mind or abandonment of reason.”<sup>54</sup> Rather, it is the result of the mind being enabled to reason “rightly” through the regenerating activity of the Spirit of God. Through the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit, the mind—which without the Spirit is enslaved to the blinding disposition of a sinful

51. Sproul, *Classical Apologetics*, 299.

52. Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992; 1834), 2:12ff.

53. Edwards, “Christian Knowledge,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2:158. Many Reformed scholars are convinced that in classical Reformed thought, the noetic influence of sin is not “direct through a totally depraved mind, but . . . *indirect* through the totally depraved heart.” Sproul, *Classical Apologetics*, 243. In my estimation, the language of directness and indirectness is problematic because it presupposes that the mind and the will are essentially distinct or independent faculties of the soul. While it is one thing to insist that the rational power of the soul was not destroyed by the fall, it is an entirely different thing to suggest that “Something is wrong with the heart—not the mind—which needs the nonrational, super-rational revelation of divine majesty.” Sproul, *Classical Apologetics*, 242. If the mind is nothing but the “whole soul” thinking, then it seems such a comment is problematic because it betrays a denial of the essential unity of the soul.

54. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, 111.



heart—“receives new keenness and a new taste for things it formerly did not relish.”<sup>55</sup> It is this taste for the divine, then, that enables the regenerate to see revealed truth more or less for what it objectively is, for it is this taste for the divine than enables regenerated sinners to see what God has revealed in its true light, or as that which is declaring the glory of God in some sense. In light of the fact that the testimony of the Spirit is not merely rational but has to do with what Edwards calls the “sense of the heart,”<sup>56</sup> we must conclude that the knowledge of God that is communicated to the regenerated soul via the combined action of Word and Spirit is in classical Reformed thought “not something purely theoretical, but a practical experience, engaging the whole human personality, soliciting all the energies of the conscience and heart, putting in motion all the spiritual faculties.”<sup>57</sup> As such, neither speculative knowledge nor spiritual knowledge is

intended in the doctrine [of Christian knowledge] exclusively of the other: but it is intended that we should seek the former *in order* to the latter. The latter, or the spiritual and practical, is of the greatest importance; for a speculative without a spiritual knowledge, is to no purpose, but to make our condemnation the greater. Yet a speculative knowledge is also of infinite importance in this respect, that without it we can have no spiritual or practical knowledge.<sup>58</sup>

55. *Ibid.*, 183.

56. Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” 2:17–18.

57. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, 25–26. The distinction between a merely speculative and a spiritual understanding of what God has revealed is grounded in the conviction that the soul is a whole unit that is comprised of two rather than three “faculties” or “powers”: the understanding, which takes precedence in all rational activity, and the will, which is broadly defined to include not just the power of self-determination but the feelings and emotions as well. While the will is a power of the mind, it is not a self-determining power, but one that is determined by the motives or sensibilities of the mind. For an excellent analysis of the understanding of free agency that is associated with this anthropology, see Paul Ramsey's introductory essay to Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), especially pages 38–40. For an excellent discussion of how the faculties or powers of understanding and will are related to each other, and for a particularly relevant discussion of “Augustinian voluntarism,” see Norman Fiering, “Will and Intellect in the New England Mind,” *WMQ* 29 (1972): 515–58.

58. Edwards, “Christian Knowledge,” 158. This statement gives some indication as to why some would argue that Edwards was an evidentialist rather than a presuppositionalist. See, for example, Sproul, *Classical Apologetics*, 185, 297–98. Like Edwards, more conservative evidentialists insist that “It is impossible that any one should see the truth or excellency of any doctrine

## The Princeton Theology and Old School Calvinism

It is my contention in this chapter that the Princeton Theology in general and the Princeton apologetic in particular must be interpreted within the epistemological context articulated in the foregoing discussion. That this is the likely context within which Old Princeton's emphasis on science, facts, and the primacy of the intellect in faith is best understood will be clear after we consider the place of the new birth in the religious epistemologies of Alexander and Hodge. Before we move on to this consideration, however, I must emphasize that the interpretation I am commending is warranted because the Princetonians stood squarely in the tradition of Old School Calvinism, particularly in their understanding of the essential nature and operation of the soul. This is clearly revealed in their repudiation of the attempt to free evangelistic outreach from the strictures of the doctrine of inability throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>59</sup> Whereas New England theologians such as Nathaniel William Taylor fell prey to the Enlightenment humanism practically manifest in the rising tide of evangelical revivalism because they severed the connection between moral character and moral activity and thereby destroyed the distinction between natural and moral ability,<sup>60</sup> the Princetonians were essentially unscathed by this assault

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of the gospel, who knows not what the doctrine is. A man cannot see the wonderful excellency and love of Christ in doing such and such things for sinners, unless his understanding be first informed how these things were done." More conservative evidentialists concur with Edwards that the fallen sinner "cannot have a taste of the sweetness and excellency of divine truth, unless he first have a notion that there is such a thing." Edwards, "Christian Knowledge," 158. Because of this, and because they recognize with Edwards that the Spirit moves beyond though not against reason, more conservative evidentialists conclude that the primary function of the apologist has to do with satisfying "the fundamental needs of the human spirit. If it is incumbent upon the believer to be able to give a reason for the faith that is in him, it is impossible for him to be a believer without a reason for the faith that is in him; and it is the task of the apologist to bring this reason clearly out in his consciousness, and make its validity plain." Warfield, "Apologetics," *Studies in Theology*, 4. For a compelling counterargument to the notion that Edwards was an evidentialist, see K. Scott Oliphint, "Jonathan Edwards, Reformed Apologist," *WTJ* 57, 1 (Spring 1995): 165–86.

59. On this attempt, see, for example, Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), 9, 34; Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science*, 33.

60. For an excellent analysis of the difference between revival and revivalism, see Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750–1858* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994). On the decline and fall of Calvinism in the American

because they recognized that the soul is a single unit that always acts as a single substance. Indeed, like classically Reformed thinkers before them, they acknowledged that the soul is a whole unit rather than a collection of more or less autonomous faculties or powers, and they also insisted that the acts of the soul are always determined by the moral character or inclination of the acting agent.<sup>61</sup>

This is historically significant for two reasons. In the first place, it suggests that the Princetonians' appropriation of Scottish Realism was qualified and conditioned by their Reformed commitments. We have already acknowledged that defenders of Old Princeton must concede that the Scottish philosophy had a marked impact on the theological method of the Princeton theologians. Defenders of Old Princeton need not concede, however, that this impact was so profound that it altered much more than the framework of the Princetonians' theology.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, as

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church, see Glenn Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality: A Study of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, John Nevin, and Horace Bushnell*, vol. 7, *Chicago Studies in the History of American Religion*, eds. Jerald Brauer, Martin Marty (New York: Carlson, 1991), 14; James Turner, *Without God Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); William McLoughlin, "Introduction," in *The American Evangelicals, 1800–1900*, ed. William McLoughlin (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 1–27.

61. On the philosophical psychology that this understanding of free agency entails, see note 57 above. Historians such as Bruce Kuklick would have us believe that a primary explanation for why the Princetonians were not "satisfied" with the theology of Jonathan Edwards is found in their repudiation of his understanding of the mind or soul. According to Kuklick, "The mind for Edwards was not so much an entity as a function, and there were two reciprocally related functions—cognition and volition. Following the Scots, Hodge [and his heirs] found comfort in a different conception of mind that divided mental substance into a series of separate powers. For those opposing Edwards (and Hume) the mind had three functions, not two, and they were more clearly separated into entities—thus the phrase 'faculty psychology.'" Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America: 1720–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 52.

While the Princetonians did refer often to the various faculties or powers of the soul, nevertheless they did not regard these powers as distinct or separate entities, for they recognized that the soul is a single unit that always acts as a single substance. As such, they would likely have agreed with the following definition of "true psychology" even though it appears to affirm—although it does not necessarily require that we affirm—the existence of three rather than two faculties or powers, for it attests to the existence of separate faculties while simultaneously maintaining the essential unity of the soul. "True psychology maintains the unity of the soul. . . . It thus makes of the soul no mere mosaic, after the old 'faculty psychology' conceptions, composed of so many separatist and distinctive parts. This unity of the soul, as monistic, is fundamental in modern psychology, and has led to a true sense of the interdependence of the faculties—will, thought, and emotion." James Lindsay, "Psychology of the Soul," *PTR* 6, 3 (1908): 438.

62. Mark A. Noll, "Jonathan Edwards and Nineteenth-Century Theology," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch, Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 268.

scholars such as Mark Noll and David Wells have carefully argued, the Scottish philosophy moved New England theologians such as Nathaniel William Taylor much farther from Reformed orthodoxy than it did Old Princeton, because Taylor and his associates endorsed “the estimate made of human nature by Scottish Common Sense Realism.”<sup>63</sup> The New England theologians endorsed, in other words, the latent humanism of the Common Sense tradition, and as a consequence they passed on to their descendants a version of Calvinism that was, as Joseph Haroutunian has incisively argued, “not Calvinism. It was the faith of the fathers ruined by their children.”<sup>64</sup> To suggest that the

63. David Wells, “Charles Hodge,” in *The Princeton Theology*, ed. David Wells, 43. In an important essay, Noll argues that the extent to which Edwards’s theological commitments were subverted by the participants in the nineteenth-century struggle for his mantle was largely dependent on the strain of the Scottish philosophy that the participants themselves embraced. Whereas Princeton “showed greatest fondness” for the “methodological aspects” of Scottish Realism, Andover and Yale embraced its anthropological commitments and thus “moved further from Edwards’s theology than . . . Princeton.” “Jonathan Edwards and Nineteenth-Century Theology,” 268. According to Noll, this way of subverting Edwards’s legacy is particularly evident in the theology of Nathaniel William Taylor. “More than other heirs of Edwards,” Noll argues, “Taylor also accepted the Scottish philosophy of Common Sense which . . . made much of innate human freedom and the power of individuals to shape their own destinies.” Mark A. Noll, “New Haven Theology,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 763; see also Noll, “The Contested Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in Antebellum Calvinism,” 200–217. Douglas Sweeney and Allen Guelzo concur with Noll’s assessment, arguing that Taylor and his colleagues “repackaged Edwardsean ideas for antebellum America. Focusing mainly on the doctrines of sin and spiritual regeneration, they formed a kinder, gentler evangelical Calvinism. . . . Denying that humans are born guilty of the sin of Adam and Eve and affirming that people play a role in their own regeneration, they seemed to some Edwardsean siblings to have sold the farm to save the family business.” Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo, “Theology in New Haven,” in *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park*, ed. Douglas A. Sweeney, Allen C. Guelzo (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 188. Note that Wells regards Taylor as “the stepping stone to the next generation’s Liberalism” because of the prominent role that he played in the decline and fall of Calvinism as the dominant force in the North American church. Wells, “Charles Hodge,” 58.

