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"Parallel Lines Never Intersect": The Influence of Dutch Reformed Presuppositionalism in American Christian Fundamentalism "Parallel Lines Never Intersect":

Adam S. Brasich



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
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“PARALLEL LINES NEVER INTERSECT”:
THE INFLUENCE OF DUTCH REFORMED PRESUPPOSITIONALISM
ON AMERICAN CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM

By

ADAM S. BRASICH

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The members of the supervisory committee were:

John Corrigan
Professor Directing Thesis

Amanda Porterfield
Committee Member

John Kelsay
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the thesis has been approved in accordance with university requirements.

To my parents, with love.

To Steve Webb, Bob Royalty, David Blix, Jon Baer, David Kubiak,
Joe and Leslie Day, Jeff Wilcox, and Zach Rohrbach.
Teachers and friends all.

To Edward B. McLean, in memory.

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ABSTRACT

Much of the current historiography of American Christian fundamentalism focuses solely on Scottish Common Sense Realism as an intellectual source of fundamentalist epistemology since the early twentieth century. This thesis argues against this historiographical trend by illuminating the central role of Dutch Reformed presuppositionalism in the formation of fundamentalist epistemologies. Articulated within the context of revitalization, confessional, and secessionists movements within the state Dutch Reformed Church, theologians such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck developed an epistemological system that stressed the necessity of correct presuppositions as a prerequisite for obtaining truth. Without correct ideas about God, in other words, one was incapable of perceiving any other truth in its fullness. This epistemological tradition was brought to North America by Dutch Reformed immigrants, who primarily settled in the Upper Midwest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Cornelius Van Til, one of these immigrants, served as a professor at J. Gresham Machen's Westminster Theological Seminary immediately following the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy and taught his unswerving presuppositionalism to several generations of non-Dutch, American Presbyterian seminarians, including Francis A. Schaeffer. Schaeffer, though rejecting the strictly Reformed strain of fundamentalism represented by Machen and Van Til's Orthodox Presbyterian Church, adapted presuppositionalism to suit his purposes, combining it with traditional Princetonian Scottish Common Sense Realism. This resulted in an epistemology that proved to be influential during the rise of the Christian Right in the latter half of the twentieth century. By investigating epistemologies that competed with Scottish Common Sense Realism or creatively interacted with it, a clearer picture appears of the diverse nature of Christian fundamentalism. It no longer seems

to be monolithic, but rather it contains a plethora of theological and confessional influences that interact in numerous ways that necessitate academic investigation.

INTRODUCTION

Historians traditionally trace the story of American Christian fundamentalism through several strains that unified in the aftermath of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy in the 1920s. On the one hand, evangelical pietism, particularly related to the Keswick holiness movement of the late nineteenth century, imparted an emphasis on living the proper Christian lifestyle connected to an emotional rebirth experience. On the other hand, Scottish Common Sense Realism, an intellectual tradition dominant in America since the Revolutionary Period, promoted a democratic epistemology in which every person could access truth. Reacting against growing Protestant liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conservative evangelicals engaged in a series of ecclesiastical and theological battles that resulted in the birth of the fundamentalist movement in America. In many cases abandoning the traditional “mainline” churches, fundamentalists focused on building faithful denominations and other institutions that would preserve the traditional faith within an apostate society, retreating from that society until their reemergence in the late twentieth century under the auspices of the Religious Right.

Much has been done by recent scholarship to complicate this story. For instance, a new paradigm of interpreting the Early Republic now argues that Common Sense Realism was not inherently democratic. Instead, it effectively preserved evangelical Protestantism’s power in the United States by combatting religious skepticism while allowing access to religious knowledge.¹ Additionally, scholars have refuted the trope of retreat, demonstrating that fundamentalists never truly separated themselves from society but interacted heavily with societal trends (such as new

¹ Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), and Sophia Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: A Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

technology) and engaged in “secular” politics.² This revisionist historiography has done much to deepen the academic community’s understanding of the social aspects of fundamentalism. However, the claim of Common Sense Realism’s intellectual monopoly over fundamentalism remains relatively untouched.

This thesis contributes to the revisionist historiography of American Christian fundamentalism by charting a genealogy of Dutch Reformed presuppositionalism as a contributing epistemology to that movement. Specifically, this thesis argues that fundamentalist epistemology was the product of negotiation due to conflict rather than peaceful monopoly. Presuppositionalism challenged the traditional place of Scottish Common Sense Realism in American evangelicalism, resulting in a unique epistemological tradition that maintains elements of both traditions.

Rooted in rebellions against theological liberalism within the state Dutch Reformed Church, presuppositionalism is a theological epistemology that declares that true knowledge can only be gained based on correct presuppositions. For example, a non-Christian would not place the sovereignty of God at the center of intellectual investigation. According to the presuppositionalist, this prevents one from truly understanding oneself or the world, both of which were created by and belong to God. Articulated by Dutch theologians Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, this tradition directly assaulted evidentialist apologetics, in which one can demonstrate the rationality of Christianity to the unbeliever, and thus came into conflict with Scottish Common Sense Realism when conservative Dutch Reformed immigrants – as well as Kuyper and Bavinck themselves in invited lectures to Princeton Seminary – brought their ideas

² See Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011); and Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

to America. This previously ethnic tradition was introduced to the wider world of American Presbyterianism and Christian fundamentalism through Cornelius Van Til, who served as professor of apologetics at J. Gresham Machen's Westminster Theological Seminary for nearly a half-century. Van Til's Dutch presuppositionalism was modified and adapted by his student Francis A. Schaeffer, who is commonly recognized as one of the founding figures of the Religious Right. Though Schaeffer's epistemology was not purely Van Tilian presuppositionalist, Schaeffer maintained his former mentor's emphasis on the necessity of correct presuppositions for apprehending truth, thereby granting presuppositionalism further influence within the Christian fundamentalist community.

Christian fundamentalism, like any other category attempting to describe religious movements, is notoriously difficult to define. George Marsden defines fundamentalism as "militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism."³ This language is both sufficiently specific and nonspecific to delineate the boundaries – both hard and porous – necessary for defining such a loose movement. Particularly in the time period that this thesis explores on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, between 1830 and 1968, the main concern of related predecessors and participants in presuppositionalist fundamentalism were first and foremost concerned with the perceived threat of modernism. While the characters in this thesis are primarily Reformed churchmen, their influence was not contained strictly within Reformed circles. Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer prevented this. This thesis primarily involves confessional fundamentalists (with the arguable exception of Schaeffer) rather than populist fundamentalists, but these categories are permeable, as Schaeffer's influence demonstrates.⁴ Therefore, this thesis accepts

³ George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

⁴ The distinction between confessional and populist fundamentalists has been articulated primarily by D. G. Hart in several of his academic works. A more thorough discussion of this appears in this thesis's first chapter.

Marsden's description of fundamentalists as "militantly anti-modernist" evangelicals as a welcome aid in investigating fundamentalism.

This thesis will investigate the role of presuppositionalism in American Christian fundamentalism in three chapters. The first chapter consists of a critical examination of the current historiography regarding Common Sense Realism in fundamentalism. In particular, the chapter discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the existing "evangelical historiography," consisting primarily of the works of George Marsden and Mark Noll, as well as confessional history represented, amongst others, by D. G. Hart and John R. Meuther, and Dutch American ethnic history, represented most prominently by James D. Bratt. This chapter argues for a synthesis of the material that allows for a more complete picture of fundamentalism rather than the often agenda-driven and myopic pictures offered by each category on its own.

The remainder of the thesis, consisting of chapters Two and Three, traces a genealogy of presuppositionalism from its Dutch roots to its refashioning by Schaeffer in the mid-twentieth century. Chapter Two describes the birth of presuppositionalism in an era of theological and social turmoil in the Netherlands. Resulting from rebellion against Dutch "modernism," the theology was transformed from a form of separatism to an aggressively world-embracing ideology by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, who emphasized that faith – and thus presuppositions – were at the heart of all intellectual endeavors. In other words, nothing was beyond the grasp of God's sovereignty. Chapter Three concludes the thesis by describing the growth of presuppositionalism in the United States through the efforts of Cornelius Van Til. Van Til succeeded in introducing presuppositionalism into the nascent American fundamentalist movement, especially once Machen unexpectedly died not long after the founding of Westminster Seminary. One of Van Til's earliest students was Francis Schaeffer. Not a

confessional Presbyterian like Van Til, Schaeffer abandoned Westminster for the more populist fundamentalist Bible Presbyterian Church. Nevertheless, Schaeffer embraced Van Til's emphasis on presuppositions, which would become the fulcrum of Schaeffer's apologetical assaults on non-Christian philosophies during the 1960s and 1970s.

This thesis does not argue that presuppositionalism remained an unchanged ideology between 1830 and 1968, let alone up to 2013. Such an ideological creature does not exist. Like any other intellectual movement, it developed over time and evolved according to its varied contexts. Therefore, this thesis does not argue that Van Tilian presuppositionalism is either popular in all evangelical or fundamentalist circles (it is not) or was uncritically communicated by Francis Schaeffer (it was not). Instead, this intellectual history argues that presuppositionalism, despite the changes that occurred over the course of its development, provided additional material in the fundamentalist epistemological arsenal alongside, and even in combination with, Common Sense Realism. Common Sense Realism did not hold an unchallenged and unchanged *in vacuo* monopoly over fundamentalist thought. Instead, fundamentalist epistemology developed through conflict and negotiation between both Common Sense Realism and presuppositionalism.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MULTISTORIED HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM

Introduction

The works within the historiography of American Christian fundamentalism are a contentious lot, in many ways reflective of their subject matter. The works range from attempts to explain the scandalous existence of such a monstrosity within a reputedly modern, liberal America to glowing hagiographies displaying their subjects as exemplars of true Christian faith. In between these two extremes lay works of a different character altogether, situating fundamentalism in opposition to evangelicalism, identifying it as requiring extrication by evangelicalism for the good of its intellectual health. Regardless, fundamentalism almost always serves within the historiography as a pawn played by strategists within larger political and theological debates being waged amongst academics, political pundits, clergy, and laity. Unfortunately, therefore, Christian fundamentalism's theological and social past has often been obscured by its placement in these debates.

As this thesis represents a revisionist interpretation of the intellectual roots of American fundamentalism, it necessarily strongly critiques the existing historiography while simultaneously borrowing from it. The work of many scholars, such as Mark Noll, George Marsden, Joel Carpenter, H. Richard Niebuhr, and others have provided many fine additions to the understanding of American Christian fundamentalism. Their works serve as building blocks upon which future research and interpretation can begin. However, improvements inevitably can be made.

This chapter identifies three main strands of the historiography of American Christian fundamentalism. The first, represented largely by George Marsden and Mark Noll, consists of an explicitly evangelical historiography, which includes works that simultaneously concern evangelicals but also written from an evangelical perspective. These works include many of the most influential works on Christian fundamentalism. However, their project is inhibited by the theological project naturally attached to it, the refashioning of American evangelicalism. A potential correction, though unfortunately underutilized, is the work of D. G. Hart, who seeks to differentiate between confessional Protestants and populist fundamentalists. His works represents the second strand. Despite his work's own flaws, Hart recognizes the diversity within the groups and individuals considered fundamentalists. His work greatly influences this thesis. However, this approach possesses potential pitfalls, which is often exemplified by the third strand of Christian fundamentalist historiography, which is confessional and ethnic history. These works contribute much to the understanding of their subject, but they too often are restricted by their respective, ghettoizing blinders, preventing them to interacting with larger issues of concern or with various academic lines of analysis. Nevertheless, these histories deserve attention, as they will in this thesis. Through the description and analysis of these three strands of the historiography of American Christian fundamentalism, the problem of the creation of an intellectually monolithic fundamentalism will be identified, which will then be rectified in the remainder of the thesis.

The Evangelical Historiography

Since 1979, a historiography of American Christian fundamentalism has been developed largely by self-identified evangelical Christians. This line of interpretation is situated within a larger historiography of American evangelicalism which attempts to place evangelicalism at the

heart of the history of American religion. The historiography also contributes to internal debates within the evangelical community concerning its theological and intellectual identity. This situation causes the historiography to serve a theological purpose which affects its understanding of fundamentalism's intellectual roots. In particular, it privileges Scottish Common Sense Realism in exclusion to other possible influences, thus portraying fundamentalism as more monolithic than it is.

The evangelical historiography provides a genealogy of American evangelicalism and fundamentalism that begins with Jonathan Edwards and colonial America. This is best exemplified by Mark Noll's *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*.⁵ Noll argues that debates concerning the "Reformed literal hermeneutic" were central to American Protestantism, and hence American religion. Connected to these debates was Scottish Common Sense Realism, which served as part of the "American synthesis." Noll states that this synthesis "was a compound of evangelical Protestant religion, republican political ideology, and commonsense moral reasoning."⁶ Describing this synthesis, Noll quotes Yale president Timothy Dwight concerning common sense and describes it as an "American credo that prevailed widely for at least the next two generations...."⁷ For Noll, Scottish Common Sense Realism is the distinguishing mark of antebellum American theology.⁸ No other nation or religious culture achieved a distinctly national synthesis in which common sense was a necessary ingredient. In *America's God*, Noll traces common sense through its different theological and ecclesiastical expressions as the common thread of American religion.

⁵ Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

Noll is not blind to the fact that there were other alternatives to common sense realism in antebellum America. Indeed, he devotes a chapter to these theologies, such as Roman Catholicism, Mercersburg Theology, and confessional and Americanized Lutheranism. However, these non-common sense theologies are deemed “failed alternatives.”⁹ Noll admits that their existence “suggests something about the great quantity of important theological labor going on outside the mainstream defined by the era’s most visible churches and church leaders.”¹⁰ However, their failures to be integrated into the grander American theological discussion derived from their views of common sense, which opposed the “literal, Reformed hermeneutic” in various fashions. For instance, Charles Hodge’s attempt to design a mediating theology in which slavery was simultaneously permitted by scripture yet worthy of abolition in the United States failed because of the power of common sense, literalist readings of the Bible.¹¹ Noll writes that “these two positions were not necessarily antithetical, but they certainly looked antithetical in the light of the standard approach to Scripture that had developed in the United States.”¹² Likewise, briefly discussing postbellum theological developments, he claims that Lutheran “strict adherence to historic Lutheran confessions in combination with the swelling tides of German and Scandinavian immigrants...removed it almost entirely from meaningful dialogue with American public life.”¹³

Noll is perhaps correct in his emphasis on the importance of common sense realism within American theology, but he errs in labeling it the center of an “American synthesis.” The creation of an “American synthesis” excludes the theological work of non-common sense theologians from view, relegating them to being “failed alternatives.” Insofar as these alternatives were

⁹ Ibid., 402.

¹⁰ Ibid., 402.

¹¹ Ibid., 416.

¹² Ibid., 416.

¹³ Ibid., 412.

accepted by their own communities and served constructive purposes within them, they were hardly failures. Instead, their longevity both within their communities and within American society makes the existence of an “American synthesis” questionable. The fact that common sense was unable to eradicate distinctively Catholic theology or the enduring confessional Lutheranism of the Midwest demonstrates the limits of its power. Regardless of excuses, failed cohesion does not constitute a synthesis.

Noll’s genealogy of evangelicalism continues forward past the Civil War in his *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, in which he diagnoses the evangelical community with intellectual malaise.¹⁴ He begins the book by bluntly claiming that “the scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is no much of an evangelical mind.”¹⁵ The Fundamentalists are among those who have perpetrated “a disaster for the life of the mind.”¹⁶ This is partially due to the Fundamentalists’ preservation and continued implementation of Scottish Common Sense Realism. Noll argues that “this system had significant intellectual shortcomings, but these shortcomings were not noticed...so long as Americans were preoccupied with constructing a stable society. The flaws in this system became more apparent when evangelicals responded to the new social and intellectual conditions of the mid to the late nineteenth century.”¹⁷ For Noll, the history of evangelical theology is the history of common sense in America, as he made clear in *America’s God*. Common sense philosophy appealed to those in colonial America who desired “to preserve traditional forms of Christianity without having to appeal to traditional religious authorities,” and this pattern was continued by the fundamentalists as they encountered

¹⁴ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

modernist theology.¹⁸ Discussing Princeton Theology, Noll claims that “so basic did this [common sense] reasoning become that even self-consciously orthodox evangelicals had no qualms about resting the entire edifice of the faith on the principles of the Scottish Enlightenment.”¹⁹ Due to this, as well as common sense’s cultural impact on the national mind, evangelicalism could not be separated from common sense.²⁰ However, views of science gradually shifted in the late nineteenth century in favor of organic development, leaving behind evangelicalism’s devotion to a static reality apprehensible by common sense.