64. Joseph Haroutunian, *Piety versus Moralism: The Passing of the New England Theology* (New York: Holt, 1932), 281. Haroutunian posits that Calvinism fell from preeminence in the North American church because the Common Sense or Enlightenment humanism practically manifest in the rising tide of evangelical revivalism subverted the theocentric piety of many in the Reformed camp shortly after the death of Jonathan Edwards. Revisionist scholarship has challenged this argument in two ways. First, revisionist scholars have discovered a diversity of theological opinion within the New England camp itself. As William Breitenbach notes, “This discovery of diversity makes older assumptions about the inevitable organic evolution of a universally accepted Covenant theology into Arminian moralism seem too simplistic.” Second, revisionist scholars have recognized that piety and moralism are not necessarily incompatible

Princetonians embraced the Scottish philosophy to the same degree that their more progressive brethren in New England did is to seriously misrepresent the Princeton Theology. It is to ignore, moreover, what the Princetonians themselves regarded as the historiographical key to understanding the theological tensions between Princeton and New England throughout most of the nineteenth century. According to Hodge, whereas Princeton was theocentric in that it had for its object “the vindication of the Divine supremacy and sovereignty in the salvation of men,” New England was increasingly anthropocentric.<sup>65</sup> It came to have for its “characteristic aim,” in other words, “the assertion of the rights of human nature. It is specially solicitous that nothing should be held to be true, which cannot be philosophically reconciled with the liberty and ability of man.”<sup>66</sup>

If Old Princeton’s emphasis on the unitary operation of the soul is significant in the first place because it establishes that the Princetonians repudiated the anthropocentrism that was an essential component of the Enlightenment, it is significant in the second because it neutralizes the assumption that is often at the heart of commentary that is critical of the religious epistemology of Old

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in Reformed thought. According to Breitenbach, historians now recognize “that Reformed theology, even in its pristine formulations, did not set piety against moralism.” William Breitenbach, “Piety and Moralism: Edwards and the New Divinity,” in Nathan O. Hatch, Harry S. Stout, eds., *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 178–79. For other examples of revisionist scholarship, see William Breitenbach, “The Consistent Calvinism of the New Divinity Movement,” *WMQ* 41 (April 1984): 241–64; Joseph Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1981); Allen Guelzo, “Jonathan Edwards and the New Divinity, 1758–1858,” in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, eds. Charles Dennison, Richard Gamble (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 147–67. In response to this revisionist scholarship I would suggest that although Haroutunian’s critique may suffer from a lack of nuance, nevertheless it is compelling because it accurately describes—albeit in general terms—the impact that the optimism of the Scottish philosophy had on evangelical theology in general and Reformed theology in particular in the nineteenth century.

65. Charles Hodge, “Remarks on the Princeton Review,” *BRPR* 23 (1851): 309. I say “increasingly” simply to acknowledge that the early advocates of the New Divinity did not “sell Edwards and New England down the Connecticut River” like their New Haven descendants did. Guelzo, “Jonathan Edwards and the New Divinity,” 148.

66. Hodge, “Remarks on the Princeton Review,” 309. On the difference between the starting points of Princeton and New England, and on the implications of these starting points for the historiography of the nineteenth century, see Wells, “Charles Hodge,” 44ff.

Princeton. Commentary that is critical of the intellectualism of Old Princeton—be it the contention that the Princeton theologians had “unbounded confidence” in the epistemic competence of the rational faculty or the related assertion that they were indifferent to the subjective and experiential components of a consistently Reformed religious epistemology<sup>67</sup>—is often grounded in the at least implicit assumption that the Princetonians fell prey to the ideas of Enlightenment humanism because they endorsed a “faculty psychology.”<sup>68</sup> The Princeton theologians sacrificed anthropological and epistemological integrity to the assumptions of an essentially humanistic philosophy, it is commonly assumed, because they failed to recognize that “our intellect, will and emotions are inseparably connected with our whole personality,” and as such cannot operate independently one from the other.<sup>69</sup> While critical analyses grounded in this assumption would be valid if the Princetonians in fact denied the unitary operation of the soul, that they are not valid is clear from their repudiation of the revisionist tendencies of those driven by their zeal for revival to embrace what Old School Calvinists regarded as the abuses of revivalism,<sup>70</sup> and from their insistence that the ability to reason “rightly” presupposes the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit on the “whole soul” of a moral agent. As the remainder of this chapter attempts to make clear through a brief examination of the religious epistemologies of Alexander and Hodge,

67. Rogers and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, 245.

68. On the “faculty psychology,” see note 61 above, note 8 in the Introduction to this volume, and the forthcoming discussion of Charles Hodge.

69. William Masselink, “Professor J. Gresham Machen: His Life and Defense of the Bible” (ThD diss., Free University of Amsterdam, 1938), 153–55; see also Rogers and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, 290.

70. On the doctrinal revisionism that was occasioned by the rise of evangelical revivalism, see note 60 above. See also Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience*; Earl Pope, *New England Calvinism and the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church* (New York: Garland, 1987); H. Shelton Smith, *Changing Conceptions of Original Sin: A Study in American Theology Since 1750* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955); Maurice Armstrong, Lefferts Loetscher, Charles Anderson, *The Presbyterian Experience: Sources of American Presbyterian History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956). Marsden notes that the doctrinal revisionism that came to be associated with the rise of evangelical revivalism “was not a liberalism that involved intentional concessions to secularism (as in later modernism). Rather, it was an outgrowth of pietist zeal for revivalism.” George Marsden, “Reformed and American,” in *The Princeton Theology*, ed. David Wells, 5.

Old Princeton's emphasis on "right reason" is neither the supreme manifestation of a loss of "Reformation bearings,"<sup>71</sup> nor evidence of what Lefferts Loetscher refers to as Old Princeton's "startling confidence in the competence of human reasoning powers."<sup>72</sup> It is evidence, rather, of Old Princeton's conscientious attempt to retain a place for both the objective and the subjective components of a consistently Reformed religious epistemology in an age increasingly characterized by religious subjectivism.

## The Religious Epistemology of Archibald Alexander

### *The Right Use of Reason in Religion*

In the first chapter of his *Evidences of the Authenticity, Inspiration, and Canonical Authority of the Holy Scriptures*, Archibald Alexander makes the rather startling claim: "Without reason there can be no religion."<sup>73</sup> The rational faculty "was certainly given to man to be a guide in religion, as well as in other things," he argues, for without it, man "can form no conception of a truth of any kind."<sup>74</sup> Indeed, since reason is the "constituent power of the soul"<sup>75</sup> that apprehends and judges truth, man "possesses no other means by which he can form a judgment on any subject, or assent to any truth; and it would be no more absurd to talk of seeing without eyes, than of knowing any thing without reason."<sup>76</sup> Given the intimate nature of the relationship of truth, reason, and the claims of the Christian religion, Alexander concludes that it would be "a great mistake to suppose that religion forbids or discourages the right use of reason. So far from this, she enjoins it as a duty of high moral obligation, and reproves those who neglect to judge for themselves what is right."<sup>77</sup>

71. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," 268.

72. Lefferts Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church Since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), 70.

73. Archibald Alexander, *Evidences of the Authenticity, Inspiration, and Canonical Authority of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1836), 9.

74. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

75. Alexander, *A Brief Compendium of Bible Truth* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2005; 1846), 136.

76. Alexander, *Evidences*, 9.

77. *Ibid.*, 9.

What, though, does “the right use of reason” entail? What does it mean, in other words, to exercise the rational power of the soul in a “right” or “proper” fashion? Alexander suggests the answer:

There is no just cause for apprehending that we shall be misled by the proper exercise of reason on any subject which may be proposed for our consideration. The only danger is of making an improper use of this faculty, which is one of the most common faults to which our nature is liable. Most men profess that they are guided by reason in forming their opinions; but if this were really the case, the world would not be overrun with error; there would not be so many absurd and dangerous opinions propagated and pertinaciously defended. In one sense, indeed, they may be said to follow reason, for they are guided by a blinded, prejudiced, and perverted reason.<sup>78</sup>

In short, Alexander is convinced that the rational power of the soul is used in a right or proper fashion when it is exercised without partiality, and it is used in a wrong or improper fashion when its exercise is prejudiced by bias. What this means for Alexander, then, is that the distinguishing characteristic of the right use of reason is found in the impartial analysis of revealed truth, and reason is a reliable guide to truth when it leads us to assess what God has revealed with “an unbiased mind.”<sup>79</sup>

### *“Right Reason” and the Inclination of the Heart*

But what, specifically, does Alexander believe is entailed in the right or impartial use of reason? When he argues that “The defenders of the truth have ever been ready to meet their antagonists on the ground of impartial reason,”<sup>80</sup> what kind of partiality does he believe compromises the right use of the rational power of the soul? Does he believe that impartiality necessitates a commitment to epistemological neutrality? Is his understanding of impartiality ultimately grounded, in other words, in an endorsement of the Enlightenment myth of the

78. *Ibid.*, 11.

79. *Ibid.*, 15.

80. *Ibid.*, 16.



disinterested knower? Or is his understanding indebted to larger, more consistently Reformed kinds of concerns? In one sense, Alexander's understanding of the right use of reason is clearly opposed, for example, to the tendentious nature of biblical scholarship that, while granting that the Bible contains a revelation from God, nevertheless insists on "the right of bringing the truths revealed to the test of human judgment and opinion, and reject[ing] them as unreasonable if they do not accord with this standard."<sup>81</sup> In an even more basic and fundamental sense, however, Alexander's understanding of the right use of reason is grounded in larger, more consistently Reformed kinds of concerns, for it emphasizes that the capacity for impartial analysis has much more to do with "the dispositions of the [knower's] heart"<sup>82</sup> or the "moral character" that "actuates" the knower's soul<sup>83</sup> than it does with the "preconceived opinions" or "narrow conceptions" that inform the knower's thinking.<sup>84</sup> That this is the case, and that Alexander's understanding of the right use of reason focuses more on the inclination of the knower's heart than on the actual contents of the knower's mind, will be clear after a brief examination of the impact of sin and regenerating grace on the knower's ability to see revealed truth more or less for what it objectively is, namely glorious.

### *The "Delusive Influence" of the Sinful Heart*

Alexander argues that as a created being, man "has many things in common with the inferior animals," yet he is unique in that he has the potential for "a higher kind of life. He is endowed with reason and a moral faculty; and by these he is made capable of spiritual life."<sup>85</sup> According to Alexander, in his original state man possessed

81. *Ibid.*, 14.

82. Archibald Alexander, "Deceitfulness of the Heart," in *Evangelical Truth: Practical Sermons for the Christian Home* (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004; 1850), 164.

83. Alexander, *A Brief Compendium of Bible Truth*, 136–37.

84. Alexander, *Evidences*, 15. Note that for Alexander, "If men possessed good and honest hearts, they would search diligently for the truth, and would be disposed to judge impartially of its evidence; and, as was said, evidence being on the side of truth, and the truth congenial with the moral feelings of the upright mind, it would always be embraced." Alexander, "Deceitfulness of the Heart," 164.

85. Alexander, "The New Creation," in *Evangelical Truth*, 120.

this life without qualification, for he had “the very image of his Creator, delineated on his inmost soul.”<sup>86</sup> In other words, his soul was clothed with “that clothing of moral excellence which was the beauty and glory of his nature,” and thus he was both “holy and happy,”<sup>87</sup> for the “reason and conscience”<sup>88</sup> that governed his soul were actuated by “holy desires and affections,”<sup>89</sup> rather than by his “animal passions.”<sup>90</sup> However, when “in a moment of inadvertency” he fell under the influence of his “lower propensities,” “the moral excellence in which [he] was created” was “effaced,” he became “destitute of any principle of true holiness,”<sup>91</sup> and his soul became “depraved and disordered” so that it was disposed “neither . . . to know [n]or love its Creator.”<sup>92</sup> Indeed, when his “inferior passions and carnal appetites” usurped the control of “reason and conscience,”<sup>93</sup> he “lost that moral purity and perfection with which [his soul] was originally endued” and he died spiritually, for “the reins of [the] government”<sup>94</sup> of his soul were seized by the “corrupt dispositions”<sup>95</sup> of his sinful heart and he “turned with aversion from God and holiness, and [his] affections attached themselves to the creature.”<sup>96</sup> In this fallen state, there is “perpetual discord” in the soul of man because “The regulator of the whole machinery of human agency is wanting. Man was made to love his Creator supremely, but in his fallen state, this principle is wanting; and its place has been usurped by *self*. Self is now the centre of all the affections and pursuits, so that the orderly and harmonious operations of the mind are destroyed.”<sup>97</sup>

Why, though, are those who are “alienated from God” and thus inclined to making themselves the “centre around which . . . all things

86. *Ibid.*, 119.

87. Alexander, *A Brief Compendium of Bible Truth*, 98, 82.

88. Alexander, “The New Creation,” 119.

89. Alexander, *A Brief Compendium of Bible Truth*, 136.

90. Alexander, “The New Creation,” 119.

91. Alexander, *A Brief Compendium of Bible Truth*, 97, 136, 83, 101.

92. Alexander, “Love to Christ,” in *Evangelical Truth*, 234.

93. Alexander, “The New Creation,” 117.

94. Archibald Alexander, “A Practical View of Regeneration,” *BRTR* 8, 4 (1836): 477–78.

95. Archibald Alexander, “An Inquiry into that Inability under Which the Sinner Labours, and Whether It Furnishes Any Excuse for His Neglect of Duty,” *BRTR* 3, 3 (1831): 362.

96. Alexander, “A Practical View of Regeneration,” 478.

97. Alexander, “The New Creation,” 117.

revolve”<sup>98</sup> without the ability to reason in a right or proper fashion? Why, in other words, is a mind that is not “rightly disposed”<sup>99</sup> to God and to his revelation “incapable of judging impartially of the nature and evidence of truth”?<sup>100</sup> The answer is found generally in Alexander’s commitment to the unitary operation of the soul, and specifically in the “delusive influence”<sup>101</sup> that depraved dispositions have on the judgment of the understanding. In his occasional essays on Christian anthropology, Alexander makes it clear that he opposes a “philosophy of the mind” that “separates entirely between the intellect and the will, and maintains that the former in its operations is incapable of virtue or vice.”<sup>102</sup> Such a “method of philosophizing” must be repudiated, he argues, because it is grounded in a “dissociation of the understanding and heart” that cannot be justified either by experience or by the teaching of Scripture.<sup>103</sup> The Scriptures, he insists,

do often use the word *heart* for moral exercise, but not to the exclusion of the intellect. Indeed, this word in the Old Testament, where it most frequently occurs, is used for the whole soul. . . . We are required to love with the understanding; and “a wise and understanding heart” is a mode of expression which shows how little the inspired penmen were influenced by a belief of this modern theory. And, in the New Testament, to “believe with the heart” includes the intellect as much as what is called the will. It means to believe really and sincerely; so to believe, as to be affected by what we believe, according to its nature. But is not all moral exercise voluntary, or an exercise of the will? yes, undoubtedly; and so is all moral exercise rational, or such as involves the exercise of the intellect.<sup>104</sup>

98. Alexander, “A Practical View of Regeneration,” 478.

99. Alexander, “An Inquiry into that Inability under Which the Sinner Labours,” 362.

100. Archibald Alexander, “Why Halt Thou between Two Opinions?” in *Practical Truths* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1998; 1857), 68.

101. Alexander, “Deceitfulness of Sin,” in *Practical Truths*, 59.

102. Alexander, “An Inquiry into that Inability under Which the Sinner Labours,” 376, 365.

103. *Ibid.*, 366. While Alexander insists the intellect takes logical priority in all rational/moral activity, he nonetheless acknowledges that the understanding and the heart always act as a single substance. According to Alexander, “There can be no exercise of heart which does not necessarily involve the conception of the intellect; for that which is chosen must be apprehended; and that which is loved and admired, must be perceived.” *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*, 367.

Given the organic nature of the relationship between the understanding and the heart in Alexander's philosophical psychology, it follows that the unregenerate cannot reason in a "right" or "impartial" fashion not, in the first place, because of the ideas that inform their thinking on one topic or another but, even more basically, because, "Under the influence of an evil heart, every thing appears in false colours."<sup>105</sup> According to Alexander, to a mind that is in bondage to depraved dispositions, things that are true appear to be false and things that are good appear to be "odious"<sup>106</sup> because the sinful heart—which "blinds" the mind and "perverts" reason<sup>107</sup>—"presents objects in a false light, or leads to a misconception of the nature of things within us and around us."<sup>108</sup> Indeed, a mind that is depraved by sin can have "no right apprehensions of God, no holy affections towards him, [and] no cheerful and habitual purpose to serve him"<sup>109</sup> not because it cannot know anything about God, but because it cannot know anything about God rightly. It is incapable, in other words, "of perceiving the beauty and sweetness of spiritual objects; and is, therefore, totally incapable of loving such objects."<sup>110</sup> While Alexander acknowledges that the evidence "is always on the side of truth," nevertheless he insists that a mind that "is strongly biased by inclination to sinful indulgence" cannot see this evidence "with sufficient clearness to give it efficacy"<sup>111</sup> because truth, "in order to produce its effect, requires a correspondent state or temper in the mind; so that even the brightest display of God's perfections to the understanding of a sinner, will only excite greater enmity, as in the devils."<sup>112</sup>

For Alexander, then, the explanation for why the unregenerate cannot reason in a "right" or "impartial" fashion is ultimately found not merely in "the opposition of the heart to the dictates of the understand-

105. Alexander, "Deceitfulness of the Heart," 167. Note that the appearance is more basic than the idea because it is the appearance that informs the idea.

106. *Ibid.*

107. Archibald Alexander, "Christ Our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption," in *Evangelical Truth*, 197.