This inevitably led to the “intellectual disaster of fundamentalism,” since “it hardened conservative evangelical commitments to certain features of the nineteenth-century evangelical-American synthesis that were problematic to begin with.”²¹ Fundamentalism’s primary sin was not necessarily the stagnant preservation of nineteenth century ideas, but rather its peculiar innovations. Dispensational premillennialism is chief among them. Noll condemns this eschatology for continuing Baconian scientific principles into the twentieth century while adding a pessimistic outlook towards society.²² This bred the spirit of anti-intellectualism that Noll sees as a curse upon evangelicalism.

Noll’s scholarly corpus can be interpreted as being a part of the evangelical renaissance that he is attempting to promote within the wider evangelical community. Having diagnosed the problem as common sense realism, Noll makes it the central theme of evangelical history, which is a history of declension. Fundamentalism plays a crucial role in his interpretation of evangelicalism, and it suffers for it. As Noll seeks to expose the weaknesses of fundamentalism, and hence the necessity of progressing beyond it, he transforms fundamentalism into a

¹⁸ Ibid., 87.

¹⁹ Ibid., 93.

²⁰ Ibid., 99.

²¹ Ibid., 109, 115.

²² Ibid., 126-130.

monolithic entity resting firmly upon the foundations of common sense realism. His narrative requires it. However, his work on evangelicalism masks the diversity of thought and intellectual roots present in fundamentalism. For instance, by focusing on the populist fundamentalists, he effectively ignores and marginalizes the confessional evangelicals, such as J. Gresham Machen and Cornelius Van Til.

This emphasis on the dispensationalists and other populist fundamentalists, grounded in their reliance upon common sense realism, is shared by George Marsden's studies on Christian fundamentalism. Defining a fundamentalist as "an evangelical who is angry about something," Marsden likewise places common sense realism at the root of the fundamentalist's anger.²³ As Noll argues in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Marsden claims that evangelicalism as a whole believed "that God's truth was a single unified order and that all persons of common sense were capable of knowing that truth."²⁴ Indeed, "Common Sense Realism remained unquestionably *the* American philosophy," though it was challenged by several alternatives.²⁵ As conservative Protestantism prior to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy relied heavily upon common sense realism, modernist challenges to it formed the root causes for the controversy. Hence, a fundamentalist, preserve the old order, necessarily was a proponent of common sense realism.

Marsden therefore connects J. Gresham Machen, William Jennings Bryan, and premillennialists through common sense realism. This epistemology becomes the connecting thread that runs through the whole of fundamentalism. For instance, Marsden writes that "Machen saw [the controversy] as a question of scientific Christianity versus 'modern anti-

²³ George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 1.

²⁴ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

intellectualism.’ Just as those who held to the paradigms of naturalistic science found supernatural Christianity wholly ‘unscientific’ and even ‘obscurantist,’ so Machen holding firmly to the view that science deal with the facts directly, found modern philosophy and religion equally unscientific.”²⁶ This was due to that, for all conservative parties in the controversy, “in the Newtonian worldview it had been possible...to regard the Bible as a repository of facts on a par with the book of nature. To fundamentalists, a worldview that excluded the most important facts in favor of a set of tenuous and speculative hypotheses was patently absurd and disastrous in its consequences.”²⁷ Christian fundamentalism is therefore rooted in a Baconian, common sense opposition to shifts in modern understandings of science.

Marsden and Noll’s work, which is exemplary of a distinctively evangelical historiography of American religious history in general and specifically evangelicalism, together present an interpretation of evangelicalism and fundamentalism in which common sense realism is the unifying theme. The history of evangelicalism from the colonial period onward (with the glaring exception of Jonathan Edwards) is the history of common sense in the United States. Since evangelicalism was the core of the “American synthesis,” common sense was integral to American thought. However, when philosophy and science moved past common sense, evangelicalism was held captive to an antiquated epistemology. The failure, or scandal, of intellectual evangelicalism has been its continued adherence to common sense realism. Fundamentalism is a prime case study of this. This is how Noll can denounce fundamentalism as an “intellectual disaster.” Utilizing history to craft a reformulation of American evangelicalism, Noll and Marsden craft narrative around common sense in order to reject fundamentalism. Unfortunately, while this historiographical trend successfully identifies an essential intellectual

²⁶ Ibid., 217.

²⁷ Ibid., 214.

background to Christian fundamentalism, it obscures other competing influences within a movement that is much more fluid and fractured than either Noll or Marsden contend.

Confessional Distinctives

This transformation of Christian fundamentalism into an intellectually monolithic sect is rectified by D. G. Hart's work on confessional evangelicals and fundamentalists, which represents the second strand of historiography for this thesis. Hart seeks to distinguish confessional evangelicals from their populist counterparts. By doing so, he provides a template which allows scholars to account for vast theological differences and attitudes with Christian fundamentalism, thereby complicating the description and analysis of fundamentalists provided by Mark Noll and George Marsden.

D. G. Hart's scholarly work serves as a separatist, confessional Protestant reflection of Mark Noll's scholarship. It covers the spectrum from strictly academic studies to polemics and positive prescriptions for modern evangelicalism. As such, the corpus requires discerning for applicability to strictly academic endeavors. As much as Noll derides common sense evangelicalism as the source of present evangelical malaise, Hart, an elder in the confessional, fundamentalist Orthodox Presbyterian Church, makes a parallel argument, thought using evangelical anti-traditionalism and anti-confessionalism as the replacement for common sense realism.²⁸ Indeed, as much as Noll and Marsden design a specifically evangelical methodology for history, Hart would rather consider himself as "Presbyterian historian" rather than an "evangelical historian," since he finds the term "evangelical" to be nebulous to the point of worthlessness.²⁹

²⁸ For D. G. Hart's self-identification as an elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, see his website, <http://oldlife.org/about/>.

²⁹ For Marsden and Noll's work on an explicitly evangelical methodology of history, see Mark A. Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 1-22 and 65-98, and

Thus, history serves an equally theological purpose for Hart as it does for Noll. However, the two historians' agendas are driven by their different theological affiliations. Noll and Marsden are explicitly attempting to reconstruct a post-fundamentalist evangelicalism that, liberated from the confinements of common sense realism, can fully undertake intellectual projects equal to those of their secularist counterparts through a strengthened application of the doctrine of the Incarnation.³⁰ Hart, on the other hand, wants to reinvigorate evangelicalism through the reemphasis of the traditional Protestant confessions. Hence, much like Noll, Hart himself possesses a theological agenda of which one must be aware.³¹

However, his agenda does not cause the same obscuring of fundamentalism's myriad intellectual roots that results from Noll and Marsden's analyses. Hart's surveys of evangelical history recognize common sense realism as a crucial element of evangelical and fundamentalist thought, similar to Marsden and Noll's conclusions.³² Indeed, he sees common sense realism as partially blame for evangelicalism's aborted intellectual promise. However, common sense realism and differing views of science were not the sole catalysts of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy or the creation of the fundamentalist movement. Instead, fundamentalists were divided amongst confessional fundamentalists and populist fundamentalists, as he argues in *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America*, his academic biography of J. Gresham Machen, the influential New Testament

George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Hart voices his identity as a "Presbyterian historian" in D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

³⁰ See Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*; Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*; and Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 259-260.

³¹ For a perceptive critique of Hart's more theologically driven works, see Jonathan R. Baer, "Confessions of a Non-Evangelical," *Reviews in Religion and Theology* 12, no. 12 (April 2005), 213-221.

³² See D. G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002).

scholar and founder of Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.³³

In *Defending the Faith*, Hart seeks to reclaim “Machen’s identity as a conservative intellectual who opposed religious modernism for reasons having as much to do with his academic training and social background as with his Presbyterian convictions...[and] his identity as a Presbyterian traditionalist who championed Calvinistic creeds and Reformed patterns of church government against the innovations of fundamentalists and modernists alike.”³⁴ Machen serves as a case study through which the common fundamentalist-modernist dichotomy can be challenged. Instead, Hart describes modernizing Protestants, cultural modernists, populist fundamentalists, and confessional fundamentalists. Amongst these various groups, the most important distinction involves the nature of Protestant hegemony in the United States.³⁵ Machen opposed modernizing Protestants and the majority of fundamentalists because their belief in the necessity of American Protestant hegemony. The main disagreement between some fundamentalists and modernizing Protestants concerned what was required of the churches in order to maintain that hegemony.³⁶

According to Hart, Machen was devoted to a Reformed ecclesiology that maintained the traditional Southern Presbyterian doctrine of the spiritual nature of the church that included a theologically prescribed church-state separation. This was due to his devotion to confessional dogma and tradition. Hart partially attributes his subject’s libertarianism to Machen’s belief that “historic Christianity was fundamentally narrow, exclusive, and partisan, and, therefore, could

³³ D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America*, second edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9, 133-159.

not provide the basis for public life in a free society.”³⁷ The church, according to Machen, must be “radically doctrinal,” “radically intolerant,” and “radically ethical,” though Machen’s views of the “ethical” church did not include ecumenical overtures. Instead, to be “radically ethical” meant that the church’s responsibility was to avoid “mere philanthropy” by simply caring for the mortal needs of humanity but also their spiritual needs by bringing them into the orthodox church.³⁸ This separatist, libertarian approach towards church involvement in secular society, according to Hart, distinguished Machen and his Orthodox Presbyterians from the concerns of both modernizing Protestants, who were seeking to change Christian doctrine to maintain cultural relevancy, and populist fundamentalists, who were hoping to secure Protestant hegemony through social legislation. Ecclesiology sharply distinguished Machen, and his politics, from those of other fundamentalists. Confessionalism matters.

Likewise, Hart distinguishes Machen from William Jennings Bryan and other populist fundamentalists by ascribing to Machen “highbrow fundamentalism.”³⁹ Machen’s fundamentalism was the result of his scholarly attitude and his devotion to traditional theology. His writings approached the controversies from an academic and logical perspective, thus differentiating him from fundamentalists whose attacks on evolution and liberalism were explicitly anti-academic and populist in nature.⁴⁰ Hence, Machen was received more warmly by Eastern academics and journalists than his more rural counterparts. Additionally, Machen rejected dispensationalism and premillennialism. Machen refused to join the World Christian Fundamentalist Association due its perceived eschatological heresies.⁴¹ Towards the end of his life, he would be extremely vocal in favor of an amillennialist eschatology, which was

³⁷ Ibid., 138.

³⁸ Ibid., 145.

³⁹ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 61-62.

⁴¹ Ibid., 64.

traditionally favored by the Reformed confessions.⁴² This issue would eventually be the catalyst for a schism within his own Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which divided along dispensationalist-populist and amillennialist-confessionalist lines. These intra-fundamentalist controversies occurred due to Machen's Reformed confessionalism. Bryan was less worried about doctrinal differences amongst fundamentalists, as long as one held to the "fundamentals" of the faith. Hart unites Bryan and the populists with their modernist opponents in their desire to build a Christian society. Machen's concerns, however, are strictly theological due to his peculiarly Reformed ecclesiology.⁴³

Hart's analysis of the Machen, Bryan, and the fundamentalist-modernist controversy is open to criticism. In some sense, he often commits the opposite error of other scholars of fundamentalism. While others neglect the theological roots, and hence the distinctiveness, of Machen's fundamentalism in order to locate him alongside Bryan, Hart oversimplifies the populist fundamentalists, though perhaps this tactic rhetorically strengthens his argument. Machen operated on different presuppositions about theology than did the populists who are often studied. Machen opposed the Victorian sentimentality and Keswick holiness that Marsden correctly recognizes major influences on the nascent fundamentalist movement, questioned the wisdom of speaking from perceptibly heterodox pulpits, was ambiguous concerning the evolution controversy, and vigorously opposed dispensationalism. To equate him with Bryan and the populists would obscure fundamental differences that result from radically divergent theologies. Hart's differentiation between confessional fundamentalists and populist fundamentalists properly illuminates internal diversity within the fundamentalist movement.

⁴² Ibid., 162-163.

⁴³ Ibid., 68-69.

Ethnic and Confessional Histories

The necessary recognition of fundamentalist diversity can be gained by giving attention to confessional and ethnic histories, the third strand of historiography for this thesis. Histories belonging to these genres possess importance as they illuminate narratives left untouched by mainstream academia. Unfortunately, their danger lies in the same situation. Too often it remains sequestered within an academic ghetto, either focusing on the most arcane of facts that retain relevance for the subject's community or ignoring the larger academic conversation altogether in favor of operating on a separate plane of academic existence. This renders ethnic and confessional histories a challenge for the other historians. Nevertheless, such works reward the historian through the sharp attention given to detail.

This thesis utilizes Dutch-American ethnic history in order to explain alternative epistemological traditions within Christian fundamentalism, thereby placing it in conversation with a larger, academic historiography. The main source of information of the second and third waves of Dutch immigration (excluding the Dutch colonists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) is James D. Bratt's *Dutch Calvinism in America: A History of a Conservative Subculture*.⁴⁴ Bratt presents a deft presentation of the different waves of Dutch immigration to the United States and Canada, detailing the theological developments in the Netherlands that led to the Secession, Kuyper's *Doleantie* and Neo-Calvinism, and finally Bavinck's elaborations of Neo-Calvinism, as well as their development amongst the American churches, colleges, and seminaries within the sphere of influence of the "second wave" of Dutch immigrants. However, the limit of Bratt's history is rooted in its self-acknowledged nature as an ethnic history. Bratt narrates the difficulties of the western Michigan Dutch-American community's attempts to

⁴⁴ James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984).

resolve their Dutch and American identities. A crucial aspect of this narrative is the liberalization of the Christian Reformed Church and the western Reformed Church in America following World War II.

However, this process, though important in analyzing Americanization of ethnic communities and theologies, is not placed into a larger conversation with the history of American evangelicalism and fundamentalism before and after World War II. Bratt describes theological controversies in the mid-twentieth century Dutch Reformed churches that parallel those of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, particularly concerning common grace and the nature of biblical inspiration. Describing the theological maneuverings between those seeking to maintain an ethnically and confessionally separatist community to those more influenced by “outside” ideas, such as neo-orthodoxy, Bratt effectively illustrates the transformation of the evangelical Christian Reformed Church and the western, “mainline” Reformed Church in America into being simultaneously “evangelical and ethnic.”⁴⁵

Bratt’s analysis would prove an interesting conversation partner concerning the emergence of neo-evangelicalism during the 1950s and 1960s, especially as he concerns himself with an isolated ethnic enclave in western Michigan.⁴⁶ However, this illustrates the limits of Bratt’s work. Since it is relegated solely to the Dutch in western Michigan, he does not place it in conversation with larger works on Americanization, conservatism, or the nature of fundamentalism or evangelicalism during the same time period. Bratt’s sole concern is the Dutch “conservative subculture.” Therefore, his sight is unfortunately myopic. Figures who deserve

⁴⁵ Ibid., 204-221.

⁴⁶ This is especially the case as most studies of the development of modern evangelicalism have focused on either the eastern or western coasts or southern revivalism personified in Billy Graham. See, for instance, Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, and Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*

more attention, such as Cornelius Van Til, receive little serious attention and are dismissed as distractions or marginalized individuals.⁴⁷

While Bratt focuses on intellectual developments and social undercurrents within Dutch western Michigan, Eugene P. Heideman describes the piety of the Dutch Reformed Michiganders in his church history *The Practice of Piety: The Theology of the Midwestern Reformed Church in America, 1866-1966*.⁴⁸ Heideman bridges ethnic and confessional histories. His primary concern is to describe “the concern of Dutch pietists to live a holy life...[and] the nature of the piety that the immigrant members of the midwestern Reformed Church in America practiced *after* arriving in America.”⁴⁹ Hence, Heideman describes the life of a pious Dutch Reformed church member through the traditional lenses of church history, describing the structure of church government, the nature of liturgical worship, and Reformed influences on everyday culture. He narrates gradual shifts in the midwestern Reformed Church in America from ethnic enclave to mainline, ecumenical church, detailing theological debates and rapprochements within the seminaries and local churches. Heideman provides a progress narrative, writing his history with questions concerning pluralism and ecumenicism in mind. “[This book] begins,” he writes, “with concern about issues of personal faith, worship, and church order, and ends with the challenge to live in a pluralistic world with confidence and hope in God, who remains sovereign in that world.”⁵⁰ Heideman illustrates the importance of doctrine and theology to the Dutch enclave, even outside the walls of the seminaries in Grand Rapids and Holland. Its weaknesses, though, lay in its nature as a church history. Confined to a study of an ecclesiastical institution and its members, it follows Bratt in ignoring larger academic

⁴⁷ Ibid., 195-196.

⁴⁸ Eugene P. Heideman, *The Practice of Piety: The Theology of the Midwestern Reformed Church in America, 1866-1966* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009).

⁴⁹ Ibid., xi.

⁵⁰ Ibid., xiii.

conversations concerning American Protestant Christianity. Being both church history and ethnic history, it contains the flaws of both, despite its important contribution to understanding the Reformed church life of Dutch Michiganders.

This pattern continues on a grander scale with conservative Reformed confessional history, which operates within its own academic world of seminaries, colleges, scholar-pastors, and independent scholars. As such, it has long operated outside the conversations and influential lines of analysis within American religious history and religious studies in general. As one might expect given the celebrated theological astuteness of the Reformed educated class, especially when questions of orthodoxy are at stake, Reformed confessional history often vacillates between heretic-hunting and apologetics. Though unfortunate, perhaps it is fitting, as these histories themselves serve as proof of the wide theological diversity even amongst the most separatist of fundamentalists.

This is certainly the case with John R. Muether's biography of Cornelius Van Til, *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman*.⁵¹ Muether is an elder in Van Til's Orthodox Presbyterian Church and an alumnus of Westminster Theological Seminary, Van Til's former academic institution, and so it would be expected that this book, published by a conservative Presbyterian press, would be sympathetic towards its subject. Indeed, it often borders on hagiography. Nevertheless, Muether sheds light on growth of Westminster Theological Seminary after Machen's unexpected death, the early students who attended the seminary, and the controversies amongst fundamentalists between those who accepted the more traditional common sense realism of "old Princeton" and those who rejected it in favor of a largely Kuyperian antithetical presuppositionalism. This controversy is largely ignored by historians

⁵¹ John R. Muether, *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2009).

focusing on fundamentalism's relation to American politics in post-World War II America or seeking to enshrine Common Sense Realism's supposedly unmatched influence of American evangelical life. Though Van Til's views were not necessarily widely accepted in their entirety, a variety of theologians – both in America and abroad – interacted with his epistemology and apologetics. Indeed, he even succeeded in irritating Karl Barth.⁵² By detailing Van Til's wide influence in American fundamentalism, Muether does an extraordinary service to the historiography, which had long ignored Van Til as, at best, a marginal character.⁵³

However, Muether's confessional concerns ironically lead to his underestimation of Van Til's influence. One of Van Til's earliest students was Francis Schaeffer, who is often viewed as one of the foundational figures in the development of modern American evangelicalism and the Religious Right. Schaeffer's emphasis on the necessity of a Christian worldview and for correct presuppositions is firmly rooted in the thought of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Van Til, rather than the Common Sense Realism for which some historians have mistaken it.⁵⁴ However, rather than celebrating the entrée of Van Tilian apologetics into the mainstream of American evangelicalism and fundamentalism, Muether focuses on Van Til's disagreements with Schaeffer based on Reformed theological nitpicking. Muether seems more willing to create distance between Van Til and Schaeffer than to explore similarities, which serves to the detriment of his hero. Ethnic and confessional histories, hence, present obvious dangers that should not overshadow rich rewards. These genres often suffer from myopia, either by ignoring other related conversations (in the case of Bratt and Heideman) or in continuing theological debates relevant to a community (as Muether accomplishes in his analysis of Van Til and Schaeffer). This myopia

⁵² Ibid., 136.

⁵³ See Bratt, 196.

⁵⁴ Daymon Johnson, "Reformed Fundamentalism in America: The Lordship of Christ, the Transformation of Culture, and Other Calvinist Components of the Christian Right" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1994), 106.

affects inclusion of facts and analysis. However, the authors mentioned in this chapter provide a narrative of American evangelicalism and fundamentalism ignored by the mainstream historiography. Noll ignores confessional Protestants except to write them out of the “American synthesis” due to their rejection of common sense realism, and Marsden hardly differentiates between confessional Protestants such as J. Gresham Machen and his more populist counterparts, such as William Jennings Bryan and Frank Norris. Despite their weaknesses, ethnic and confessional histories make significant contributions to the historiography, and thus serve, under the gaze of critical analysis, as a foundation for this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFENDING THE “ASSAILED BREASTWORK”: NINETEENTH CENTURY DUTCH REFORMED PRESUPPOSITIONALISM

Introduction

From his desk at Westminster Theological Seminary near Philadelphia, less than fifty miles away from the traditional citadel of Calvinism at Princeton Theological Seminary, his prior academic home, the Dutch Reformed-turned-Presbyterian apologist Cornelius Van Til declared that the conflict between Christianity and non-Christianity “is the life and death struggle between two mutually opposed life and world views.”⁵⁵ Echoing the views of his mentor J. Gresham Machen, the founder of the confessional fundamentalist Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Van Til shared a common battle with his predecessor at Westminster. Both attempted to eliminate theological liberalism, which Machen famously decried as a “modern non-redemptive religion” foreign to Christianity, and both devoted their intellectual lives to articulating a defense of orthodox Protestantism after the ostensible conclusion of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy, in which Machen was defrocked by the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.⁵⁶ However, Van Til, despite the Princeton Ph.D. that he shared with his colleague, constructed his epistemological response to liberalism utilizing foundations foreign to Machen’s Presbyterianism. Van Til’s contribution to fundamentalist theology was the transfusion of Dutch Reformed presuppositionalist thought into American Presbyterianism. Heavily influenced by Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and the strains of Dutch Reformed orthodox, dissenting

⁵⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), 6.

⁵⁶ For a description of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy in relation to Machen and the Presbyterians, see D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith* and Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

theology that they represented, Van Til brought their thought to bear during the initial formulations of intellectual Christian fundamentalism, thus garnering influence for presuppositionalist thought outside of “old Amsterdam” and the Dutch American enclaves of western Michigan. Because of this, this chapter argues, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck are just as much key figures in the development of fundamentalist Protestantism, and by extension American religious history, as were Charles Hodge, Benjamin Warfield, and other voices of traditional American Calvinism.

The Dutch Reformed Church

The religious history of the modern Netherlands is intricately connected to its state church, the Dutch Reformed Church (NHK). Much like the history of English state church across the Channel, the NHK’s history has been long filled with doctrinal controversy, political compromises, periodic revivals, and experiences with liberalization in theology and polity. These conflicts set the stage for the confessional movements that later influenced American fundamentalism.

At the heart of much of the controversy, in connection to this thesis’s narrative, are the NHK’s dual and contradictory roles as a confessional and public church. In the Belgic Confession of 1571, the church confessed that the government’s responsibility vis-à-vis the church “is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, with a view to removing and destroying all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honored and served by

everyone, as he requires in his Word.”⁵⁷ Regardless of the original intent of the Belgic Confession, its result was the allowance of government interference in the administration and function of the church. The state government asserted itself in clerical hires and doctrinal decisions. At the heart of their meddling was the belief that the church must function as a “public church,” a church assisting *all* the citizens of the state, regardless of theological “orthodoxy.” Therefore, the distinctiveness of its Reformed identity was tempered by the demands of the state. For instance, all children, regardless of the religious affiliation or devoutness of the parents, were eligible for baptism, in contradiction to the widely accepted Reformed understanding of covenant baptism (based on the covenants of the parents).⁵⁸ The church acquiesced to the government, proclaiming that God’s children resided outside as well as inside the Reformed communion. Thus, the Reformed Church willingly accepted its role as the public church. The state granted the NHK stability and power, while the church lent the state credence to the rhetoric of a “Dutch Israel” particularly blessed by God.⁵⁹

This, however, did not result in the death of Reformed confessionalism in the Netherlands. Instead, in reaction to the state’s theological permissiveness, confessionalism was married with pietism through the *Nadere Reformatie* (the Further Reformation). Heavily influenced by the English Puritans and their attempts to purify the Church of England, the Further Reformers sought to revive Reformed doctrine and spirituality amongst the Dutch Reformed people, calling them back to Dortian theology and Genevan sabbatarianism. Largely failing to persuade the state to legislate their views, the *Nadere Reformatie* emphasized personal devotion and practice, much

⁵⁷ “Belgic Confession,”

<http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/BelgicConfession.html>.

⁵⁸ Karel Bei, *The Netherlands Reformed Church: 1571-2005*, trans. Allan J. Janssen (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 26.

⁵⁹ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Vintage, 1997), 102-103.

like their German pietist counterparts.⁶⁰ This resulted in the preservation of a strongly confessional class within the Dutch Reformed Church that often existed in tension with the state and church hierarchies.

The tension within the church increased with the growth of the Enlightenment and romanticism within the Dutch Reformed Church during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These two movements empowered the liberalizing elements within the church, particularly within the university divinity faculties which educated the rising generations of ministers. For the romantic theologians, often identified as the “Groningen school,” “Christ was less a bleeding Savior than a model for fully realized humanity; the end of religion was less salvation from sin than the achievement of virtue; the human heart was less a sin-blacked seat of evil in need of radical conversion than a trustworthy organ of discernment fit to replace doctrinal standards as the ultimate measure of religious truth.”⁶¹ Heavily influenced by the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, the advance of romantic theology, aided by the state decreed church order of 1816, widens the already existing divisions between confessionalist and non-confessionalist church members.⁶² Though following Schleiermacher’s emphasis on the authority of religious feeling for the church, they expanded the epistemological foundations of religion to include “human nature with all its powers and needs.”⁶³ Included in this was reason, which resulted in a theology that differed little from rationalistic, Enlightenment theologies, though its romantic bent directed it towards the congregant’s heart.

⁶⁰ Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 360-362; Bratt, 4.

⁶¹ Bratt, 5.

⁶² Gerrit J. tenZythoff, *Sources of Secession: The Netherlands Hervormde Kerk on the Eve of the Dutch Immigration to the Midwest* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 103-104. TenZythoff, unlike other historians, views the growth of liberalism in the NHK as an organic feature of the development of the church, following the centuries-old precedent of state interference – which included the Canons of Dort itself. Liberalism was not foreign to the Dutch Reformed Church, but rather one stream of theology coexisting amongst others. This thesis accepts and follows tenZythoff’s analysis.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 106.

The Afscheiding

The growth of romantic theology in the Dutch Reformed Church led to the *Afscheiding*, or Secession. Resulting from church discipline administered to confessionalsists, dissenting congregations and ministers seceded from the state church beginning in 1830, resulting in the first major schism within the Dutch Reformed Church in the nineteenth century. Splitting from the state church at a time of social instability in the Netherlands, the *Afscheiding* helped create the theological atmosphere in which presuppositionalist theology could thrive in conservative Dutch Reformed circles.

Much like the *Nadere Reformatie*, the *Afscheiding* grew out of discontent with the theological realities of a public church and the yearning for a rich orthodoxy represented by the earliest Reformed theologians. Hendrik de Cock, a rural minister, earned his theological degrees from the University of Groningen, which was the center of the innovative, romantic theology that gained influence over much of the state church. Originally, de Cock did not object to the theology. However, he converted to traditional Dutch Reformed theology, influenced by congregants involved in the pietistic conventicle system that had developed alongside the official institutions of the church. At de Cock's parish in Ulrum, there were "two elements which are long since present in the Netherlands Reformed Church: the old narrow particularism built upon the Synod of Dordrecht and the new free universalism arising from a more enlightened knowledge of the Bible and a sounder culture, a universalism that did not always respect the lines drawn by the Gospel."⁶⁴ While well acquainted with the romantic theology he imbibed during his university days, de Cock had not yet experienced the "narrow particularism" of Dortian Calvinism.

⁶⁴ Quoted in tenZythoff, 110.

Expressions of the traditional faith by conservative congregants caused de Cock to question his own romantic theology, especially as he often failed to convince congregants of the falsehood of the doctrine of total depravity.⁶⁵ Responding to his congregants' beliefs, he discovered Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the Canons of Dort, and other Reformed confessions and treatises.⁶⁶ Reading these works convinced him of the necessity of fidelity to the orthodox Reformed faith. He soon read pamphlets written by Dutch Reformed theologians and pastors who dissented from the liberal ecclesiastical policies endorsed and implemented by the state church under the leadership of King William I, who used romantic advocacy for dogmatic tolerance to mediate political concerns regarding the French-speaking Belgian Catholic population within his realm.⁶⁷ When Belgium successfully rebelled against the Dutch, de Cock and many other confessionalists viewed this as God's punishment for a national apostasy.⁶⁸ Seeing their nation in declension, some Dutchmen, seeing their call for a Reformed revival as a cure for the Netherlands' problems, listened to de Cock and others. In an era of political tumult, confessionalism became more appealing to many Dutch Reformed churchmen, blaming "wolves in the sheepfold of Christ."⁶⁹

As de Cock's popularity grew, opposition from the liberal theologians, supported by the state church and the government, took notice and opposed him. As de Cock baptized children outside of his congregation, attacked opposing ministers as "wolves," and preached against the

⁶⁵ TenZythoff, 110-111.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 111; Bratt, 6.

⁶⁷ King William I's attempts at educational and language usage reforms had antagonized the Belgian Catholics in the Netherlands, who accused the king of attempting to gain too much power over the Belgians. In order to prevent a Belgian rebellion (which eventually occurred all the same), William opposed militantly Reformed forces from implementing a conservative confessionalism in the state church that would be perceived by the Catholics as an immediate political threat. Therefore it was in William's political interests to promote the tolerant, romantic theology represented by the university divinity faculty at Groningen. Theological liberalism preserved Dutch imperialist policies. See ten Zythoff, 112-113.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁶⁹ Bratt, 6.

usage of human-written hymns (“a patched up Koran in which out of blindness or perfidy the truth necessary to salvation is concealed”), the local classis and provincial synod suspended him.⁷⁰ This, however, did not deter de Cock, who regarded the church discipline leveled at him a demand for “an absolute rejection of truth and Christ.”⁷¹ On October 14, 1834, de Cock and his supporters in Ulrum signed the Instrument of Secession and Return, which served as the starting point for the *Afscheiding*.

De Cock’s *Afscheiding* was a marginalized movement from its genesis. Its adherents were primarily rural and disenfranchised from the means of Dutch power. According to James D. Bratt, there was “a threefold set of natural sympathizers: those cause between an aggrandizing elite and a growing pauper class, many of the ‘faithful’ in the National Church, and conventicles, which had come in face of the centralizing process [in the National Church] to fear for their informal independence.”⁷² Due to the political instability of the Netherlands in the 1830s, as well as famine and economic troubles that blighted the nation, class divisions had been exacerbated. Thus, the government saw Seceders as “for the most part... from the lowest ranks,” “uncultured,” and “the least significant.”⁷³ Abraham Kuyper, leader of the later *Doleantie*, agreed with the basic truth of the government’s perception of the Seceders, if not its derogatory spirit, describing the Seceders as “little people.”⁷⁴ Many of these same politically and economic disenfranchised class accused the church of apostasy, aligning their political qualms against the government with their theological qualms about the government’s church.

Fearing rebellion amongst “the least significant,” William and his government persecuted the Seceders, “outlawing Seceder meetings, imprisoning some of their pastors, quartering troops

⁷⁰ TenZythoff, 123-125.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 127; Bratt, 6.

⁷² Bratt, 7.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁴ Muether, 23.

in their homes, and levying exorbitant fines upon individuals and congregations.”⁷⁵ Regardless, through church planting by de Cock and others, the *Afscheiding* expanded from its rural Groningen base, transforming itself into a national movement.⁷⁶ However, it never grew into a numerically significant sect. Maintaining the decentralization characteristic of the pietistic conventicles, the Seceder church was plagued with internal quarrels over personalities, degrees of appropriate sectarianism, millennialism, polity, and perfectionism.⁷⁷ Persecution ended in 1840 following the abdication of William I.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, many Seceders emigrated from the Netherlands to the United States in the 1846-1847 exodus.

While some Reformed historians have construed this “first wave” of modern Dutch immigration as a religious exodus resulting from persecution, Bratt argues that it conforms more to the typical nineteenth century European “mass exodus of the rural poor.”⁷⁹ Of the first wave immigrants, less than four percent claims that religion was the motivating factor for their emigration from the Netherlands while economics played a major role.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Seceders were disproportionately represented amongst the Dutch immigrants to the United States.⁸¹ Also, Bratt argues, “[e]migration appealed to the same socio-economic groups as the Secession, and so it also appealed to the Secession’s natural sympathizers.”⁸² There was much in common between the Seceders and their non-Seceders co-nationals immigrating to America, which was facilitated

⁷⁵ Bratt, 7. Interestingly, while all of the histories of the Dutch Reformed community in the United States and Canada discuss the religious persecution of the Seceders, only tenZythoff details the political context for the persecution (e.g., the Belgian rebellion and economic crises), and Bratt hints at it. Muether, in his biography of Cornelius Van Til, insinuates that the persecution was purely theological in nature. Muether is an elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, while tenZythoff was associated with the “mainline” Reformed Church in America. This serves as an example of the differences in works by confessional historians that requires triangulation by non-confessional historians.