108. Alexander, "Deceitfulness of the Heart," 162.

109. Alexander, "A Practical View of Regeneration," 479.

110. Alexander, "An Inquiry into that Inability under Which the Sinner Labours," 365.

111. Alexander, "Why Halt Thou between Two Opinions?" 68.

112. Alexander, "Love to Christ," 235.

ing,” as if the understanding and the heart really are distinct and the corrupt understanding really does have the capacity to “present truth in its true colours, to the heart,” as many of Alexander’s contemporaries were arguing.<sup>113</sup> It is found, rather, in “the depravity of the heart”<sup>114</sup> that prevents the unregenerate from seeing what God has revealed for what it objectively is, namely glorious. While Alexander concedes that the unregenerate can have a “speculative” understanding of what God has revealed and that this understanding “may be correct as far as it goes,” nevertheless he insists that such an understanding cannot move the soul to embrace the truth with assurance and delight “simply because it is inadequate.”<sup>115</sup> It “produces no effect,” in other words, because “it does not penetrate the excellence and the beauty of any one spiritual object; and it may be averred, that the affections of the heart do always correspond with the real views of the understanding.”<sup>116</sup> “If men are unaffected with the truth known,” Alexander concludes,

113. Alexander, “An Inquiry into that Inability under Which the Sinner Labours,” 365–66. Alexander notes that “there has been current with many, in our day, a theory which separates entirely between the intellect and will, and maintains that the former in its operations, is incapable of virtue or vice; and to corroborate this opinion, a distinction has been made of the powers of the soul itself, into natural and moral. By this division, the understanding or intellect belongs to the former class, the will and affections to the latter. According to this hypothesis, all sin consists in voluntary acts, or in the exercise of the will; and the understanding is incapable of moral obliquity, because it is not a moral faculty. They who have adopted this theory (and they are many) entertain the opinion that depravity consists very much in the opposition of the heart to the dictates of the understanding. In regeneration, according to them, there is no illumination of the understanding by the Holy Spirit. This, according to the theory under consideration, is altogether unnecessary. This work, therefore, consists in nothing else, than giving a new heart, or a new set of feelings. If the person has received correct doctrinal instruction, no other illumination is needed; and the whole difference in the conceptions of truth, between the regenerate and unregenerate, is owing to nothing else than a change in the feelings; for, as far as mere intellect is concerned, the views of the understanding are the same before regeneration as afterwards; except, that a renewed heart disposing the person to the impartial love of truth, he will be more careful to collect and weigh its evidences, and will thus be preserved from errors into which the unregenerate, through the corrupt bias produced by the affections, are prone to fall.” Ibid.

114. Alexander, “Deceitfulness of the Heart,” 163.

115. Alexander, “An Inquiry into that Inability under Which the Sinner Labours,” 366. Note that the source of the inadequacy is not found in what God has revealed, for there is “light enough” in God’s revelation and this light is objectively compelling. Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989; 1844), 61. Rather, the source is found in the “blindness” of the mind of “the percipient being.” Ibid.

116. Alexander, “An Inquiry into that Inability under Which the Sinner Labours,” 366. Elsewhere, Alexander argues, “If there be a clear truth in the law of mental operation, it is that the affections are in exact accordance with the views of the understanding.” Alexander,

it must be because they do not know it aright. . . . Did any man ever see an object to be lovely and not feel an emotion corresponding with that quality? And what unconverted man ever beheld in Christ, as represented in Scripture, the beauty and glory of God? Hence that doctrine is not true which confines depravity or holiness to the will, and which considers the understanding as a natural and the will as a moral faculty. The soul is not depraved or holy by departments; the disease affects it, as a soul; and of course all faculties employed in moral exercises must partake of their moral qualities.<sup>117</sup>

### *The Work of the Spirit*

If it is therefore true that for Alexander, “True knowledge and pious affections are inseparably conjoined . . . [because] The views of the understanding and the purposes of the heart, from the constitution of the mind, must be in coincidence,”<sup>118</sup> then how do fallen sinners acquire the ability to reason “rightly”? How, in other words, do fallen sinners acquire the ability to see revealed truth more or less for what it objectively is, namely glorious? The answer is found in Alexander’s understanding of the new birth, for it is in the new birth that the Spirit, through the “instrumentality” of the Word, does two things that foster the capacity for impartial analysis.<sup>119</sup> First, the Spirit regenerates fallen sinners by “introduc[ing spiritual] life into . . . depraved soul[s].”<sup>120</sup> In regeneration, which Alexander

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*Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 63. Alexander’s discussion of the nature of faith is grounded in his commitment to the logical priority of the intellect in faith. “If any thing is known of the order of exercises in the rational mind, the perception of the qualities on which an affection terminates, is, in the order of nature, prior to the affection. The soul, in an unregenerate state, is equally incapable of seeing and feeling aright in relation to spiritual objects. And, indeed, we hardly know how to distinguish between the clear perception of the beauty of an object, and the love of that object: the one might serve as a just description of the other. Not but that the intellect and heart may be distinguished; but when beauty, sweetness, excellence, and glory, or good in any of its forms, is the object of the understanding, this distinction, in experience, vanishes.” Alexander, “An Inquiry into that Inability under Which the Sinner Labours,” 366.

117. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 63.

118. Alexander, “Obedience to Christ Gives Assurance of the Truth of His Doctrines,” in *Evangelical Truth*, 22.

119. Alexander, “A Practical View of Regeneration,” 481.

120. Alexander, “Christ the Believer’s Life,” in *Practical Truths*, 63.

insists cannot be produced “by any human efforts”<sup>121</sup> but requires “a peculiar work of God” because it necessitates “a ‘new creation,’”<sup>122</sup> the Spirit changes the “moral character”<sup>123</sup> that actuates the soul and thereby grants fallen sinners “a capacity of being properly affected with truth when proposed.”<sup>124</sup> The Spirit renders sinners “susceptible of impression from divine truth,”<sup>125</sup> in other words, neither by operating on the soul like “a mechanical force,” nor by “doing violence to its free and spiritual nature.”<sup>126</sup> Rather, the Spirit restores the “lost power of spiritual perception and susceptibility of holy feeling” by operating on the soul “in a way perfectly consistent with its nature, as a spirit, and a creature of understanding and will.”<sup>127</sup> In short, the Spirit renders sinners “impressible”<sup>128</sup> by divine truth by implanting a “principle of holiness” that restores—at least in part—“the image of God, lost by the fall.”<sup>129</sup> It is this “partial restoration of the lost image of God,”<sup>130</sup> then, that not only frees “the rational powers [of the soul] . . . from the misdirection of evil motives” so that they can “act more correctly,”<sup>131</sup> it is also that which disposes regenerated sinners to “a sincere love of the truth,” the kind of love that informs the impartial analysis of what God has revealed.<sup>132</sup> According to Alexander, “The genuine love of truth makes its possessor willing to relinquish his most cherished opinions as soon as it shall be satisfactorily demonstrated that they are not true. The love of the truth

121. Alexander, “Love to Christ,” 235. Note that the “human efforts” to which Alexander is referring include those of the self as well as those of others: “Not by the man himself, for he can only bring into action such principles as are within him. Nor by any other creature, for another can only address himself to the heart by objectively proposing truth to the understanding.” Ibid.

122. Alexander, “A Practical View of Regeneration,” 480.

123. Alexander, *A Brief Compendium of Bible Truth*, 136.

124. Alexander, “Love to Christ,” 235.

125. Alexander, “A Practical View of Regeneration,” 482.

126. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 62. Note that examples of acting on the soul in a mechanical fashion would include changing “the substance of the soul,” creating a “new faculty” in the soul, or giving “new strength to the faculties, which belong to human nature” as such. Alexander, “The New Creation,” in *Evangelical Truth*, 111.

127. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 62, 59.

128. Alexander, “Holding Forth the Word of Life,” in *Evangelical Truth*, 451.

129. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 62, 59.

130. Alexander, *A Brief Compendium of Bible Truth*, 137.

131. Alexander, “The New Creation,” 112.

132. Alexander, “Love of the Truth,” in *Practical Truths*, 80. Note that at the heart of the impartiality that Alexander is commending is not neutrality, but the “principle of holiness.”

renders a man not only earnest in the pursuit of the beloved object, but impartial in his judgment of evidence.”<sup>133</sup>

The first thing that the Spirit does in the new birth, then, is to create the capacity for impartial analysis by placing God again “on the throne of the human heart.”<sup>134</sup> It is the communication of spiritual life in regeneration, Alexander insists, that gives fallen sinners the ability to see the “supreme excellence” of what God has revealed,<sup>135</sup> for it is the communication of spiritual life that frees the soul from its bondage to the blinding influence of sinful dispositions and enables it to function according to a holy rather than a depraved principle.<sup>136</sup> The second thing that the Spirit does in the new birth is to actually give a “just conception”<sup>137</sup> of what God has revealed by enlightening “the eyes of our mind”<sup>138</sup> to the “true nature” of revealed truth.<sup>139</sup> In illumination,

133. *Ibid.*, 81.

134. Alexander, “The New Creation,” 117–18.

135. Alexander, “Obedience to Christ Gives Assurance of the Truth of His Doctrines,” 17.

136. Alexander argues that when God is placed again on the throne of the human heart in regeneration, the “disorder” of the mind begins to be “removed” and the “harmony” of the mind begins to be “restored.” “The renewed man is no longer a selfish, sensual, and sordid creature. He is now spiritual in his prevailing desires. His affections are set on things above, and not on things on the earth, and he strives to keep a conscience void of offence to God and man, by taking pains to have it truly enlightened as to the rule of duty, and by obeying its dictates uniformly. The course which the renewed man pursues is approved by enlightened reason; and he endeavours more and more to bring all the thoughts and imaginations of his heart into obedience to the gospel of Christ.” Alexander, “The New Creation,” 118.

137. *Ibid.*, 115.