⁷⁶ Muether, 23.

⁷⁷ Bratt, 7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁹ Muether, 24; Bratt, 8.

⁸⁰ Bratt, 8.

⁸¹ Bratt, 8.

⁸² Bratt, 9.

by the extensive Seceder immigration networks that helped finance immigration. Communities became intricately connected, the Seceder community in the United States benefited, as many Dutch immigrants joined the Seceder church in Michigan.⁸³ This combination of factors created disproportionate power for the *Afscheiding* in the United States in contrast to the Netherlands.

The *Reveil*

However, not all confessionalists seceded from the NHK or immigrated to America. Some, members of the *Reveil* movement, remained loyal to the state church, earning the undying ire of the Seceders.⁸⁴ Consisting primarily of aristocratic or higher class churchmen, the *Reveil* was deeply suspicious of “revolutionary activity,” connecting it to the chaos of the French Revolution and its spillover effects in Western Europe.⁸⁵ Fearing revolution by the lower class, members of the *Reveil* preferred to remain loyal to the state church and attempt to revive the church from within.

While the *Afscheiding* was primarily theological in nature, the *Reveil* was explicitly political in its implications and actions.⁸⁶ Also, unlike the Seceders, the Reveilers possessed the embryonic beginnings of the worldview critique that Abraham Kuyper would employ a generation later. For the Reveilers, the French Revolution was just, as Bratt writes, “the political outbreak of a disease spiritual in essence.”⁸⁷ The Enlightenment, the mother of revolution, had usurped revelation with reason as the font of truth and knowledge. God had been overthrown,

⁸³ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 11; Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2010), 434.

⁸⁵ Bratt, 11.

⁸⁶ This is not to deny that there were political aspects of the *Afscheiding*. As mentioned previously, the movement drew primarily from the “disenfranchised” of Dutch society in a period of national tumult. Reformed confessionalism and dissent from the state church provided an avenue to mediate frustrations with the political and economic state of the Netherlands in the 1830s and 1840s. However, the leaders of the *Afscheiding*, in their writings and sermons, seemed more explicitly concerned with the purity of Reformed doctrine, which resulted in ecclesiastical and social separatism. A thorough, complete political theory (coupled with activity) seems to be lacking from the *Afscheiding*.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 11.

and Robespierre's Religion of Reason had taken its place. Only through reason could humans, with certainty, discover truth. Divine revelation, apart from reason and nature, was ambiguous at best and superstitious at worst. Therefore, from a Reveiler perspective, unbelief begat revolution.⁸⁸ Theological presuppositions produced an epistemology that wrecked society. In order to preserve, or rebuild, society, the Dutch people must return to "the Gospel" and "History" (tradition), which together promote obeisance to divine and temporal hierarchical powers.⁸⁹ Through application of these correct presuppositions, positive political reforms could be undertaken, removing the need for the perpetuation of a French-style "atheistic" revolution. Proper presuppositions lead to a proper society. Anything else leads inevitably to chaos.

Abraham Kuyper, the *Doleantie*, and "Life-Systems"

While the *Reveil* maintained loyalty to the state church as an instrument of proper authority and societal hierarchy during the mid-nineteenth century, further suspicion of the increasing theological liberalism within the NHK led to a second schism, the *Doleantie*, which attracted Reformed churchmen belonging to the middle and upper classes. Unlike the separatist nature of the *Afscheiding*, the *Doleantie* maintained the explicitly political interests of the *Reveil*, refusing to separate politics and theology as distinct spheres of influence. Masterfully articulated and implemented by theologian, academic, minister, and Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper, the *Doleantie* produced the "worldview" theo-politics that would, further developed by theologian and Kuyper protégé Herman Bavinck, filter across the Atlantic into American Christian fundamentalism.

Much like Hendrick de Cock, Abraham Kuyper was educated in the liberal tradition of the NHK and later converted to confessional Reformed theology. Born in 1837 to a devout family,

⁸⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 12.

Kuyper experienced a conversion experience at age eleven (at precisely 11:15 on the evening of October 10, 1848, according to his childhood notes) and, when he came of age, began his theological studies at Leiden University, which was a center of liberal theology.⁹⁰ During his university years, Kuyper went so far as to stand and applaud a faculty member who denied the bodily resurrection of Christ.⁹¹ Leaving the orthodox faith of his childhood, Kuyper embraced his teachers' liberal theology, though he maintained a pietistic streak. Continuing his parallels with de Cock, Kuyper was strongly influenced by conservative members of his first congregation, writing that "[w]ith my poor knowledge of the Bible, which I had acquired at the university, I could not measure myself against these humble folk."⁹² It was through his interaction with his congregants, along with the budding relationship with anti-revolutionary and *Reveil* leader Groen van Prinsterer, that led Kuyper to an epiphany. Describing his congregants, he wrote:

There was not only knowledge of the Bible but also knowledge of a well-ordered world-view, though of old-Reformed style. It was sometimes as though I was sitting on the lecture-room benches hearing my talented mentor Scholten lecturing on the "doctrine of the Reformed Church," but with inverted sympathy. And what, for me at least, was the most attractive, was that here spoke a heart that not only *possessed* but also *understood* a history and experience of life.... Those ordinary working people, hidden away in a corner, told me in their rough regional dialect the same thing Calvin had given me to read in beautiful Latin. Calvin could be found, however misinformed, among those simple country-folk, who had hardly heard of his name. He had taught in such a way that he could be *understood*, even centuries after his death, in a foreign country, in a forgotten village, in a room floored with tiles, with the mind of an ordinary labourer.⁹³

For the "simple country-folk," Calvin provided a comprehensive, comprehensible worldview. To Kuyper's eyes, Calvinism was not simply a historical tradition relegated to the academy, but also

⁹⁰ Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 28-29; Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1931), i.

⁹¹ Heslam, 30.

⁹² Quoted in Heslam, 33.

⁹³ Quoted in Heslam, 33-34 (emphasis in the original).

a living worldview capable of practical application in society. Whereas de Cock's conversion had led him out of the world, Kuyper's conversion led him to embrace full engagement in order to transform society. Kuyper would later serve as a Member of Parliament, Prime Minister, the founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, and the editor of several Anti-Revolutionary and Calvinist periodicals.⁹⁴ However, Kuyper did follow de Cock in his ecclesiastical separatism, leading a schism (the *Doleantie*, or "Protest") from the NHK in 1886 in protest of the church's continuing liberalism.⁹⁵ Unlike the *Afscheiding*, the *Doleantie* drew many of its members from the upper and middle classes of Dutch society, granting more social influence and acceptance than their Seceder counterparts. These two confessional movements would eventually unite in 1892.

Having reached prominence as a Dutch Reformed thinker, B. B. Warfield and Princeton Theological Seminary invited him to deliver the seminary's prestigious Stone Lectures in 1898. Deciding to speak on "Calvinism" in general, Kuyper dutifully studied American history, reading books that emphasized the United States' Reformed roots.⁹⁶ The Reformed heritage of America would constantly make appearances in his lectures, being interpreted as the source of American democracy's success.⁹⁷ However, at the heart of Kuyper's lectures would be the exposition of a

⁹⁴ For further information concerning Kuyper's political and academic activities, see Heslam, 36-56; Gleason, 374-375; and Bratt, 14-33.

⁹⁵ Heslam, 51.

⁹⁶ Heslam, 60.

⁹⁷ Interestingly, Kuyper was quicker to credit American democracy to the Dutch Reformed colonists of New Amsterdam rather than the Puritans of New England. Additionally, both the Netherlands and the United States were Christian nations: "Far more precious to us... is the crown which ennobles [human life], and this noble crown of life for you and for me rests in the Christian name. That crown is our common heritage. It was not from Greece or Rome that the regeneration of human life came forth; - that mighty metamorphosis dates from Bethlehem and Golgotha; and if the Reformation, in a still more special sense, claims the love of our hearts, it is because it has dispelled the clouds of sacerdotalism, and has unveiled again the fullest view the glories of the Cross" (Kuyper, 10). See also Heslam, 70.

comprehensively Reformed worldview, or “life-system,” that could serve as the basis of a coherent society.⁹⁸

Indeed, his introductory lecture to his American audience, his first impression on the American continent, was entitled “Calvinism[:] A Life-System.” He immediately decried “Modernism” as a force that is “in deadly opposition to the Christian element, against the very Christian name, and against its salutiferous influence in every sphere of life....”⁹⁹ Anticipating J. Gresham Machen’s claim twenty-five years later that “the present time is a time of conflict” between Christianity and “modernism,” Kuyper told his audience that “[t]wo *life systems* are wrestling one another, in mortal combat. Modernism is bound to build a world of its own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself from the data of nature; while, on the other hand, all those who reverently bend the knee to Christ and worship Him as the Song of the living God, and God himself, are bent upon saving the ‘Christian Heritage.’”¹⁰⁰ According to Kuyper, modernism had been winning the conflict, as “Protestantism...wanders about in the wilderness without aim or direction, moving hither and thither, without making any progress.”¹⁰¹ Modernism’s success was “[s]imply because [Christians] were devoid of an equal unity of life-conception, such as alone could enable us with irresistible energy to repel the enemy at the frontier.”¹⁰² Protestantism, weakened by a liberalism that reduced it to a vague spirituality, has been unable to match the power of modernism’s coherency and consistency. The only adequate and vital response is Calvinism: “By this unity of conception alone as given in Calvinism, you in

⁹⁸ Kuyper expressed his views concerning a Reformed worldview throughout his written works. However, most of them have not been translated from Dutch into English. Additionally, within American Reformed circles – both Dutch and non-Dutch – Kuyper was best known and most influential as a result of his *Lectures on Calvinism*. Therefore, the analysis of Kuyper in this thesis will focus on his Stone Lectures.

⁹⁹ Kuyper, 10.

¹⁰⁰ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1923)2; Kuyper, 11.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 19.

America and we in Europe might be enabled once more to take our stand, by the side of Romanism, in opposition to modern Pantheism. Without this unity of starting point and life-system we must lose the power to maintain our independent position, and our strength for resistance must ebb away.”¹⁰³

In particular, this “unity of starting point and life-system” must impact Christian attitudes toward knowledge, which must take God’s sovereignty seriously. Kuyper argues, “If everything that is, exists for the sake of God, then it follows that the whole creation must give glory to God.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, God, and Christianity, are at the center of all endeavors: “Wherever man may stand, whatever he may do, to whatever he may apply his hand, in agriculture, in commerce, and in industry, or his mind, in the world of art, and science, he is, in whatsoever it may be, constantly standing before the face of his God, he is employed in the serve of his God, he has strictly to obey his God, and above all, he has to aim at the glory of his God.”¹⁰⁵ Since all belongs to God and all action should be undertaken with God in mind, then the Calvinist Christian should have no fear of engaging in the world. Kuyper claims that

It is not true that there are two worlds, a bad one and a good one, which are fitted into each other.... For this very reason the Calvinist cannot shut himself up in his church and abandon the world to its fate. He feels, rather, his high calling to push the development of this world to an even higher stage, and to do this in constant accordance with God’s ordinance, for the sake of God, upholding, in the midst of so much painful corruption, everything that is honorable, lovely, and of good report among men.¹⁰⁶

Separatism is not an option for the consistent Calvinist. Instead, the Calvinist must work for society’s further development through the spread of Christianity.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 19. Kuyper earlier denounced liberal Protestantism, influenced by modernism, as assisting the growth of “pantheism” (which he described as “a hopeless modern Buddhism”) in continental Christianity (Kuyper, 18). He is not terribly specific concerning the nature of this “pantheism” in his lectures. Additionally, during his tenure in Dutch politics, Kuyper often allied with Roman Catholic politicians in order to counteract the political activities of the “revolutionaries.” For further details concerning his cooperation with Dutch Roman Catholics, see Heslam, 234-237.

¹⁰⁴ Kuyper, 52.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 73.

However, this rejection of separatism does not amount to making common cause with the world. Instead, the Christian's relationship with "the world" is one of unmitigated conflict and separation. Neither appeasement nor compromise but conquest is the goal for Christian engagement. Kuyper grounds his stance in his concept of "antithesis," in which the Christian and non-Christian worldviews rest on separate principles that do not allow for intellectual convergence. "Common grace," or natural law, allows the non-Christian to perform some level of social good, but their rejection of revealed religion (and hence revealed presuppositions) prevents the ultimate, theological good from being accomplished.¹⁰⁷ As Kuyper wrote, "parallel lines never intersect. You have to choose either the one or the other."¹⁰⁸

This epistemological logic, simultaneously separatist yet aggressively combative, allows Kuyper to claim that there are two kinds of disciplines, one Christian and the other non-Christian. Therefore, there is no conflict between science and faith, since "[e]very science in a certain degree starts *from faith*, and, on the contrary, faith, which does not lead to science, is mistaken faith or superstition, but real, genuine faith it is not."¹⁰⁹ Insofar as science depends upon empiricism, it places faith in human ability to discern truth through experiments and the senses. Further faith is placed in views concerning divine action (or the lack thereof) in creation. Due to the starting point of faith, which involves presuppositional implications, there are "*two scientific systems* or if you choose, two scientific elaborations, are opposed to each other, *each having its own faith*."¹¹⁰ In opposition to each other are "two absolute forms of science, *both* of which claim the whole domain of human knowledge, and both of which have a suggestion about

¹⁰⁷ Bratt, 18-22; Muether, 25-26

¹⁰⁸ Kuyper, 134 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 131.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 133.

the supreme Being of their own as the point of departure for their world-view.”¹¹¹ Because of the absolute nature of the scientific systems, no compromise is possible. Their absoluteness entails their influence on every other aspect of life and so conflicting presuppositions must result in opponents “disputing with each one another *the whole domain of life*, and they cannot desist from the constant endeavor to pull down to the ground *the entire edifice* of their controverted assertions.... If they did not try this, they would thereby show on both sides that they did not honestly believe in their point of departure [and] that they were no serious combatants....”¹¹²

Naturally, then, the apocalyptic battle includes the field of apologetics, which incorporates epistemology. Earlier in his lectures, he had complained that “[i]n this struggle [against modernism] Apologetics have advanced us not one single step. Apologists have invariably begun by abandoning the assailed breastwork, in order to entrench themselves cowardly in a ravelin behind it.”¹¹³ Their cowardly retreat was the result of unstable epistemological foundations. Classical apologetics, which is Kuyper’s target of criticism, relied upon either upon rationalistic or romantic epistemologies, either relying upon Aristotlean reason or Schleiermacherian or Kantian experience as proper foundations for religious knowledge and arguments. These approaches were inherently problematic, as, in his opinion, they were anthropocentric, did not take seriously God’s sovereignty, and, thus, were not consistently Reformed. They were doomed to failure, as “this defense might be compared to a man who tries to adjust a crooked window-frame, while he is unconscious of the fact that the building itself is tottering on its

¹¹¹ Ibid., 133.

¹¹² Ibid., 133 (emphasis in the original).

¹¹³ Kuyper, 11.

foundations.”¹¹⁴ Poor epistemological foundations, though at first perhaps indiscernible and perceptibly harmless, ultimately lead to larger problems.¹¹⁵

The “antithesis” and its emphasis upon presuppositions were at the heart of Kuyper’s Neo-Calvinism. Attempting to revive conservative Reformed theology and its influence in Dutch society, Kuyper designed a theology that combined separatism with active, aggressive political engagement. Similar to de Cock and the *Afscheiding*, Kuyper refused to compromise on theological matters, separating with the establishment Reformed church in order to preserve doctrinal purity. However, perhaps assisted by the upper and middle class support for the *Doleantie*, Kuyper rejected abandonment of the world to satanic influences. Rather, he created political coalitions with Roman Catholics and other “anti-Revolutionaries” who advocated for similar political agendas and succeeded in being elected Prime Minister. Though advocating a specifically Reformed worldview, he advocated for a Christian society. Nevertheless, he sought to strengthen Calvinism by insisting upon consistency and coherency. Compromise, at least theologically, was not permissible. Thanks to his Stone Lectures at the behest of Princeton Seminary, this would be one of his great legacy in the United States.

Herman Bavinck: Kuyper’s Dogmatist

Though Kuyper was a theologian in his own right and produced a prodigious theological output, including lectures, encyclopedias, devotional works, and treatises, his political and educational interests proved distracting. Heavily involved in a multitude of endeavors, Kuyper was limited in his ability to produce a thorough articulation of his presuppositional theological position. The task of developing and presenting a comprehensive Reformed presuppositional theological fell to his protégé, Herman Bavinck. The symbol of the union in 1892 of the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 135.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 135-136.

Doleantie and *Afscheiding*, Bavinck, though often forgotten by non-Reformed scholars, brought Kuyper's views to theological fruition, especially through his seminal *Reformed Dogmatics*, which emphasized the necessity of correct presuppositions throughout its text, as well as his own Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary in 1908. While Kuyper perhaps has been more influential politically in the United States, the presuppositional strand of Christian fundamentalism owes its theological *modus operandi* to Bavinck.¹¹⁶

Herman Bavinck was a child of the *Afscheiding*, the son of a Seceder minister. Rather than study theology at the Seceder institution in Kampen, where his father preached from a prominent pulpit, he decided to attend Leiden University in order to learn liberal theology from the best liberal theologians in the country. However, unlike the young Kuyper several years before, Bavinck did not undertake his liberal theological studies in an act of rebellion against the orthodox faith of his youth. Rather, rooted in his tradition, he wanted to be fair towards his future liberal opponents and avoid criticizing them for something they did not teach. University education would serve doubly as theological inoculation and as preparation for a future career as an opponent of theological liberalism.¹¹⁷ The inoculation worked. Graduating from Leiden, Bavinck passed Seceder ordination examinations that were extended due to his theologically suspect degree.¹¹⁸ Serving as a pastor for a rural congregation, eventually Bavinck was called to be a professor at the Seceder seminary in Kampen. He would later leave Kampen to teach at

¹¹⁶ For examples of evangelical political works that explicitly express indebtedness to Kuyper see Vincent E. Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010); John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000); Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011); and Richard J. Mouw, *The Challenges of Cultural Discipleship: Essays in the Line of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011). Notably, when Bavinck is referenced, he is referenced strictly as a theologian, often providing further foundations for Kuyper's own theology. Interestingly, he is mentioned once in the main evangelical history of worldviews, David K. Naugle *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002).

¹¹⁷ Gleason, 44; Herman Bavinck, *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Boonstra and Gerrit Sheeres (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 15-16.

¹¹⁸ Gleason, 65-68.

Kuyper's Free University of Amsterdam, where he would remain for the balance of his academic career.

While at Kampen, Bavinck developed a particularly close relationship with Abraham Kuyper, who had long taken notice of the promising career of the nascent scholar. This caused tensions between Bavinck and several Kampen theologians, who accused Kuyper of neo-Kantianism for making theology "a sub-section of human knowledge."¹¹⁹ According to Kuyper's conservative Reformed opponents (often of a Seceder heritage), Kuyper demoted theology to a discipline equal in importance to science and the other fields, which removed the element of faith from theology. Kuyper's demotion of theology naturally led to a new version of liberal theology rather than an alternative to it. Bavinck defended Kuyper against his critics, and he used Kuyper's theory of presuppositions as a linchpin for his defense. Emphasizing that there was no "twofold knowledge of God" in Kuyper's thought, he referenced Kuyper's view of Christian science, which was rooted firmly in one's faith in God (as opposed to the non-Christian faith that served as the basis for other sciences).¹²⁰ Bavinck was not uncritical of Kuyper, airing disagreements concerning baptism and Kuyper's supralapsarianism (in contrast to Bavinck's infralapsarianism).¹²¹ Nevertheless, Bavinck, during the tension following the 1892 union of the Seceders and the *Doleantie*, defended Kuyper's Reformed credentials against elements of the residual separatism in the new union church.¹²²

Bavinck proceeded to clarify his mentor's thought in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, which were published in four volumes between 1895 and 1901. Fully translated and published in English only between 2003 and 2008, Bavinck's *Dogmatics* have had little direct influence on non-Dutch

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 183.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 189-190.

¹²¹ Ibid., 190-194. See also Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 513.

¹²² Gleason, 184-186 and 196-202.

American evangelicals until very recently, but nonetheless it was substantially influential on early American fundamentalists with Dutch Reformed roots, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Following Kuyper's lead, Bavinck emphasized the importance of presuppositions in every section of his *Dogmatics*, though it was showcased most prominently in his prolegomena volume concerning methodology.

Early in his prolegomena, Bavinck elaborates upon Kuyper's fundamental ideas about the relationship of both science and theology based on faith. In the first place, Bavinck declares that "faith is not the source but the organ of knowledge," as knowledge is part of God's revelation to humankind.¹²³ As "believing is a free act" and "an act of the intellect," belief is a response to revelation which "consist[s] in the making known of truth, in communicating the thoughts of God; it is not only manifestation but also inspiration, not only deed-revelation but also world-revelation."¹²⁴ This "knowledge of God also lies spread out before us objectively in his revelation and can be absorbed and thought through by us in faith."¹²⁵ Rooted in revelation provided via the God's Word, dogmatics "can only be a transcript of the knowledge God has revealed concerning himself in his Word."¹²⁶ Therefore, dogmatic theology "can be thought through scientifically and gathered up in a system."¹²⁷ The theologian *qua* scientist "can only reproduce the truth God has granted" from the evidence provided through revelation.¹²⁸

Since faith is the "organ" by which one perceives knowledge, "the theologian can never arrive at knowledge that is higher than the faith."¹²⁹ Human knowledge cannot exceed its organ. Hence, faith is definitional for science, and thus, "precisely because a true faith-knowledge of

¹²³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 41.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

God exists, dogmatics has the knowledge of God as a part of its content and can rightly claim to be a science.”¹³⁰ Theology is no different than any other science, for science requires faith, “for it is impossible...to base the sciences in general – with the possible exception of the science of mathematics and a number of subdivisions of natural science – on facts that are accepted as certain by all without distinction.”¹³¹ Despite the fact that “everyone observes [facts] with his own eyes and his own pair of lenses,” differences of opinion exist.¹³² Therefore, from Bavinck’s perspective, faith, resultant from one’s worldview, is inherently a part of science. Science is presuppositional, as “the scholar can never be separated from the human being. And therefore it is much better to see to it that the scientific investigator can be as much as possible a normal human being, that he not bring false presuppositions into his work but be a man of God completely equipped for every good work.”¹³³ Thus, different sciences can exist based upon scientists’ presuppositions. Divergent starting points lead to disparate endpoints.

Though this principle is applicable to all the sciences, Bavinck took particular aim at the nascent discipline of religious studies, which he naturally placed on equal footing with his own work. Explicitly rejecting positivism as “the only true conception of science,” he accuses religious studies scholars of practicing a discipline that rests upon theological presuppositions, regardless of whether religious studies is sequestered within its own department or combined within a university faculty of divinity.¹³⁴ Attacking the earliest religious studies scholars, Bavinck noted that religious studies “bases itself on the premise that not only are the religions of the world a historical fact but they also are worthy of intentional study. Such a study also presupposes that religions are interrelated, that they all possess a common component, and that in

¹³⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹³¹ Ibid., 43.

¹³² Ibid., 43.

¹³³ Ibid., 43.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 51.

ascending order they produce and develop ‘religion’ proper.”¹³⁵ Religious studies, as performed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe, was an incarnation of liberal theology rather than an utterly irreligious or secular science. “However the two [theology and religious studies] differ,” Bavinck writes, “they have in common the fact that they do not hang in the air but rest on faith.”¹³⁶

Faith is intricately connected to worldview, which allows Bavinck to diminish distinctions between religious studies and theology. One does not choose his or her worldview, as “we cannot believe whatever and whenever we please.”¹³⁷ One’s intellectual free will is limited based upon worldview, which does not “function completely arbitrarily and to accept what is pleases.”¹³⁸ Therefore, the worldview, which is shaped by faith, judges observable evidence and ideas according to its criteria. This does not challenge the objective nature of truth. God’s Word is God’s Word, whether or not one’s worldview is capable of accepting it, as “the word of God has an objective content that was established before, and persists apart from, our faith, just as much as the world of colors and sounds exists independently of the blind and the deaf.”¹³⁹

A correct worldview, which is connected to correct faith, necessarily must be Christian. The non-Christian must rely upon the general revelation present in creation to obtain even the most basic grasp of reality. However, “this general revelation is not sufficient.”¹⁴⁰ General revelation is useful but also severely limited, since it “can at best communicate certain truths but conveys no facts, no history, and therefore changes nothing in existence.”¹⁴¹ As “the knowledge of nature and history also is intimately conjoined with that of God,” an incorrect reading of general

¹³⁵ Ibid., 52.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 52.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 52.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 52.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 53.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 312.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 313.

revelation, which is inevitable under the condition of total depravity and without special revelation, draws one away from God and reality.¹⁴² One's vision is severely limited by his or her unregenerate comprehension of revelation.

Due to this limitation, non-Christian worldviews can only obtain some truth but inevitably are bound to err. They are only a shadow of Christian truth. They possess what Calvin called a "sense of divinity."¹⁴³ However, that "sense" was not divinity itself. While "not impostors or agents of Satan," they are antithetical to Christianity.¹⁴⁴ As Bavinck pointedly says, "What in paganism is the caricature, the living original is [in Christianity]."¹⁴⁵ This is as much an epistemological claim as it is a salvific and theological claim. Their weakness results from a faulty worldview borne out of depravity. Lacking proper foundations, "the carnal person does not understand God's speech in nature and history."¹⁴⁶ This lack of understanding is the origin for false religions. Bavinck claims that as soon "as the pure knowledge of God disappears, nature too in its true character is disowned, and either exalted into the sphere of the godhead or degraded to the sphere of a demoniacal power."¹⁴⁷ Such knowledge is granted to the regenerate Christian, who possesses God's special revelation through the Word.¹⁴⁸

Therefore, the unregenerate non-Christian does not possess a true knowledge of science, history, religion, or reality. There is no fact that is not inherently Christian. Non-Christians do not possess facts, due to their errant worldviews. Bavinck thus confirms Kuyper's epistemological theory. As faith rests at the heart of all disciplines, there necessarily must be a Christian

¹⁴² Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (n.p.: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 168.

¹⁴³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 319.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹⁴⁷ Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, 169.

¹⁴⁸ Bavinck also uses this point to claim that Christians should "find themselves at home also in the world" (*Ibid.*, 321). Continuing the "this-worldliness" emphasis of Kuyper's *Doleantie*, Bavinck rejects the political and social separatism encouraged by his Seceder heritage.

discipline and a non-Christian version of the same. As Bavinck told his American audience during his own Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1908, “the so-called conflict between science and faith lies not in the realm of the physical, but in that of the metaphysical.... What nature is to us is determined by what we think of god and who he is for us.”¹⁴⁹ Kuyper undoubtedly approved. Ten years before, he had told the same audience that “parallel lines never intersect.”¹⁵⁰ This theologically-applied geometry would soon reverberate through the Protestant world in the aftermath of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy.

¹⁴⁹ Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, 103.

¹⁵⁰ Kuyper, 134.

CHAPTER THREE

POINTS OF CONTACT: THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN PRESUPPOSITIONALISM FROM WESTMINSTER TO L'ABRI

Introduction

Descending from his perch atop the Swiss Alps, Francis Schaeffer, with his trademark Swiss knickers, trimmed goatee, and hair that was longer than the acceptable style amongst conservative American evangelicals, roundly denounced the evils of modernity to American students in lecture halls and churches across the nation, whether in person or through his popular videos. Abortion, homosexuality, and evolution were amongst the most pernicious issues worthy of evangelical attention and action – both intellectual and political. Over the course of his life, he had made a long journey from his native Germantown, Pennsylvania, to the quasi-monastic L'Abri educational community he had designed in Switzerland and had expanded via satellite campuses in Europe and the United States. However, regardless of his travels or institutional affiliations, Schaeffer never strayed too far from the influence of his former professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, Cornelius Van Til, the devotee of Bavinck and Dutch Reformed presuppositionalism. Whereas Van Til spoke primarily to his seminarians in Philadelphia in a famously dense fashion, Schaeffer presented a modified version of the critique he inherited from his two years at Westminster to a wider audience through new mediums of technology and through a style of prose that was simultaneously accessible yet still testifying of intellectual weight.

Through the works of Francis Schaeffer, the burgeoning Religious Right of the upcoming Reagan Revolution received an epistemology that rejected liberalism on the basis of worldview,

rather than strictly on illogic or faulty evidence.¹⁵¹ The Scottish Common Sense Realism of traditional Anglo-American Calvinism was supplemented and, through Schaeffer, combined with Dutch presuppositionalism. Cornelius Van Til, granted influential access to the Presbyterian community by J. Gresham Machen at Westminster Theological Seminary, infused the concerns of Kuyper and Bavinck into the intellectual lifeblood of American fundamentalism just as the movement was establishing itself in the aftermath of the schisms and incriminations of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy. Through his work at Westminster, Van Til's presuppositionalism flourished in modern American evangelicalism, though tempered both through Schaeffer's modifications and the ever-present influence of Scottish Common Sense Realism. Nevertheless, Van Til and Schaeffer successfully challenged the epistemological preeminence of Common Sense Realism in twentieth century evangelicalism by imparting an emphasis on the correctness of presuppositions to evangelical and fundamentalist intellectuals.

Machen, Common Sense Realism, and Westminster

J. Gresham Machen was a transitional figure in American Protestantism. During his tenure at Princeton Theological Seminary, evangelical Presbyterianism divided into its conservative and liberal factions, and fundamentalism emerged as a more separatist alternative to the traditional Protestant denominations. Machen was a key figure in these events.¹⁵² However, less heralded is Machen's participation in an epistemological transition within American evangelicalism. Trained in the Scottish Common Sense Realism characteristic of "Princeton Theology," Machen never departed from this tradition. However, by earnestly courting and eventually hiring Cornelius Van

¹⁵¹ Insofar as this thesis concerns itself with tracing an intellectual genealogy of presuppositionalism within American fundamentalism, it will not dwell on the social aspects of the birth of the Religious Right and the increased aggressive public activity on the part of evangelicals and fundamentalists in the late twentieth century. Such events have been discussed by other scholars of Francis Schaeffer and are beyond the scope of this particular project.

¹⁵² For descriptions of his involvement in the birth of American Christian fundamentalism, and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy in general, see Hart, *Defending the Faith*, and Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*.

Til as the professor of apologetics at the newly established Westminster Theological Seminary, Machen invited into American Presbyterianism an epistemology that, until then, had been relegated to the Dutch-speaking hinterlands of American Calvinism.

Machen was raised within a traditional Presbyterian household, and thus it was fitting that he undertook his theological studies at the Presbyterian citadel of Princeton Seminary. Since its founding in 1812, Princeton Seminary had established itself as a bastion of conservative scholarship that defended Christianity and the Bible from perceived threats by Arminians, liberals, and “heretics” of all stripes. Essential to their articulation of Calvinism, known as “Princeton Theology,” was Scottish Common Sense Realism.

Based on Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid’s interpretation of scientific Baconianism, Common Sense Realism argued that “the human mind was so constructed that we can know the real world directly.”¹⁵³ Aimed at counteracting Humean skepticism, Reid believed that “there are certain principles...which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them.”¹⁵⁴ God made humanity with this common sense that allows it to discern between right and wrong, and it provides access to an absolute truth. This common sense is universal, and therefore it is accessible by people of all cultures, classes, and creeds. By an appeal to common sense, Reid hoped to quash the skeptic’s attempt to render religious “knowledge” absurd and unusable.

Reid’s philosophy of common sense may have remained sequestered in the confines of the Scottish Enlightenment *philosophes* had it not been for the work of James Beattie. Whereas Reid,

¹⁵³ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 14.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997), 33, quoted in Sophia Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: A Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 72.

though he intended for his Common Sense Realism to serve as a defense of conservative religion, had written in philosophical rather than theological language, Beattie effectively baptized Common Sense Realism and commissioned it to serve Christianity by disarming religious skepticism. Beattie defined common sense as “that power of the mind which perceives truth, or commands belief, not by progressive argumentation, but by an instantaneous and instinctive impulse; derived neither from education nor from habit, but from nature; acting independently on our will, whenever its object is presented...and acting in a similar manner upon all, or at least upon a majority of mankind...”¹⁵⁵ Thus, religious knowledge is received by humans through the action of God. God made humans in such a way that they have the ability to perceive truth correctly. Debate, to some degree, was declared null and void. Even the most common beggar on the streets of Edinburgh can possess absolute truth apart from the distorted rationalizations that led Hume down the primrose path to hell.¹⁵⁶ Common Sense Realism’s value was precisely in its benefit to the Edinburgh beggar. That beggar could yet maintain the simple, childlike faith requested by Christ in the Gospels and thus be comforted by a minister’s message.