138. Archibald Alexander, “Privileges of the Sons of God,” in *Evangelical Truth*, 154.

139. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 73. From the beginning of this discussion of illumination, note that for Alexander the “just conception” of truth that the Spirit gives to regenerated minds is not always and everywhere precisely the same, but varies to one degree or another, and this is the case for two reasons, both of which suggest that Alexander embraced a form of perspectivalism that takes seriously both the subjective condition and the situation of the knower. The first has to do with the varied nature of the Spirit’s work in the lives of individuals. While Alexander insists that “The work of grace on the heart, is *in kind* the same in all,” nevertheless “The *degrees* of light, and the *vigour* of life, communicated in regeneration, are very different in different converts.” Alexander, “Privileges of the Sons of God,” 155; emphasis added. The second reason has to do with the “diversity” of the “particular truths” that regenerated sinners “are led to contemplate when their eyes are first opened” by the Spirit. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 64, 67. Speaking of the religious exercises of renewed sinners, Alexander argues that “as the field of truth is very wide, and divine things may be perceived under innumerable aspects and relations, and as there is no uniformity in the particular objects which may first occupy the attention of the enlightened mind, it is impossible to lay down any particular order of exercises which take place. . . . The case may be illustrated by supposing a great multitude of blind persons restored to sight by



which Alexander maintains is “the first effect of regeneration,”<sup>140</sup> the Spirit gives “a discernment of the true quality of spiritual objects”<sup>141</sup> by removing “the films of ignorance and unbelief and prejudice” from the eyes of the fallen mind.<sup>142</sup> When the Spirit works in this fashion, Alexander argues, fallen sinners begin to see “the very best evidence for the truth of Christ’s doctrine,”<sup>143</sup> for they begin to see the truth “in its genuine and attractive colours.”<sup>144</sup> They begin to see, in other words, not only “the mere verity and relative connexion of divine truth, but the beauty and glory of the truth” as well.<sup>145</sup> Alexander concludes,

There is a wide and real distinction between merely intellectual ideas of divine things and those which are spiritual. The unregenerate man may be endowed with a powerful intellect, and he may exercise his reasoning powers on divine truth, and may draw just conclusions respecting them; but he can never by the mere exercise of reason attain to spiritual ideas, any more than the man born blind can attain to the knowledge of light and colours, by logical reasoning; or the deaf mute attain to the correct idea of sounds in some other way. The weakest Christian, even the mere child, by the illumination of the Spirit, possesses a species of knowledge, to which the philosopher can never attain, by the utmost exertion of unassisted reason. And

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an act of divine power. Some of them would be so situated, that the first object seen would be the glorious luminary of day; another might receive the gift of sight in the night, and the moon and stars would absorb his wondering attention; a third might direct his opened eyes to a beautiful landscape; and a fourth might have but a ray of light shining into a dark dungeon without his knowing whence it came. Of necessity, there must be the same endless variety in the particular views of new converts; but still they all partake of new views of divine truth; and the same truths will generally be contemplated, sooner or later, but not in the same order, nor exhibited to all with the same degree of clearness.” *Ibid.*

140. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 62.

141. Archibald Alexander, “Faith’s Victory Over the World,” in *Evangelical Truth*, 417.

142. Alexander, “Privileges of the Sons of God,” 155.

143. Alexander, “Obedience to Christ Gives Assurance of the Truth of His Doctrines,” 19.

144. Alexander, “Holding Forth the Word of Life,” 451.

145. Alexander, “Faith’s Victory Over the World,” 418. Alexander insists that when spiritual truth is seen, “the affections relinquish their hold of earthly things, and however strong the grasp by which they were embraced, they are now voluntarily resigned for the sake of those more excellent things which faith reveals to the soul. With these objects full in view, the glory of this world fades away, and all its grandest objects appear trivial, and little worthy of the pursuit of a rational and immortal mind. The riches, honours, and pleasures of the world, are to the person in the exercise of faith, like the toys of children to the man of mature age.” *Ibid.*, 419–20.

this knowledge is far more excellent, than that of any human science, however sublime or useful.<sup>146</sup>

*The Right Use of Reason and Saving Faith*

For Alexander, then, the new birth is at the foundation of the ability to “know . . . aright” for it is “nothing but the impression of divine truth on the mind, by the energy of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>147</sup> It is, in other words, the means by which those who are “entirely destitute of any spark of true holiness” are enabled to see the “beauty, and glory, and sweetness . . . of divine things,”<sup>148</sup> for it is the means by which their eyes are opened to the “real nature”<sup>149</sup> of the truth that in one way or another is brought before their minds.<sup>150</sup> While interpreters such as Lefferts Loetscher would have us believe that Alexander’s religious epistemology was compromised by “a dualism of mind and heart” that was grounded in the accommodation of Scottish Realism, Alexander’s understanding of the new birth establishes, on the contrary, that he stood in the epistemological mainstream of the Reformed camp.<sup>151</sup> Indeed, it establishes that for Alexander, it is the work of the Spirit that not only brings the mind into a state in which it can perceive in the Word of God “*that* which it never saw before,” namely, “a beauty and excellence, of which it had no conception until now,”<sup>152</sup> but it is also that which thereby

146. *Ibid.*, 418.

147. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 63, xviii.

148. *Ibid.*, 17, 66.

149. Alexander, “Obedience to Christ Gives Assurance of the Truth of His Doctrines,” 23.

150. On what is involved in bringing truth “fairly before the mind,” cf. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 59–61.

151. Lefferts Loetscher, *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism: Archibald Alexander and the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983), 168. Loetscher insists that although Alexander rejects “the old ‘faculty psychology,’” he practically reinstates it by endorsing the primacy of the intellect in faith. Loetscher argues that “In his youthful sermons [Alexander] had at times reflected the fine blending of ‘affections’ and intellect seen in Jonathan Edwards’s ‘Treatise on Religious Affections,’ but in more mature life he seems to have kept intellectual functions quite separate from the ‘affections,’ a pattern more obviously suited to mathematics and to natural science than to religion or to relations between persons divine or human.” *Ibid.* In my estimation, the validity of this point is undermined by the blending of the affections and intellect that is found in *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, one of Alexander’s more mature works.

152. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 64.

excites “those exercises and affections in which the spiritual life essentially consists.”<sup>153</sup>

That Alexander was consistently Reformed in this regard is clearly revealed in his endorsement of the distinction between “a merely rational, or historical faith” and “a true, [or] saving faith.”<sup>154</sup> According to Alexander, the new birth not only opens the eyes of the mind to “a new heaven and a new earth”<sup>155</sup> so that “even natural objects, the visible heavens, and the earth appear clothed with new attributes,”<sup>156</sup> it also engenders the love of truth that is at the heart of “genuine faith.”<sup>157</sup> While Alexander acknowledges a “species of faith”<sup>158</sup> that “is merely the offspring of man’s reason,”<sup>159</sup> he insists that saving faith follows “as a thing of course”<sup>160</sup> from the “views of divine truth”<sup>161</sup> that are “produced by the illumination of the Holy Spirit,” for he recognizes that it is impossible—given the organic nature of the relationship between the understanding and the will—“that the rational mind should see an object to be lovely, and not love it.”<sup>162</sup> He recognizes, in other words, that it is the perception

153. Alexander, *A Brief Compendium of Bible Truth*, 136. Note that these affections are primarily focused on Christ. For elaboration on what this entails, see Archibald Alexander, “Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ,” in *Evangelical Truth*, 437–46.

154. Alexander, “Obedience to Christ Gives Assurance of the Truth of His Doctrines,” 21.

155. Alexander, “Privileges of the Sons of God,” 154.

156. Alexander, “The New Creation,” 116. According to Alexander, in the new birth we receive “a susceptibility of taking on lively impressions from objects which affected us not at all before. A new heaven and a new earth seem to be created; for the views of all nature are changed, by the new life which has been communicated.” Alexander, “Privileges of the Sons of God,” 154. Elsewhere, Alexander insists that God’s special revelation is the key that opens the “book of nature” to regenerated sinners. “With the Bible in our hands,” he argues, “the heavens shine with redoubled lustre,” for through the “declarations” of Scripture, “the mind [is] enlarged and elevated, in contemplating the heavens and the earth!” Whereas the universe “to the atheist is full of darkness and confusion” and thus is “as a volume sealed,” to the Christian it “is resplendent with light and glory.” Indeed, “How grand, how beautiful, how wise, how harmonious, is the universe, when viewed through the medium of divine revelation.” Archibald Alexander, “The Bible, A Key to the Phenomena of the Natural World,” *Biblical Repertory. A Journal of Biblical Literature and Theological Science*, Conducted by an Association of Gentlemen New Series 5, 1 (1829): 107–8.

157. Alexander, “Faith’s Victory Over the World,” 417.

158. Alexander, “Receiving Christ by Faith,” in *Evangelical Truth*, 141.

159. Alexander, “Faith’s Victory Over the World,” 417.

160. Alexander, “Love to Christ,” 235.

161. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 64. Please note that I removed the italics from this quote.

162. Alexander, “Faith’s Victory Over the World,” 417.

of the “moral fitness and beauty”<sup>163</sup> of what God has revealed that “is nothing else but saving faith,”<sup>164</sup> for it is the perception of “the intrinsic excellence of spiritual objects” that—given the constitution of the mind—“excites holy affections, which prompt [the soul] to good purposes,” including the “good purpose” of faith.<sup>165</sup>

What this suggests, then, is that for Alexander, the difference between a “saving faith” and a “historical or merely rational faith” is ultimately found “not in the truths believed . . . , nor in the degree of assent given . . . , but in the evidence on which they are respectively founded.”<sup>166</sup> Whereas historical faith is essentially inert because it rests

163. Alexander, *Evidences of the Authenticity, Inspiration, and Canonical Authority of the Holy Scriptures*, 189.

164. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 64.