Additionally, while including a potentially democratizing spirit by allowing knowledge to be perceived by both doctor and pauper, Common Sense Realism was inherently conservative. By protecting religion from Humean assaults, it safeguarded a social order by preserving traditional society. This was as true in Scotland as it was in the United States, where Scottish Presbyterian immigrants delivered the gospel of common sense to the newly founded institutions of a developing nation, such as Princeton University and the seminary that was established in

¹⁵⁵ Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, 11-12, quoted in *ibid.*, 74-75.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

1812.¹⁵⁷ Charles Hodge, the most prominent articulator of Princeton Theology, used Common Sense Realism to thrust and parry against Darwinism, higher criticism, and radical abolitionism.¹⁵⁸ The Princeton theologians utilized common sense as a defensive weapon, guarding traditional religion and the society it served.

In this regard, Machen was no different than his Princeton predecessors. His scholarly methodology and theology were heavily influenced by Scottish Common Sense Realism. His scholarly works on the virgin birth of Jesus and Pauline religion, though criticized by some scholars for imprecise contextualization of ideas (“*in vacuo*”), were likewise well-reviewed by scholars for their attention to detail and his abandonment of a strictly providential understanding of history.¹⁵⁹ While not denying Providence, of course, Machen was quicker to provide natural explanations that were both rational and obtainable through historical evidence.

For example, in his study on the virgin birth, Machen intended to provide “an examination of the positive testimony to the virgin birth and of the objections that have been raised against it” as well as evidence to the contrary.¹⁶⁰ He continues to provide a deeply textual analysis of the Matthean and Lucan narratives of the virgin birth, uses history and Greek grammar to reduce potential problems arising from the texts themselves, and then argues against the scholarship of Harnack, Ritschl, and other liberal church historians. While he argues for the admissibility of the supernatural based upon a unified theory of knowledge in which religious and scientific truths are equally admissible, Machen spends more time arguing historically for the overall reliability

¹⁵⁷ For the history of the growth in Common Sense Realism’s influence in America during the colonial and early republic periods, see Noll, *America’s God*, 93-113; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” *Church History* 24, No. 3 (Sep., 1955), 257–272; E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); and Jeffrey H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 45-70.

¹⁵⁸ See Noll, *America’s God*, 414-415, and Paul C. Gutjhar, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 168-175.

¹⁵⁹ Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 53.

¹⁶⁰ J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co. Ltd., 1958), 1.

of the Gospel accounts of the virgin birth. Admitting that “the supernatural appears in these birth narratives,” he quickly notes that “it does not appear in any excessive or unworthy form.”¹⁶¹

Bracketing opposition to the supernatural, Machen attempts to demonstrate that “as attributed to men of that time, and to those particular persons, [the actions described by Matthew and Luke] cannot be shown to be impossible.”¹⁶²

This line of argument is made easier by his claim that “[t]he authors of books like the Gospels are not intending merely to give their readers inspiring poetry or an instructive philosophy of religion; they are intending to narrate facts.”¹⁶³ This emphasis on biblical factuality became the linchpin of his critique of liberalism. Machen accused liberals of rejecting history by abandoning biblical narratives while still attempting – to varying degrees of fidelity – to hold Christian beliefs. For Machen, Christianity is necessarily a historical faith. He argued this strongly in *Christianity and Liberalism*, his short *magnum opus* in which he famously condemns liberalism as being “not Christianity at all, but a religion which is so entirely different from Christianity as to belong in a distinct category.”¹⁶⁴ Insofar as “the liberal theologian seeks to rescue certain of the general principles of religion, of which these particularities are thought to be mere temporary symbols, and these general principles he regards as constituting ‘the essence of Christianity,’” the liberal is unscientific, ahistorical, and, thus, non-Christian.¹⁶⁵ “The Christian movement at its inception was not just a way of life in the modern sense, but a way of life founded upon a message. It was based, not upon mere feeling, not upon a mere program of works, but upon an account of facts.”¹⁶⁶ History is combined with a message to produce doctrine,

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 219.

¹⁶² Ibid., 237.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 385.

¹⁶⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 6.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 18.

which is the essence of Christianity, but nonetheless factual history is a non-negotiable necessity.¹⁶⁷ Something needed to “happen” for Christianity to exist. A man named Jesus needed to walk the earth as the Christ. Apart from this fact, Machen argued, there could be no Christianity.

Natural history was used in the service of traditional theological understandings of Christianity.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, for Machen, it could not be any other way. Following the Common Sense Realism that he inherited from his Princetonian Presbyterian roots, the facts, through the correct use of reason, could demonstrate biblical authority. If provided with enough facts, he believed that the liberal would see the error of his or her ways.¹⁶⁹ Reason would prevail. Unfortunately for him, this did not occur. Defrocked from the ministry and banished from his denomination, Machen focused his attention towards rebuilding confessional Presbyterianism through his Presbyterian Church of America (later the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) and Westminster Theological Seminary. One of his new hires, though, would shift the epistemological direction of conservative Presbyterianism in the United States.

Cornelius Van Til and the Quest for Consistency

One month prior to the beginning of the Great Depression, Westminster Theological Seminary welcomed its first students on September 25, 1929.¹⁷⁰ Thanks to Machen’s own vast personal wealth and his privileged connections, Machen was able to focus on attracting faculty to his seminary, mainly by trying to convince professors from Princeton to cross the Delaware River to join his endeavor. One of the potential candidates whom Machen desperately wanted was a young Dutch-American pastor and former Princeton philosophy professor, Cornelius Van

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶⁸ Hart, 50.

¹⁶⁹ Longfield, 48, 173.

¹⁷⁰ Hart, 134.

Til. Coaxing Van Til from his Western Michigan pulpit was a major coup for Machen, who eventually relied heavily upon Van Til as a foundational figure at Westminster while Machen crisscrossed the nation building his Orthodox Presbyterian Church. More importantly for the nascent fundamentalist movement, Van Til highlighted the importance of presuppositions in presenting a coherent, consistent apologetic in opposition to “the world.” Van Til would attempt to finish Machen’s war on liberalism with a different arsenal.

Befitting his role in American Christian fundamentalism, Cornelius Van Til was an immigrant. Born in the Netherlands in 1895 to a family with a Seceder heritage, Van Til’s family crossed the Atlantic and settled in northwestern Indiana when Cornelius was ten years old. Reformed piety and theology was central to his youth, and later in life he praised his parents for inculcating correct presuppositions in him from birth.¹⁷¹ Therefore, it was unsurprising when Cornelius felt a call to the ministry and thus left his farm for Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he studied at Calvin Preparatory School and the Theological Seminary of the Christian Reformed Church, which was the American incarnation of the Dutch *Afscheiding*. Disenchanted with the oppressive academic atmosphere in Grand Rapids, Van Til left the seminar for Princeton Seminary in 1922, where he earned four degrees over the next five years (a Th.B. in 1924, M.A. in 1924, a Th.M. in 1925, and finally a Ph.D. in 1927).¹⁷²

While at Princeton, Van Til came to a conclusion that would define this career. In order to defend Reformed theology from attacks, a particularly Reformed apologetic approach must be identified and undertaken. Calvinism’s consistency would be the root of its success. Discovering the answer to the problem of theodicy in a content-winning essay, Van Til boldly proclaimed that “God must be his own theodicy,” thereby reaffirming the traditional Reformed understanding of

¹⁷¹ Cornelius Van Til, *Why I Believe in God* (Philadelphia, Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1948), 5-6.

¹⁷² Muether, 52.

God's sovereignty.¹⁷³ "God does not need our little fences for his protection, nor do they do us much subjective good, rather harm."¹⁷⁴ If one takes Calvinism seriously, Van Til argued, much less work is needed. Let God be God, then all things will eventually fall into place in a system. At the heart of this is the recognition of the utter otherness of God in relation to humanity. Humankind is absolutely dependent upon God. In his university writings, Van Til quickly rejected any use of Immanuel Kant, whose epistemology he found faulty and whose concept of human freedom he deemed impotent.¹⁷⁵ Relying upon the "inimitable trio of Kuyper, Bavinck, and Warfield," Van Til quickly argued for the importance of presuppositions and applied it in his developing thought.

Taking a pulpit in western Michigan, Van Til accepted a position at Princeton Seminary as the professor of apologetics in 1929. Ironically, this was the very position that had been denied to Machen by the Presbyterian Church's General Assembly.¹⁷⁶ As he witnessed the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy and the seminary's reorganization, Van Til, taking Machen's advice, resigned his position at the seminary, returning to his old pulpit in Michigan. Being feverishly recruited by Machen, who even made the train trip from Philadelphia to Michigan to convince Van Til, Van Til eventually succumbed and accepted a chair of apologetics at Machen's Westminster Theological Seminary during the summer of 1929.

By abandoning his Dutch Reformed pulpit for a Presbyterian academic chair, Van Til automatically expanded his influence over the American Reformed community. Dutch Reformed students rarely crossed the Alleghenies to study in Philadelphia, and so Van Til's students were primarily Presbyterians. Nevertheless, Van Til did not relinquish his Christian Reformed

¹⁷³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 53.

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 54.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

membership until 1936, when Machen formed his Presbyterian Church of America (later renamed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church).¹⁷⁷ With his new base of operation, Van Til quickly went to work as a polemicist, doing the work Machen was largely unable to undertake due to his constant traveling and newfound ecclesiastical responsibilities.¹⁷⁸ As books were published by Princeton professors, inevitably Van Til would publish a reply that would discern the heresy lurking with the suspect work. One of his former colleagues at Princeton sarcastically declared that Van Til had created a new category of heretics, the “modern Princetonianist.”¹⁷⁹ At some level, Van Til could not have agreed with him more. Heresy was heresy, detrimental to the Reformed and Christian faiths, and needed to be uncovered and exterminated.

Though viciously fighting the Princetonian modernists, Van Til took a softer approach towards his employer and mentor, Machen. While Machen recognized that Van Til teaching an apologetics that departed from the Common Sense Realism of “old Princeton,” Machen approved, admitting that epistemology was not one of his strengths.¹⁸⁰ In one of his letters, Machen told Van Til that “I wish I could take our course in Evidences. I need it...”¹⁸¹ To what degree this is sincere or simply polite is perhaps unknowable. Historical evidence is limited to Machen and Van Til’s correspondence during their shared time at Westminster as well as Van Til’s reminiscences over the next forty years. Further, there is no public record of a controversy between Machen and Van Til over apologetics, while Van Til seemingly fought with nearly everyone else who disagreed with him over the course of his career.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 77.

¹⁷⁸ For Machen’s work regarding the building of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, see Hart, 133-159, and Longfield, 212.

¹⁷⁹ “Mackenzie v. Van Til (Conclusion),” *Christianity Today*, May 1934, 13, quoted in Muether, 74.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 71.

¹⁸¹ J. Gresham Machen to Cornelius Van Til, May 21, 1930, quoted in *ibid.*, 71.

This has led Van Til biographers to speculate that Machen was an epistemological work-in-progress, and his views were evolving in Van Til's direction under his influence.¹⁸² Others avoid the issue altogether, such as Van Til's main interpreter, Presbyterian theologian John M. Frame. Frame argues that Machen was the "consolidator of the Machen Reformation."¹⁸³ According to Frame, Machen "was highly intelligent and scholarly, but more concerned with defending basic biblical truths than with the comprehensive and detailed elaboration of Reformed theology."¹⁸⁴ Hence, Machen concerned himself largely (prior to the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) to writing scholarly defenses of traditional Christianity. Nevertheless, Machen, according to Frame, fully recognized the existence of an antithesis between Christianity and liberalism.¹⁸⁵ Van Til continued and updated Machen's work as he encountered new challenges to conservative theology. Regardless of Machen's own epistemological views, his recruitment of Van Til to Westminster and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church allowed for the continuation of Machen's crusade following his untimely death in 1937 in North Dakota. Labeling Van Til as the "consolidator of Machen's Reformation" is beneficial for understanding their theological and historical relationship, as it does not require complete agreement between the two. Van Til recognized this when he described Machen's work after Machen's death: "The point...is not that factual apologetics is useless but that it alone and by itself is insufficient, if we are considering the question of a logically consistent and comprehensive apologetics."¹⁸⁶ Facts are worthwhile when accompanied by a correct understanding of the nature of facts. Machen would have agreed.¹⁸⁷ While Machen was more concerned with assembling the facts, Van Til aimed to

¹⁸² Ibid., 71

¹⁸³ John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), 39.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 41-42.

¹⁸⁶ Cornelius Van Til to J. Oliver Buswell, February 1, 1937, quoted in Muether, 85.

¹⁸⁷ See Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 218-219.

bolster the meaning of those facts through a consistently Reformed epistemology and apologetics.

At the heart of this system was the concern with presuppositions that he inherited from Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, whom he studied devotedly while in seminary. Van Til did not accept Bavinck's works uncritically, as he sometimes found the Dutch theologian to be inconsistent in his application of presuppositionalist principles.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Van Til's critical appropriation of Bavinck endorsed the principle of presuppositionalism. Van Til constantly cites Bavinck, both positively and negatively, in all of his major works. He credits Bavinck as the one "who taught me that the proofs of God as usually formulated on the traditional method prove a finite god."¹⁸⁹ Bavinck was included by Van Til as one of the "three great men of Reformed theology" (alongside Warfield and Kuyper), and "to differ from them is a serious matter.... [T]o depart from them may, in a general sense, be conducive to a presumption that one has departed also from the creeds of the church. These men have the status of authorities in the field of Reformed thinking and represent the tradition of Reformed thought; they are the classical representatives of the Reformed Faith."¹⁹⁰

Van Til, then, attempted to impart Bavinck's presuppositionalism to the several generations of students he taught at Westminster from 1929 until his full retirement in 1979. At the heart of it was acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God. "In God's being there are no particulars not related to the universal, and there is nothing universal that is not fully expressed in the particulars."¹⁹¹ God is present in all things, and thus all things refer back to God. This is central

¹⁸⁸ Brian G. Mattson, "Van Til on Bavinck: An Assessment," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008), 112-114.

¹⁸⁹ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1955), 264.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

to a “Christian philosophy of reality.”¹⁹² Reality cannot be understood without the presupposition that all subjects, disciplines, and entities ultimately point to the universal that God embodies. Lacking this presupposition results in a misperception of reality, which necessarily is a different reality and therefore unreality. In order for one to grasp reality, one must understand his or her environment. However, this is not a *cri de coeur* for cultural analysis. Rather, “God is man’s ultimate environment, and this environment is completely interpretative of man who is to know himself.”¹⁹³

In order to know oneself, one must know God. One’s objective reality exists only in relation to God. This belief, grounded in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, means that humans must “interpret [the world of objects] under God. Without the interpretation of the universe by man to the glory of God, the whole world would be meaningless.”¹⁹⁴ Objective knowledge is only found vis-à-vis the subject’s relation to the divine Object, since he is the subject’s grounding in reality. Any theory of creation that places the subject (humankind) solely in relation to other subjects does not present objective knowledge, but rather the subjective knowledge of relativism.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, Van Til can claim simply that “[w]e see then that our knowledge of the universe must be true since we are creatures of God who has made both us and the universe.”¹⁹⁶ True knowledge is only true through its relation to God. Anything grounded in a different relationship is not true knowledge at all.

The reality of the subject’s relationship to the object precludes the subject’s “autonomy,” which Van Til defined as any attempt to free oneself from dependence upon God. Humankind exists within “the comprehensive plan and providence of God with respect to all that takes place

¹⁹² Ibid., 45.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 65.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 66.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 67.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 67.

in the universe.”¹⁹⁷ No one can escape from this system, as “any individual fact of this system is what it is in this system.”¹⁹⁸ This is the case because “God makes the facts to be what they are.”¹⁹⁹ Therefore, if facts are subordinate to God, then so are individuals. “Hence the idea of human autonomy can find no place in the truly Christian system any more than can the idea of chance. The human being is analogical rather than original in all the aspects of its activity. And as such its activity is truly significant.”²⁰⁰ Eve was the first to make this mistake. By disobeying God’s mandate against partaking of the tree’s fruit, “[s]he denied God’s being as ultimate being. She affirmed therewith in effect that all being is essentially on one level.”²⁰¹ By claiming ultimate authority for herself, Eve claimed autonomy. She rejected God’s system, God’s facts, and thus reality. In her fall, she rejected the opportunity for knowledge, which comes from God’s revelation. “The revelation of a self-sufficient God can have no meaning for a mind that thinks of itself as ultimately autonomous.”²⁰² Therefore, a claim of autonomy, with its faulty presuppositions, bars any claim on true knowledge.