165. Alexander, “A Practical View of Regeneration,” 489, 482. While Alexander insists that “In the order of causation life must precede action,” he is convinced that “in the order of time the communication of life and the acts of the new creature are simultaneous.” *Ibid.*, 483. Note that for Alexander, “every good desire, every holy emotion, every exercise of faith, love, repentance, hope, and joy, are produced by the views of truth which the [regenerated] soul now enjoys.” Alexander, “Holding Forth the Word of Life,” 451. How, though, are the acts that are produced by spiritual knowledge related to one another? How, for example, are we to understand the relationship between repentance and saving faith? According to Alexander, “Repentance literally signifies a change of mind for the better. In our Shorter Catechism, it is defined as ‘a saving grace, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience’ [WSC 87]. In the same place, faith is defined as ‘a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him (Jesus Christ) for salvation as he is freely offered in the gospel’ [WSC 86]. Whatever difference of opinion there may be as to the precise meaning of these scriptural terms, all sound Christians will admit that for popular and practical use no language could be selected which would more perspicuously and properly convey to the reader a true notion of these fundamental graces. As to the precedence of one before the other, it is a question as impertinent as whether a whole precedes one of its parts, or is preceded by it. No man can give a sound definition of evangelical repentance which will not include faith. But if the word repentance be used in a more restricted sense, for godly sorrow for sin and hatred of it, it must be preceded by a true faith, for seeing in a rational mind goes before feeling. There must be a perception of the holiness of the divine law, before the turpitude of sin can be so seen as to occasion hatred of it and grief on account of it. But if by faith be meant that cordial reception of Christ, which is mentioned in the words cited from the Catechism, then certainly, there must be some true sense of sin before we can appreciate Christ as a Savior from sin. But it is altogether wrong to perplex the minds of serious Christians with useless questions of this sort. Let the schoolmen discuss such matters to their heart’s content, but let the humble Christian rest in the plain and obvious meaning of the words of Scripture. The effect of divine truth on the heart is produced by general views, and not by nice and metaphysical distinctions.” Alexander, *A Brief Compendium of Bible Truth*, 139–40.

166. Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 66.

merely “on the prejudices of education, or the deductions of reason,” saving faith embraces those exercises that theologians typically ascribe to the understanding as well as those that theologians typically ascribe to the will, for it rests on a perception of spiritual truth that constrains the soul to appropriate what it now regards as the object of its affection.<sup>167</sup> We must conclude, therefore, that for Alexander, spiritual knowledge and saving faith “involve each other,” for saving faith

is simply *a belief of the truth*, when viewed as distinct, and discriminated from all other mental acts. Some will be startled at this nakedness of faith; and many will be ready to object, that it is to make faith to be no more than a bare assent of the understanding to the truth. . . . But I deny that, as described, it is a naked assent of the understanding, as those words are commonly understood. The wide distinction between the understanding and will, which has very much confounded our mental philosophy, has come down to us from the schoolmen. But in making the distinction, they made simple verity the object of the understanding. And that is what we commonly mean by bare assent; it relates to the simple truth; but the will has respect, they said, to *good*—every species of good. Now the faith of which I have spoken, at the same time contemplates the truth, and the beauty, excellency, and goodness of the object, and also its adaptedness to our necessities: all these things are comprehended in the views which the Holy Spirit gives to the mind. Therefore, though faith be a simple uncompounded act, a firm belief or persuasion, it comprehends the objects ascribed both to the understanding and the will.<sup>168</sup>

## Charles Hodge on “Right Reason” and Saving Faith

### *The Relationship between Moral Character and Moral Activity*

When we turn our attention to Charles Hodge, whom we will encounter again in Part Two of this study, we discover that subjective and experiential factors play just as significant a role in his religious epistemology as they do in the epistemology of Archibald Alexander,

167. *Ibid.*

168. *Ibid.*, 64–65. See Alexander’s sympathetic treatment of Edwards’s views on regeneration and conversion, 67–72.

for Hodge also recognizes that the soul is a single “unit” that acts in all of its functions—including cognition—as a single substance.<sup>169</sup> In his published writings on Christian anthropology, Hodge argues that human beings consist of two substances: the body, which is material or corporeal, and the soul or heart, which is immaterial or spiritual and comprised of two faculties or powers, namely, the understanding and the will,<sup>170</sup> which he defines broadly to include the power of self-determination and “all the desires, affections, and even emotions.”<sup>171</sup> While Hodge insists that the soul or heart is distinct from the body,

169. On how the soul acts in all its functions as a single unit, see Charles Hodge, “Free Agency,” *BRPR* 29 (January 1857): 115. At the heart of Hodge’s critique of the theology of Edwards A. Park is his insistence that Park’s distinction between the theology of the intellect and the theology of the feelings is “founded on a wrong psychology. Whatever doctrine the writer may actually hold as to the nature of the soul, his thoughts and language are evidently framed on the assumption of a much greater distinction between the cognitive and emotional faculties in man than actually exists. The very idea of a theology of feeling as distinct from that of the intellect, seems to take for granted that there are two percipient principles in the soul. The one sees a proposition to be true, the other sees it to be false. The one adopts symbols to express its apprehensions; the other is precise and prosaic in its language. We know indeed, that the author would repudiate this statement, and deny that he held to any such dualism in the soul. We do not charge him with any theoretic conviction of this sort. We only say that this undue dis severing the human faculties underlies his whole doctrine, and is implied in the theory which he has advanced. Both scripture and consciousness teach that the soul is an unit; that its activity is one life. The one rational soul apprehends, feels and determines. It is not one faculty that apprehends, another that feels, and another that determines. Nor can you separate in the complex states of mind of which we are every moment conscious, the feeling from the cognition. From the very nature of affection in a rational being, the intellectual apprehension of its object, is essential to its existence. You cannot eliminate the intellectual element, and leave the feeling. The latter is but an attribute of the former, as much as form or colour is an attribute of bodies. It is impossible therefore that what is true to the feelings should be false to the intellect.” Hodge, “The Theology of the Intellect and That of the Feelings,” *BRPR* 22, 4 (1850): 660–61; cf. 671. For a helpful explanation of why the debate between Hodge and Park is relevant to the history of theology in North America, see D. G. Hart, “The Critical Period for Protestant Thought in America,” in *Reckoning with the Past*, 181–99.

170. While Hodge concedes, “The Scriptures do not formally teach any system of psychology,” he argues that “there are certain truths, relating both to our physical and mental constitution, which they constantly assume. They assume . . . that the soul is a substance; that it is a substance distinct from the body, and there are two, and not more than two essential elements in the constitution of man.” Charles Hodge, “The Nature of Man,” *BRPR* 37 (January 1865): 112, cf. 111.

171. Hodge, “Free Agency,” 113; cf. Charles Hodge, “Regeneration, and the Manner of Its Occurrence,” *BRTR* 2 (1830): 289–90. For Hodge, in this broad sense, “All liking and disliking, all preferring, all inclination and disinclination, are . . . acts of the will.” Hodge, “Free Agency,” 113.

he recognizes that it is not distinct from the spirit, but *is* the spiritual substance of human nature. It is, in other words, that underlying force or power which constitutes the essence of who we are, and which manifests itself in thoughts, feelings, and volitions. As the aspect of the human person that is synonymous with the “self,” Hodge concludes that the soul or heart is properly regarded as the source from which the intellectual, religious, and moral life of the moral agent emerges.<sup>172</sup>

What, though, determines the quality of the various exercises of the soul, including the quality of its cognitive exercises? The answer is found in an understanding of moral agency that is grounded in Hodge’s insistence that the quality of moral activity—whether that activity has to do with an act of the will or an act of the mind—is determined by the disposition or “principle,”<sup>173</sup> i.e., the “character,”<sup>174</sup> from which it flows. That this is the case is clearly revealed in Hodge’s understanding of free agency. Whereas Hodge is convinced that moral agents are genuinely free when they are the efficient causes of their own actions, he rejects that understanding of free agency that presupposes the will is itself free, for he recognizes that the will cannot operate independently of the mind. The will, he argues, is not an autonomous faculty or power that can operate in isolation from the views of the understanding, but it is a faculty or power that always acts in concert with the understanding, for it is always determined by the “strongest motive” in the mind, i.e., by what appears to be most preferable to the mind in

172. Hodge, “The Nature of Man,” 118. Hodge often uses the word “heart” to refer to the “whole soul” of a moral agent. As such, the “heart” is that internal power which “drives the current of thoughts, feelings, affections, desires and volitions, all that constitutes our inward life.” Charles Hodge, “My Son, Give Me Thy Heart,” in *Conference Papers* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879), 131; cf. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989; 1871–73), 2:255.

173. “By principle is not meant any act or purpose or state of conscious feeling. It is something which is the source of acts, purposes and feelings, and which determines their character. It is a law in the sense of an abiding force.” Hodge, “Mortify the Deeds of the Body,” in *Conference Papers*, 150.

174. Hodge describes character as “the inward principles which control the inward and outward life.” Charles Hodge, “Except Ye Be Converted and Become as Little Children, Ye Shall Not Enter into the Kingdom of Heaven,” in *Conference Papers*, 125. Elsewhere, Hodge notes that “The character of an act is decided by the nature of the principle by which it is determined. . . . A good man, therefore, is one who is inwardly good: who has a good heart, or nature, something within him which being good in itself, produces good acts.” Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:109; cf. Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality*, 73.

the moment of acting or choosing.<sup>175</sup> Since Hodge is convinced that the activity of the will is always determined by “the last judgment of the understanding,” he concludes that “a man is [genuinely] free”—and “his acts are the true products of the man, and really represent or reveal what he is”—“so long as his volitions are the conscious expression of his own mind; or so long as his activity is determined and controlled by his reason and feelings.”<sup>176</sup>

How, though, are we to conceive of the motives that determine the activity of the will, and how are they related to the moral character of an acting agent? The answer reveals how the understanding and the will are related in Hodge’s philosophical psychology, and it explains why the understanding always takes precedence in moral activity. According to Hodge, the word “motive” can be defined in both objective and subjective senses. In an objective sense, the word refers to something that is outside the self and which awakens

175. According to Hodge, to say that the will is determined by the strongest motive in the mind “only means that it is not self-determined, but that in every rational volition the man is influenced to decide one way rather than another, by something within him, so that the volition is a revelation of what he himself is.” Hodge, “Free Agency,” 114. Hodge opposes that understanding of human freedom that presupposes the will is a self-determining power because it “presupposes that the will can act independently of motive, and it thereby denies the unity of the soul. It supposes that our volitions are isolated atoms, springing up from the abyss of the capricious self-determination of the will, from a source beyond the control or ken of reason. They are purely casual, arbitrary, or capricious. They have no connection with the past, and give no promise of the future. On this hypothesis, there can be no such thing as character. It is, however, a fact of experience universally admitted, that there are such things as principles or dispositions that control the will. We feel assured that an honest man will act honestly, and that a benevolent man will act benevolently. We are moreover assured that these principles may be so strong and fixed as to render the volitions absolutely certain.” *Ibid.*, 131.

176. *Ibid.*, 110, 134, 112. As a general principle, Hodge argues that the will “gets all its light from reason. It is necessarily determined by the intelligence; if it is not, and so far as it is not, it is irrational.” Charles Hodge, “The Elements of Psychology,” *BRPR* 28, 2 (1856): 382. When Hodge discusses this general principle elsewhere, he makes it clear that “the intelligence” he is affirming has to do with the whole soul, not with the rational faculty alone. “If I desire anything,” he argues, “it is because I apprehend it as suitable to satisfy some craving of my nature. If I will anything because it is right, its being right is something for the understanding to discern. In other words, all the desires, affections, or feelings which determine the will to act must have an object, and that object by which the feeling is excited and towards which it tends, must be discerned by the understanding. It is this that gives them their rational character, and renders the determinations of the will rational. Any volition which does not follow the last dictate of the understanding, in this sense of the words, is the act of an idiot. It may be spontaneous, be just as the acts of brutes are, but it cannot be free, in the sense of being the act of an accountable person.” Hodge, “Free Agency,” 111.



desire and affection and thereby moves the agent to an action or a decision. In a subjective sense, the word refers to “those inward convictions, feelings, inclinations, and principles *which are in the mind itself*, and which impel or influence the man to decide one way rather than another.”<sup>177</sup> When the word “motive” is defined in this subjective sense, i.e., the sense that explicitly denies the understanding and the will can act independently of one another in moral activity,<sup>178</sup> it becomes immediately clear that the moral quality of a voluntary act is determined by the character of the acting agent because it is the character of the acting agent that determines what is most preferable to the mind in the moment of acting or choosing. “There is no such thing,” Hodge argues, “as a purely intellectual cognition of a moral truth. It is the exercise of a moral nature; it implies moral sensibility. It of necessity, involves feeling to a greater or less degree. It is the cognition of a being sensitive to moral distinctions, and without that sensibility there can be no such cognition.”<sup>179</sup>

What this suggests, then, is that for Hodge a moral agent is genuinely free not just when his actions are determined by his will, but more precisely when “his volitions are truly and properly his own, determined by nothing out of himself, but proceeding from his own views, feelings, and immanent dispositions, so that they are the real, intelligent, and conscious expression of his character, or of what is in his mind.”<sup>180</sup> This is how moral character is related to moral activity,

177. *Ibid.*, 113–14. Emphasis added.

178. Recall Hodge’s broad definition of the “will.” According to this definition, “the term voluntary applies not only to . . . acts of choice, but to all exercises of the affections or desires preliminary thereto.” Hodge, “Regeneration, and the Manner of Its Occurrence,” 290; cf. 288–90. While Hodge concedes that “purely intellectual cognition” is possible “in the apprehension of speculative truths,” he insists that the cognition involved in moral activity involves the whole soul, and as such is not a “purely . . . intellectual exercise.” Hodge, “The Theology of the Intellect and that of the Feeling,” 662.

179. Hodge, “The Theology of the Intellect and that of the Feeling,” 662.

180. Hodge, “Free Agency,” 108–9. Hodge distinguishes between moral *certainty* and moral *necessity* largely for semantic reasons having to do with the relationship between the will and the motives that determine the will to act. He argues that the motives that determine the will to act are not the “efficient cause” of moral activity, but the “ground or reason” for moral activity. On the basis of this distinction Hodge affirms both the efficiency of the agent in moral activity as well as the essential truth captured in the doctrine of moral necessity, namely that “motives are the reasons which determine the agent to exert his efficiency in one way rather than another.”

Hodge argues, no matter how the dispositions and feelings that “constitute character” and determine the will come to be what they are, for the inclinations that inform the last judgment of the understanding “derive their morality or immorality from their nature, and not from their origin. Malignity is evil and love is good,” Hodge insists, “whether concreated, innate, acquired or infused.”<sup>181</sup>

### *Sin, Grace, and the Ability to Reason “Rightly”*

The subtleties of Hodge’s philosophical psychology—especially those having to do with the precise nature of the relationship between the understanding and the will—are particularly evident in his understanding of saving faith. Like Alexander before him, Hodge maintains that a mind that is depraved by sin is incapable of moving the soul to embrace God precisely because a mind that is destitute of holiness is blind to the spiritual significance of “the things which are freely given to [us] of God.”<sup>182</sup> It cannot yield a true and compelling perception of what

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Ibid., 114. As such, “Motives are not the efficient cause of the volition; that efficiency resides in the agent; but what we, ‘by a necessary mental law,’ must demand, is a sufficient reason why the agent exerts his efficiency in one way rather than another.” Ibid., 133.

181. Ibid., 134. According to Hodge, “A man is responsible for his external acts, because they are decided by his will; he is responsible for his volitions, because they are determined by his principles and feelings; he is responsible for his principles and feelings, because of their inherent nature as good or bad, and because they are his own, and constitute his character. If you detach the outward act from the will, it ceases to have any moral character.” Ibid., 130.

182. Charles Hodge, *The Way of Life* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978; 1841), 15, 23. Hodge argues that Adam was created in the image of God with a moral nature that was genuinely holy. Charles Hodge, “The First and Second Adam,” *BRPR* 32 (April 1860): 358. He was created, in other words, in a state of “original righteousness,” and thus was pronounced by God to be exceedingly good not only because of the “perfect harmony and due subordination of all that constituted man,” i.e., “His reason was subject to God; his will was subject to his reason; his affections and appetites to his will; the body was the obedient organ of the soul,” but more importantly because “his moral perfection in which he resembled God, included knowledge, righteousness and holiness.” Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:99. When Adam fell, however, he lost his original righteousness and plunged his posterity into a state of original sin (on the “inherent corruption” that constitutes the state of original sin, cf. *ibid.*, 2:227–56). At the heart of this fallen condition is the depravity of human nature. According to Hodge, the depraved condition is not the consequence of a “positive infusion of wickedness,” but its essence is found in “The mere absence of a native tendency to God [that] leaves the soul in moral confusion and ruin.” Hodge, “Regeneration, and the Manner of Its Occurrence,” 293. While the “essential attributes and constitutional propensities” remain in fallen human beings, “they are there without a principle of moral order and subordination. There is no presiding spirit to turn them to the service of God. The result of this absence is

God has revealed, in other words, because it can neither “discern” the beauty nor “taste” the sweetness of the truth that it can rationally perceive.<sup>183</sup> But how can this be? Why would an otherwise rational moral agent remain indifferent to the force of the truth that God has revealed when the truth itself is objectively compelling? The answer is found in Hodge’s insistence that “No truth can be *properly* apprehended unless there is a harmony between it and the mind to which it is presented.”<sup>184</sup> While Hodge acknowledges that the unregenerate can appropriate the “external evidence” for the truth of what God has revealed and thus can exercise a speculative or historical faith, he insists that a saving faith is beyond their grasp not because there is “any deficiency in the evidence of the truth,” but because the depraved mind does not have the moral capacity “to appreciate” the true significance of the truth that it can rationally perceive.<sup>185</sup> The last judgment of the depraved mind is incapable of determining the will to make the beauty of God’s glory the focus of the affections, in other words, because a moral defect “in the organ of vision”<sup>186</sup>—“by which the reason or understanding is blinded, and the taste and feelings are perverted”<sup>187</sup>—prevents a “true” or “right” apprehension of the truth that is present to the understanding.<sup>188</sup>

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all manner of evil, and a tendency to all this evil lies in this very state of the soul, and exists prior to any of its moral acts.” Ibid.

183. Cf. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:261. For Hodge, the supreme manifestation of spiritual blindness is found in the refusal “to recognize and receive [Christ] as being who he claims to be. . . . This is the greatest of sins. It is the condemning sin. Its heinousness consists . . . in its opposition to the clearest light. He who cannot see the sun, must be stone blind. He who cannot see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ must be blinded by Satan. This blindness is moral, religious, and spiritual deadness.” Hodge, “The Sin of Unbelief,” in *Conference Papers*, 98; cf. Hodge, “Regeneration, and the Manner of Its Occurrence,” 283–84.