Therefore, according to this epistemological move, every scientist who rejects Christian presuppositions in effect becomes Eve in the narrative of the fall. Van Til is able to dismiss the theory of evolution or any other theory contrary to his interpretation of Reformed Christianity on the basis of presuppositions alone. As Van Til interpreter Greg Bahnsen writes, summarizing Van Til, “The Christian’s commitment to Christ as his Lord leads him to see everything in the light of who Christ is and what Christ has revealed in His word; his reasoning and evaluations

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 167.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 167.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 167.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 167.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 58.

²⁰² Ibid., 112.

are subject to the authority of God, speaking infallibly in the Scriptures.”²⁰³ Insofar as one’s presuppositions are grounded in revealed revelation, then they are beyond question. As one might gather from the tone, Christianity is not one philosophical option amongst many. There is no room for conversation with compromise as either a goal or a tactic towards rapprochement. Persuasion aimed at human satisfaction will not suffice: “[Some] preachers appeal to men to take Christ because he will satisfy them best. Now it goes without saying that a drunkard cannot be tempted into accepting Christ in this way if it be understood as meaning nothing more than that the drunkard is himself, as he is, to be the judge of what really satisfies him.”²⁰⁴ Instead, the preacher should tell the drunkard “to allow Jesus to tell him what satisfies him, and if he does, then Jesus will satisfy him.”²⁰⁵ Conversation therefore consists of the Christian relating revelation to the unregenerate. Christianity is not “one hypothesis among many,” and if the non-Christian accepted it as that, then “he would not be accepting Christianity, but a substitute for it. To reason about anything as an hypothesis for the explanation of any fact or facts means that there may be other hypotheses that should eventually prove to be true.”²⁰⁶ This then leads to the logical conclusion that “these facts are now considered as being apart from God,” since Christianity could be just one of many legitimate options.²⁰⁷

This epistemological exclusivism does not allow for the lazy utilization of reason or facts on the part of the Christian. Insofar as Van Til locates everything within the divine system of reality, it can be pieced together (though not in its complete entirety). “The very factness of any individual fact of history is precisely what it is because God is what he is.... God makes the facts

²⁰³ Greg L. Bahsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1998), 462.

²⁰⁴ Cornelius Van Til, *Survey of Christian Epistemology*, quoted in Bahsen, 468.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 468.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 468-469.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 469.

to be what they are.”²⁰⁸ Divine revelation will force the elect to “drop his own assumptions of autonomy and chance,” but the power of the Reformed gospel is advanced by a thoroughly coherent and comprehensively rational system.²⁰⁹ This is done through the scholar’s presentation of facts within a system guided by proper presuppositions. Following Kuyper, Van Til emphasizes the need for explicitly Christian scholarship, which possesses the advantage of operating within the sphere of reality, unlike those sciences that reject correct presuppositions. Facts properly understood, obtaining their truthful status from God, inevitably testify of Christianity. They gain coherency through revealed scripture, as “in the totality picture that man must seek for himself, he must go to Scripture as the final court of appeal. He learns from nature still, but what nature teaches him must be brought into relationship with what the Scriptures teach in order that it may be properly understood.”²¹⁰ This scriptural basis then provides the facts with power: “If facts are what they are as parts of the Christian-theistic system of truth, then what else can facts do but reveal that system to the limit of their ability as parts of that system? It is only as manifestations of that system that they are what they are.”²¹¹ Outside the proper system, though, they are not facts. They are delusions, providing irrational evidence to a depraved and perverse separated from God by its perceived autonomy.

Van Til recognized the radicalness of his system, particularly within American Presbyterianism. Indeed, he spent much of his career defending himself against accusations by other Reformed theologians of rejecting common grace or destroying opportunities for unity within American evangelicalism.²¹² However, this did not deter him from using his system to warn Presbyterians away from the dangerous inconsistencies of their vaunted heroes, such as

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 167.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 169.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 58.

²¹¹ Ibid., 139.

²¹² Muether, 91-118, 149-178.

Charles Hodge. Adopting Hodge as the personification of the Scottish Common Sense Realism identified historically with American Presbyterianism, Van Til boldly accused Hodge of possessing Arminian tendencies, which no doubt would have agitated the cantankerous defender of Princeton orthodoxy. Indeed, Hodge was a “less consistent Calvinist.”²¹³ “It would seem that we have dropped...to the level of evangelicalism when Hodge speaks of the office of reason in matters of religion.”²¹⁴ Hodge believed that one could appeal to the unbeliever’s reason, which may “judge of the evidences of a revelation.”²¹⁵ Reason consists of “those laws of belief which God has implanted in our nature.” Herein lays Hodge’s inconsistency. He believes that the Christian can appeal to an unregenerate person’s reason to draw them to Christianity. However, “it is...impossible to appeal to the intellectual and moral nature of men, as *men themselves interpret this nature*, and say that it must judge of the credibility and evidence of revelation. For if this is done, we are virtually telling the natural man to accept just so much and no more of Christianity, as with his perverted concept of human nature, he cares to accept.”²¹⁶ Hodge lacks an understanding of the true nature of reason, which “is always the instrument of a person. And the person employing it is always either a believer or an unbeliever.”²¹⁷ There is no common sense to which Hodge can appeal that unites all people. The unbeliever’s common sense is depraved and thus cannot be trusted to judge revelation. Instead, revelation judges common sense, finds it lacking, and then converts the elected individual, who then abandons common sense for correct presuppositions. In dismissing Hodge for promoting “the exact equivalent of the Arminian position,” Van Til exclaimed to the Presbyterian world that the epistemology that was emanating from the seminary named after their central confession of faith was a radical

²¹³ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 103.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

²¹⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:49, quoted in *ibid.*, 104.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 105 (emphasis in the original).

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

correction of past errors. Evangelical epistemology and rhetoric must be reformed in order to withstand the assaults of liberalism and the unregenerate.

Whether or not Machen understood the potential impact of hiring the Dutch-influenced Van Til at his new seminary, Van Til, in his fifty years at Westminster Seminary, presided over an intellectual revolution. Whereas generations of Presbyterian ministers had studied under the masters of Scottish Common Sense Realism at Princeton or other Presbyterian seminaries, several generations of confessional Presbyterians learned a system of apologetics that, were it not for Van Til's presence at Westminster, would have been sequestered to the Dutch communities of Michigan. Van Til introduced his students to the ideas of Kuyper and Bavinck, hoping that these foreign - yet "consistently" Calvinist – concepts would aid the dissemination of confessional Calvinism and protect it from the heresy that Van Til saw all around him. However, Van Til was limited by his position. An academic philosopher, he was painfully unable to communicate his presuppositionalist ideas to the common laity. He never could reproduce the tenor of his mentor's *Christianity and Liberalism*. However, one of his students was much more successful at producing a digestible version of presuppositionalism. Though Van Til would at times vehemently disagree with him, Francis Schaeffer delivered Van Til's epistemology – in a modified form – to a new, broader audience searching for meaning and ammunition against the American counterculture.

Francis Schaeffer and the Presuppositional Counter-Counterculture

Francis Schaeffer's connection to Van Til has been a point of contention within the world of conservative Reformed theologians. Schaeffer modified Van Til's system to fit his own conclusions and situations, which of course drew disappointment and disbelief from the

Dutchman, who naturally accused Schaeffer of inconsistency.²¹⁸ Nevertheless, Van Til was still undeniably present on every page of Schaeffer's works, where he forced evangelicals to consider presuppositions as the root of a successful Christian apologetic. His presuppositional emphasis has been sufficiently successful as to inspire one of his devotees to condemn the only academic biography of Schaeffer as being "less insightful" because the author "sees Schaeffer through his own presuppositions, and thereby fails to give sufficient justice to the person and his view of truth."²¹⁹ Regardless of Schaeffer's intellectual evolution over the course of his life, he remained Van Til's student, and it was through him that Van Til had his most lasting and important impact on evangelicalism and the Religious Right.

Schaeffer possessed an innate sympathy for the skeptics and confused students that he ministered to later in his life because, in his youth, he was one. Born into a liberal Presbyterian household in 1912 in Germantown, Pennsylvania, the young Schaeffer possessed an inquisitive spirit, particularly regarding religious matters. Studying the Bible alongside the Greek philosophers as potential fonts of wisdom, Schaeffer was struck with what he perceived as universal truth in the Bible.²²⁰ A newly regenerated fundamentalist, Schaeffer quickly matriculated to Westminster Seminary in 1935, where he was a student of both Machen and Van Til.²²¹ Thus, Schaeffer was able to imbibe both of the distinct epistemological traditions present at Westminster in its early years. This perhaps accounts for the "inconsistency" in Schaeffer so detested by Van Til.

²¹⁸ Muether, 197-199.

²¹⁹ Udo Middelmann, "Francis A. Schaeffer: The Man," in *Francis Schaeffer: A Mind and Heart for God*, ed. Bruce Little (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2010), 6. Middelmann is also Schaeffer's son-in-law.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11; Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 2-3.

²²¹ Bryan A. Follis, *Truth with Love: The Apologetics of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 30.

However, after two years, Schaeffer abandoned Westminster for the newly established Faith Theological Seminary, which was founded by separatist fundamentalists who had distanced themselves from Westminster and Machen's Orthodox Presbyterian Church by organizing the Bible Presbyterian Church. The Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) objected to practices by those associated with Westminster that were deemed contaminated by the mainline, non-fundamentalist churches. For example, Faith and the BPC adopted a premillennial eschatology, in contrast to Westminster's amillennialism, and advocated for temperance, which was not mandated (or practiced) at Westminster. In this sense, Faith and the BPC were more in tune with the concerns of the larger, non-confessionally Presbyterian fundamentalist movement.²²² Schaeffer admitted as much, claiming that one of the reasons for his defection to Faith was his uneasiness with the tenor of Reformed theology espoused at Westminster, which he considered to be more Calvinist than Calvin himself.²²³ Furthermore, premillennialism strongly influenced his understanding of the ecclesiastical turmoil surrounding him in the wake of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy. Indeed, he spent much of his time studying biblical prophecy and fussing over authorship dates and possible interpretations of the prophetic texts.²²⁴ Schaeffer engaged in theological tendencies that would have disturbed both Machen and Van Til, deviating from the traditional confessional orthodoxy they held to be gospel truth.

However, this should not be grounds for discounting Van Til's influence on Schaeffer. Schaeffer, when he joined the Bible Presbyterian Church, certainly took a different direction than advocated by Van Til. Schaeffer soon immersed him in the world of a fundamentalism that was more readily defined in opposition to "modernism" rather than adherence to the Presbyterian

²²² See Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 51-55, 66-68; Colin Duriez, *Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 43-44; Hankins, 12-15.

²²³ Hankins, 13.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

standards. However, his two years with Van Til were immensely important in his intellectual development. Encountering Van Til only a few years after his conversion to fundamentalist Christianity, the Dutchman presented the seminarian with early critiques of Karl Barth's neo-orthodox theology as the "new modernism," and, even more importantly, Van Til was Schaeffer's *entré* in the world of apologetics.²²⁵ While Schaeffer may have disagreed with his mentor, as will be discussed later, he maintained an emphasis on presuppositions that would be characteristic of his thought in the 1960s and 1970s. As biographer Colin Duriez rightly claims, "Many of the ideas familiar to readers of Schaeffer's books, written in his later fifties and beyond, were in seed during [his] seminary years."²²⁶ Van Til's influence on Schaeffer, and therefore by extension fundamentalism, has been wrongly discounted or ignored by many scholars in favor of the more popular fundamentalist strain which Schaeffer imbibed through the Bible Presbyterian Church. The necessity of this mandated separation between the two strains is questionable at best.

Following his graduation from Faith and his ordination in the Bible Presbyterian Church, Schaeffer excelled at being a pastor-scholar. Shepherding congregations in Pennsylvania and Missouri, Schaeffer decided in 1947 to serve as a missionary to Europe under the auspices of the International Council of Christian Churches, which was an international extension of Carl McIntire's fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches. Schaeffer and others hoped to "revive" Christianity (in its American fundamentalist articulation, of course) in post-war Europe in what biographer Barry Hankins aptly described as a "theological Marshall Plan."²²⁷

²²⁵ Duriez, 40-42.

²²⁶ Duriez, 41.

²²⁷ Hankins, 29.

Once in Europe, he settled in Switzerland, where he worked to counteract the influence of Karl Barth, whom he saw as the greatest danger to modern Christianity.²²⁸ In his first major speech, Schaeffer denounced neo-orthodoxy as the “new modernism,” which had been Van Til’s label for neo-orthodoxy and the title of his first book.²²⁹ Indeed, in reviewing Schaeffer’s critique of his work, Barth saw the hand of Van Til, with whom he saw dialogue to be futile.²³⁰ In the preface to the fourth volume of *Church Dogmatics*, Barth indirectly dismissed Van Til as amongst those who were “butchers and cannibals [who] are beyond the pale (i.e., the one who summarily described my theology as the worst heresy of any age).”²³¹ Similarly, he did not save any of his pith from Schaeffer, to whom he wrote: “Conversations are possible between open-minded people. Your paper and the reviews of your friend [J. Oliver] Buswell reveals the fact of your decision to close your window-shutters. I do not know how to deal with a man who comes to see and to speak to me in the quality of an [*sic*] detective-inspector or with the behaviour [*sic*] of a missionary who goes to convert a heathen. No, thanks!”²³² Much to Barth’s dismay, another incarnation of Van Til had come to harass him, only this time on his own continent.

However, as Schaeffer continued living in Europe, he gradually rejected elements of his fundamentalist training. This was due in part to his self-removal from the fundamentalist ghetto of America. In his newly adopted Switzerland, he dismissed separatism as impractical. If he had rejected Westminster as too dogmatically Reformed in exclusion to the grander fundamentalist cause, he likewise rejected separatism as a stumbling block to missionary work amongst non-

²²⁸ Ibid., 38-42.

²²⁹ Ibid., 38. See Cornelius Van Til, *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1946).

²³⁰ Hankins, 39.

²³¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4.2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), xii. Elsewhere, Barth had lamented Van Til’s supposed criticism of Barth (“the worst heresy of any age”). See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 380.

²³² Karl Barth to Schaeffer, 3 September 1950, quoted in Hankins, 39.

Christians.²³³ Schaeffer was not rejecting fundamentalist theology. Indeed, his distaste for neo-orthodoxy and liberalism continued. Nevertheless, he saw the modern situation as requiring different tactics than those espoused by the Bible Presbyterian Church.

In a modern age in which theologically fundamentalist Christianity was more of a foreign intrusion than a natural to existence, Schaeffer believed that full cultural engagement, rather than separatism, was the appropriate tactic for world evangelism. In order to accomplish this, Schaeffer established the L'Abri Fellowship in 1955 in Huémoz, Switzerland. Offering hospitality and wide-ranging intellectual discussion, Schaeffer opened his door to individuals as disparate as Boston Brahmin Swiss boarding school students to tripping disciples of Timothy Leary.²³⁴ Visitors could stay at the Schaeffers' Swiss chalet for either short- or long-term visits in which they would study Christianity with Schaeffer, who traded the conservative appearance of a fundamentalist minister for Swiss knickers and a goatee. Schaeffer would lead discussions on the Christian nature of all disciplines, including theology, art, music, and philosophy. Echoing Kuyper, Schaeffer argued against the ghettoization of Christianity within certain disciplines. Instead, as Christianity was a religion for the whole person, it was applicable to all human endeavors.²³⁵ Led Zeppelin and Albert Camus were equally valid targets of analysis and discussion as Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin. The Christian worldview, for Schaeffer, was all-encompassing. Nothing was beyond its reach.

²³³ Hankins, 45.

²³⁴ Ibid., 60; Duriez, 127-151.

²³⁵ Bryan A. Follis, *True with Love: The Apologetics of Francis Schaeffer*, 33; see also Hankins, 121. Schaeffer possessed a rich respect for Kuyper, whom he occasionally quoted in his works. In his jeremiadic *The Church Before the Watching World*, Schaeffer placed Kuyper in such luminous company as Warfield, Machen, Luther, and Calvin (Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church Before the Watching World in The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, volume 4, book 2 [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982], 125). Likewise, Schaeffer explicitly endorsed Kuyper's theory of "sphere sovereignty," which expressed God's sovereignty over all spheres of human endeavor. See Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man in The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, volume 5, book 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 35. Interestingly, in that work, Schaeffer uses Kuyper's sphere sovereignty to argue in favor of evangelical environmentalism.