184. Hodge, *The Way of Life*, 12. Emphasis added.

185. Ibid., 12, 18. According to Hodge “the scriptures . . . clearly teach that holiness is necessary to the perception of holiness. In other words, that the things of the Spirit must be spiritually discerned: that the unrenewed have not this discernment, and therefore, they cannot know the things which are freely given to us of God, i.e., the things which he has graciously revealed in his word. They may have that apprehension of them which an uncultivated ear has of complicated musical sounds, or an untutored eye of a work of art. Much of the object is perceived, but much is not discerned, and that which remains unseen, is precisely that which gives to these objects their peculiar excellence and power.” Hodge, “The Theology of the Intellect and That of the Feelings,” 671.

186. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:51.

187. Ibid., 2:261.

188. Cf. *ibid.*, 2:234; Hodge, *The Way of Life*, 15; Charles Hodge, “The Necessity of the Spirit’s Teaching in Order to the Right Understanding of the Scriptures,” in *Conference Papers*, 75–77.

If, then, the ultimate cause of unbelief is found in “the want of power rightly to discern spiritual things, and the consequent want of all right affections toward them,”<sup>189</sup> how do those who are positively unrighteous and inclined not to God but “to self and sin”<sup>190</sup> acquire the ability to appreciate “the beauty, excellence, and suitableness of the things of the Spirit”?<sup>191</sup> The answer is found in Hodge’s understanding of the new birth. While Hodge acknowledges that fallen sinners play an active role in their own conversion, he insists that they are totally “passive” in regeneration because “the state of mind” that enables them to see and love what God has revealed “is produced directly by the Spirit of God.”<sup>192</sup> According to Hodge, the Spirit regenerates fallen sinners not by changing “the essence or essential properties” of their souls,<sup>193</sup> nor by urging them to attend more carefully to the “moral power” of the truth that they can already rationally perceive.<sup>194</sup> Rather, the Spirit breathes “new life” into souls that are dead in sin by sovereignly changing “that inward immanent disposition or spiritual state which is back of all voluntary or conscious activity, and which, in the things of God, determines that activity.”<sup>195</sup> For Hodge, then, it is this “infusion

189. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:261.

190. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993; 1835), 185. For Hodge, the positive nature of sin “results from the active nature of the soul. If there is no tendency to the love and service of God, there is, from this very defect, a tendency to self and sin.” *Ibid.* For a fuller discussion of “positive unrighteousness,” see Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:187–88.

191. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:262.

192. Hodge, “Regeneration, and the Manner of Its Occurrence,” 295. According to Hodge, “It is the soul that repents, believes, hopes and fears, but it is the Holy Spirit that regenerates.” *Ibid.*

193. *Ibid.*, 255. Hodge insists that the change wrought by the Spirit in regeneration is “a moral and not a physical change; and . . . it takes place without any violence being done to the soul or any of its laws.” *Ibid.*, 261.

194. *Ibid.*, 261. Regeneration, Hodge argues, “is not effected by mere moral suasion; . . . there is something more than the simple presentation of truth and urging of motives. The idea of Calvinists uniformly was, that the truth, however clearly presented or forcibly urged, would never produce its full effect without a special influence of the Holy Spirit. This influence they maintained was supernatural, that is, above the mere moral power of the truth, and such as infallibly to secure the result, and yet . . . did the soul no more violence than demonstration does the intellect, or persuasion the heart.” *Ibid.*

195. Charles Hodge, “Evidences of Regeneration,” in *Conference Papers*, 137–38; cf. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:35. As the previous notes indicate, Hodge is convinced that the regenerating work of the Spirit does not violate the integrity of the fallen soul in any sense. He reinforces

of a new spiritual principle”<sup>196</sup> that enables the regenerate to see revealed truth more or less for what it objectively is, for it is this “renovat[ion] of the corrupted nature of man”<sup>197</sup> that gives them the ability “to see and love the beauty of holiness.”<sup>198</sup> “Regeneration secures right knowledge as well as right feeling,” Hodge argues, “and right feeling is not the effect of right knowledge, nor is right knowledge the effect of right feeling. The two are inseparable effects of a work which affects the whole soul.”<sup>199</sup>

Having established that the inclination of the heart plays a decisive role in Hodge’s philosophical psychology, we must conclude our consideration of Hodge’s religious epistemology by reflecting on his understanding of the relationship between “right reason” and saving faith. If it is indeed true that for Hodge there is an intimate relationship between moral character and moral activity because the soul is a single “unit” that acts in all its functions as a single substance, then might there be grounds for expecting that the inclinations that inform the perception of the regenerated mind will also “fit and dispose” the regenerated agent to “holy acts”?<sup>200</sup> Might there be grounds for expecting, in other words, that because of the “constitut[ion]” of the mind,<sup>201</sup> the inclinations that inform a “right” understanding of what God has revealed will also lead the regenerated agent “to embrace [the truth] with assurance and delight”?<sup>202</sup> Indeed there are. Hodge argues that the genesis of saving faith is found in the new birth because it is

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this point with the following quotation from the Puritan Stephen Charnock: “His grace is so sweet and so strong, that he neither wrongs the liberty of his creature, nor doth prejudice his absolute power. As God moves necessary causes, necessarily; contingent causes, contingently; so he moves free agents freely, without offering violence to their natures. The Spirit glides into the heart by sweet illapses [*sic*] of grace, and victoriously allures the soul . . . not by crossing, but changing the inclination, by the all conquering and alluring charms of love.” Charnock, quoted in Hodge, “Regeneration, and the Manner of Its Occurrence,” 264.

196. Charles Hodge, “Regeneration,” in *Conference Papers*, 136.

197. Hodge, “The First and Second Adam,” 341.

198. Hodge, “Regeneration, and the Manner of Its Occurrence,” 285.

199. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:36. For concise summaries of Hodge’s understanding of regeneration, cf. *ibid.*, 2:69–70; Hodge, “Regeneration,” 136–38.

200. Hodge, “Regeneration, and the Manner of Its Occurrence,” 267. See also Hodge’s sympathetic treatment of Edwards’s understanding of the relationship between regeneration and the spiritual sense that fosters holy acts. *Ibid.*, 268–69.

201. Hodge, *The Way of Life*, 16.

202. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:71.

in the new birth that the Spirit imparts “a discernment not only of the truth, but also of the holiness, excellence, and glory of the things discerned.”<sup>203</sup> It is this perception of the truth in its true or “right” nature, then, that is “inseparably connected” with saving faith, for it is this “opening of the eyes on the certainty, glory, and excellence of divine things” that engenders the “delight” that directs “all the energies of the new-born soul” toward the pursuit of that which is spiritual and eternal rather than toward that which is “seen and temporal.”<sup>204</sup> What this suggests, then, is that when “the excellence of spiritual objects” is revealed by the Spirit “to the intelligence” of a regenerated sinner, there is a sense in which it is entirely right to say that this knowledge “is . . . eternal life,”<sup>205</sup> for the “delight” that determines the will to embrace what the sinner now discerns to be glorious is itself “the necessary consequence of spiritual illumination; and with delight come satisfaction and peace, elevation above the world, or spiritual mindedness, and such a sense of the importance of the things not seen and eternal, that all the energies of the renewed soul are . . . devoted to securing them for ourselves and others.”<sup>206</sup>

## Conclusion

If the foregoing analysis of the religious epistemologies of Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge articulates the epistemological context within which the “intellectualism” of Old Princeton must be interpreted, then two conclusions—both of which call for a reassessment of the consensus of critical opinion—are in order regarding how we should approach Old Princeton’s emphasis on “science,” “facts,” and the primacy of the intellect in faith. First, if it is indeed true that

203. *Ibid.*, 3:69.

204. *Ibid.*, 3:34–35.

205. Hodge, “The Theology of the Intellect and That of the Feelings,” 672.

206. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:34; cf. *ibid.*, 2:263; Hodge, “Regeneration, and the Manner of Its Occurrence,” 295–96; Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality*, 57. On the delight that determines the soul to embrace what God has revealed, cf. Charles Hodge, “Delighting in the Law of God,” in *Conference Papers*, 249–50; Hodge, “Living by Faith,” in *Conference Papers*, 152.

subjective and experiential factors play a critical role in Old Princeton's religious epistemology because the soul is a single unit that acts in all of its functions as a single substance, then it would be a serious mistake to conclude that the Princeton Theology in general and the Princeton apologetic in particular are grounded in a form of Enlightenment rationalism rather than in faithfulness to the epistemological assumptions of the Reformed tradition. Indeed, if we can account for the "intellectualism" of Old Princeton by pointing to emphases that are standard components of the Reformed tradition, then a reconsideration of Old Princeton's orthodox bearings is in order because in that case, its emphasis on "science," "facts," and the primacy of the intellect in faith is not "*ipso facto* evidence of an intellectualized faith."<sup>207</sup>

Second, given the plausibility of the claim that the "intellectualism" of Old Princeton in fact is moral rather than merely rational, there is warrant for concluding that despite what the consensus of critical opinion would have us believe, the Princeton Theology was driven by subjective rather than objective, theological rather than philosophical concerns. There is warrant for concluding, in other words, that the Princeton theologians were not indifferent to the subjective and experiential components of a consistently Reformed religious epistemology, nor were they exceedingly optimistic about the epistemic competence of the unregenerated mind. Rather, like those in the mainstream of the Reformed tradition before them, they recognized that even in cognition, the quality of the operation of the soul is always determined by the disposition or character of the acting agent. If these conclusions hold water, then what this suggests is not that the Princeton theologians were so indebted to the assumptions of the Enlightenment that they passed on to their descendants a bastardized version of Calvinism. What this suggests, rather, is that they were more or less consistently Reformed scholars who responded to the modern era's relocation of the divine-human nexus not only by insisting that the Christian religion entails the rational appropriation of objective truth, but also by maintaining that the ability to see this truth for what it objectively is presupposes the work of the Holy Spirit on the "whole soul" of a moral agent.

207. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, 3.