Schaeffer devoted the remainder of his life to articulating a coherent Christian worldview for his contemporaries – particularly the younger generation. His “trilogy” – *The God Who Is There* (1968), *Escape from Reason* (1968), and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (1972) – served as his initial (and most influential) barrage against secularists and non-Christians. Edited transcripts of invited lectures, his books, like the discussions at L’Abri, spanned a multitude of topics, which inevitably resulted in shallow analysis of his sundry subjects, but this weakness is negated by their value. Whereas Van Til composed dense four-hundred page treatises on Barth, with copious references to the evils of Kantian epistemology, Schaeffer accomplished what Van Til failed to achieve: popularization. Removed from the academic confines of Westminster and the theological discipline, Schaeffer was an intellectual troubadour, leading his readers in discussion of existential philosophy and rock-and-roll – topics which heretofore had been unaddressed by the evangelical intellectual class and left abandoned to the emotional revulsion of confused parents.

Schaeffer began by crisply identifying the problem facing modern Christians: “The present chasm between the generations has been brought about almost entirely by a change in the concept of truth.”²³⁶ Most importantly, this change is the result of a shift away from Christian presuppositions.²³⁷ In particular, everyone, Schaeffer claimed, held to a belief in absolute truth, which is connected to the “idea of antithesis.” By antithesis, Schaeffer meant that “If you have A it is not non-A,” or that a truth is not a falsehood.²³⁸ Antithesis therefore involves good-bad, right-wrong, and true-false dichotomies. For Schaeffer, the antithesis is essential to Christianity,

²³⁶ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, volume 1, book 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 5.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

as “[i]f we let go of our sense of antithesis, we will have nothing left to say.”²³⁹ In the past (prior to 1935), “People may or may not have thought out their beliefs consistently, but everyone would have been talking to each other as though the idea of antithesis was correct.”²⁴⁰ This presupposition rested in the assumption that it was true. Its nature as an assumption was the root of its downfall in the mid-twentieth century. Because it was a common assumption, there was no need for Christian ministers or intellectuals to coherently articulate the correctness of this presupposition. Therefore, “[t]he floodwaters of secular thought and liberal theology overwhelmed the Church because the leaders did not understand the importance of combatting a false set of presuppositions.”²⁴¹ Common Sense Realists had failed the Church.

It is here that we first see a degree of distinction between the epistemologies of Schaeffer and Van Til. Schaeffer emphasized the reasonableness of correct presuppositions. Influenced by the Scottish Common Sense Realism still present in the early years of Westminster, Schaeffer held an exalted view of human reason. Reason was a shared common ground between the believer and the non-believer.²⁴² There is a common language between the Christian and the non-Christian by which the Christian can argue the reasonableness of Christianity in the face of other options. Unlike Van Til, Schaeffer believed in univocal knowledge of God. He claimed that “[t]he God who has spoken is not the unknowable infinite above the line. The God who has created man in His own image communicates true truth about Himself. . . . We have true knowledge, for as the Scriptures say so simply and overwhelmingly, when God wrote the Ten Commandments on stone, or when Jesus spoke to Paul on the Damascus road in the Hebrew language, a real language was used subject to grammars and lexicons, a language to be

²³⁹ Ibid., 47.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 7.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

²⁴² Hankins, 91.

understood.”²⁴³ Furthermore, “[t]he biblical presentation indicates that because man is made in God’s image, the problem of God communicating to him is not of an absolutely different order from that of man speaking to man. We are finite, God is infinite, but we can understand truly.”²⁴⁴ God spoke so as to be understood. Indeed, “God’s propositional communications to mankind” are not to be accepted by a “leap of faith,” but instead “are open to verification.”²⁴⁵

Schaeffer utterly rejected the very notion of a Kierkegaardian “leap of faith” as misleading, since Christianity (or faith) does not require such a leap. Kierkegaard’s formulation of that language was a horrific landmark in Schaeffer’s declension narrative of modern Christianity. Its result was “the total separation of the rational and faith.”²⁴⁶ This marked philosophy’s descent below “the line of despair,” by which Schaeffer meant relativism or lack of certainty.²⁴⁷ Tragically, “Kierkegaard had not read the Bible carefully enough,” and thus he misinterpreted the story of Abraham.²⁴⁸ The patriarch did not take any “leap of faith” in his obedience to God’s commands. Rather, Abraham’s decision to sacrifice Isaac rested in his rational reaction to prior events in his life, as “he had much propositional revelation from God, he had seen God, God had fulfilled promises to him. In short, God’s words at this time were in the context of Abraham’s strong evidence for knowing that God both existed and was totally trustworthy.”²⁴⁹ Abraham certainly acted in faith, but it was faith rooted in knowledge, and therefore it was a rational step. Based on this interpretation of the story, knowing and following God does not require a “leap of faith.” Rather, knowing God can be the result of piecing together evidence. “[T]he pieces macth up in a coherent whole over the whole unified field of knowledge. With the propositional

²⁴³ Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 104.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

communication from the personal God before us, not only the things of the cosmos and history match up, but everything on the upper and lower stories matches too....”²⁵⁰ Aesthetics, morality, theology, science, and all other disciplines and fields of exploration, when properly investigated and analyzed, lead one naturally to the understand of the reasonableness of Christianity.

Knowledge is necessarily noncontradictory, since truth is true.²⁵¹ Therefore, for example, science cannot contradict scriptural revelation, which provides inerrant coherency to science when properly applied.²⁵²

Schaeffer is more optimistic concerning human reason than in Van Til, who argued that there was no point of contact beyond the direct revelation of God. Following his Dutch Reformed predecessors, Van Til emphasized the total depravity of humankind, which extended to the unregenerate human’s rational faculties. For him, dead people cannot reason.²⁵³ “It will be quite impossible...to find a common area of knowledge between believers and unbelievers unless there is agreement between them as to the nature of man himself.”²⁵⁴ Due to the Fall, this agreement does not exist. “When man became a sinner, he made of himself instead of God the ultimate or final reference point.”²⁵⁵ If personal autonomy (which would include one’s ability to reason properly) “is left unquestioned in any field, all the facts and arguments presented to the unbeliever will be made over by him according to this pattern. The sinner has cemented colored glasses to his eyes which he cannot remove. And all is yellow to the jaundiced eyes. There can be no intelligible reasoning unless those who reason together understand what they mean by their

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 120.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 121.

²⁵² Ibid., 101.

²⁵³ Van Til, *The Defense of Faith*, 99.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 91.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 101.

words.”²⁵⁶ Schaeffer takes issue with this, insofar as he allows the unregenerate the ability to understand Christianity’s reasonableness.²⁵⁷

However, there are substantial points of contact and agreement between the two presuppositionalists. Theologian Clark Pinnock rightly noted that Schaeffer “floats back and forth between these two very different standpoints [Old Princeton evidentialism and Dutch Reformed presuppositionalism] as suits him.”²⁵⁸ Therefore, it behooves scholars to recognize the influence Dutch presuppositionalism held over Schaeffer. Schaeffer’s apologetics strongly emphasized the necessity of correct presuppositions for true religion. Unlike Van Til, Schaeffer did not require correct presuppositions for conversation.²⁵⁹ Fruitful discussion about theology could occur, leading towards one’s epiphany of the truth of Christianity. However, in this disagreement, one can still discern Van Til’s influence over his former student.

Schaeffer believed fervently that “every person we speak to, whether shop girl or university student, has a set of presuppositions, whether he or she has analyzed them or not.”²⁶⁰ The tragic reality for non-Christians, for Schaeffer, is that they have not fully examined their own presuppositions. If they thoroughly did that, they would inevitably recognize the error of their ways. They would recognize the inconsistency of their ways, as “no non-Christian can be consistent to the logic of his presuppositions. The reason for this is simply that a man must live in reality.... Man cannot make his own universe and then live in it.”²⁶¹ Humans are bound by reality. That reality was designed by and belongs to God. Therefore, the non-Christian lives in “a

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 101.

²⁵⁷ Therefore, Van Til biographer John R. Muether is correct to point out matters of substantial disagreement between Van Til and Schaeffer, though his focus on the disagreement as opposed to the points of connection serves as evidence of the uncritical approach Muether takes towards Van Til’s critiques of Schaeffer. See Muether, 197-199.

²⁵⁸ Clark Pinnock, “Schaeffer on Modern Theology,” in Ronald W. Ruesegger, *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 190.

²⁵⁹ Follis, 109.

²⁶⁰ Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 131-132.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 132.

place of tension” between reality and his or her false presuppositions.²⁶² It is the role of the Christian apologist to recognize this and relieve the non-Christian from that tension by revealing the weaknesses of the individual’s presuppositions. Hence, the non-Christian and the Christian share the common ground of reality, but the non-Christian is blind to reality because of his or her presuppositions.

For Schaeffer, therefore, conversation between two individuals possessing different presuppositions would lead to disagreement. That disagreement would be illuminating to the non-Christian, because the non-Christian’s presuppositions were inherently wrong and therefore led to inevitable inconsistency, and hence tension with reality. Here is another point of contact and agreement between Schaeffer and Van Til: Both apologists recognized the necessity of non-contradictory presuppositions that could be articulated by Christians in their quest to convert non-Christians. Similar to Schaeffer, Van Til believed that Christians “can make no contact with men unless we speak to them in their language.”²⁶³ Van Til saw himself as doing this as he wrote in the prose of epistemology, maintaining though that Christian apologists “shall have to be on our guard to put Christian content into this language that we borrow.”²⁶⁴ Human language can never truly penetrate divine reality, as Van Til posits an analogical theory of knowledge in which “laws are but generalizations of God’s method of working with the particulars.”²⁶⁵ However, those particulars, which humans can grasp, “do and must act in accord with universals or laws.”²⁶⁶

Humans therefore possess the ability to grasp a shade of reality. However, a clear vision of reality is impossible so long as the individual possesses non-Christian presuppositions. True

²⁶² Ibid., 132.

²⁶³ Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 45.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 46.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 50.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 50.

knowledge is only gained as subjects are “interpreted in relation to God. The object of knowledge is not interpreted truly if, though brought into relation with the human mind, it is not also brought into relation with the divine mind. God is the ultimate category of interpretation. Now we cannot fully understand God’s plan for created things, and so we cannot fully understand things.”²⁶⁷ Full, comprehensive knowledge is impossible due to the infinite-finite divide between God and humans, but this does not prevent humans from recognizing that something is wrong. The non-Christian, being unregenerate, naturally “will not be receptive of God’s interpretation; it wants to create its own interpretation without reference to God. It will not reconstruct God’s interpretation. It will construct only its own interpretations.”²⁶⁸ This places the non-Christian in Schaeffer’s “place of tension,” since he or she attempts “to do the impossible with the result that self-frustration is written over all its efforts.”²⁶⁹ No consistency can be found in non-Christian thought because it has divorced itself from God, the source of intellectual unity.²⁷⁰

This discomfort is assisted by the existence of common grace. Even the depraved sinner, according to Van Til, possesses the “*rudera* or *scintillae* of the knowledge of God and of the universe. Non-Christians know after a fashion....”²⁷¹ Common grace serves two purposes. First, it protects society from utter chaos that should result from total depravity. Second, it confounds the non-Christian’s attempts at rationality by providing enough true knowledge to scuttle the attempt. The unregenerate presuppositions prevent the non-Christian from apprehending truth in its salvific fullness. Van Til’s utilization of common grace was often seen as problematic by other Reformed theologians, as his emphasis on human depravity seemed to preclude

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 67.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 72.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 72.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 72.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 72.

humankind's ability to access the knowledge provided by common grace.²⁷² Though he rejected common grace as a point of contact between the regenerate Christian and the unregenerate non-Christian, common grace still assisted the apologist insofar as it convicted the "dead man" with his inconsistency.

Consistency could be offered only by Christianity, which was connected to true knowledge through the divine unity of God. "Christianity is the source from which both life and light derive for men."²⁷³ Its light is enhanced through internal consistency within the expression of the faith to the world, and "[a] Protestant theology requires a Protestant apologetic."²⁷⁴ This is the weakness of Warfield, Hodge, and other Common Sense Realists, who present an apologetics that is inconsistent with Calvinism, as it does not fully accept the implications of total depravity.²⁷⁵ Therefore, attention must be given to presuppositions. Reformed presuppositions will lead to the most coherent and consistent articulation of Christian truth, which strengthens the Church. Though perhaps as empathic on the necessity of Reformed consistency, Schaeffer translated Van Til's obsession with consistency for his own situation in a post-Christian world.

Conclusion

Van Til's apologetics seems to preclude true conversation between the non-Christian and the Christian. This deeply frustrated Schaeffer, who saw Van Til's apologetic as being closed and useless to debating or converted non-Christians.²⁷⁶ The essential difference between Van Til

²⁷² For further discussion on Reformed debates concerning Van Til's views on common grace, see Muether, 152-178.

²⁷³ Van Til, *The Defense of Faith*, 92.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 103-113.

²⁷⁶ Follis, 109. Follis rightly notes that several of Van Til's students have argued that Van Til did not abandon a notion of any point of contact between the regenerate and unregenerate, since everyone, Van Til claimed, naturally recognized the existence of God at minimum. This may be, but Van Til seemed to discount even the value of the natural knowledge of God: "For man to reflect on his own awareness of meaning and then merely to say that a higher power, a god, exists, is in effect to say that God does not exist. It is as though a child, reflecting upon his home environment, would conclude that a father or mother exists" (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 108). Such an

and Schaeffer rests in their respective missions. While Van Til undeniably was interested in the salvation of non-Christians, his first intellectual responsibility was finishing Machen's project of preserving – if not restoring – Christianity (in opposition to liberalism) in America. This was first and foremost an ecclesiological mission. Van Til, John Muether correctly argues, was a churchman, and thus “Van Til's theological commitments cannot be understood apart from his ecclesiology.”²⁷⁷ The Church was an instrument through which God communicated the faith through the proclaimed Word and the sacraments. Therefore, it was imperative to protect the Church, and a presuppositional epistemology emphasizing internal consistency rooted in the unity of knowledge was a means of accomplishing this.

Schaeffer, on the other hand, was seeking to engage an utterly non-Christian world. Not operating within the context of a seminary or strictly academic debates, Schaeffer was admittedly more practical. His practicality was at the root of his rejection of Westminster Seminary in 1937 and then separatist fundamentalism in the 1950s. From his perspective, it was better to convert an atheist than to heap further condemnation upon the Arminians. Therefore, Schaeffer required a point of contact that allowed for conversation. This necessitated rejecting Van Til's presuppositional separatism, but he did not abandon Van Til's emphasis on presuppositions. Presuppositions, combined with a more optimistic understanding of human reason that he had inherited from Machen and his traditional Presbyterian mentors at Westminster and Faith, were the center of his apologetics. Schaeffer's apologetics was neither entirely Dutch presuppositionalist nor Common Sense Realist. It was a creative merger of two traditions, born of a myriad of intellectual influences as well as the pragmatic necessities of evangelism. Through Schaeffer, presuppositionalism reached thousands of young evangelicals and fundamentalists in

acknowledgment may occur, but its ultimately valueless and a further reflection of human rebellion insofar as it is rooted in human autonomy. Therefore, there is credence to Schaeffer's frustration with Van Til's apologetics.

²⁷⁷ Muether, 15.

the 1960s and 1970s, including such future culture warriors as Michele Bachmann, who described him as “one of the greatest philosophers of the last century.”²⁷⁸

Hence, Van Til had reason for complaint. Schaeffer departed from the Reformed consistency that Van Til saw as inherent to his epistemological system. Schaeffer saw common ground between the non-Christian and Christian existing through reason, while Van Til saw it existing – if it did – through common grace, which still was worthless apart from special revelation. Nevertheless, this disagreement does not negate Van Til’s influence upon Schaeffer. Van Til is on every page of Schaeffer’s writings through an emphasis upon presuppositions as the point of contact – and attack – with non-Christians. Scholars ignore this connection at their own peril by creating and analyzing a monolithic evangelicalism that never was. It may make for an interesting theological construct, but it does a disservice to evangelical intellectual history.

²⁷⁸ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Q&A: Michele Bachmann on Cuts for Aid Relief, Obama's Faith and Credibility, and Francis Schaeffer,” *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/aprilweb-only/qamichelebachmann.html?start=4>.

AFTERWORD

This thesis traced presuppositionalism from its Dutch Reformed roots through its eventual espousal and modification by Francis Schaeffer in response to the European and American countercultures of the 1950s and 1960s. Combined with Scottish Common Sense Realism, presuppositionalism represents an additional source for fundamentalist epistemology in the twentieth century. As such, the traditional narrative of fundamentalism's development has been expanded to include more ideas and more characters. As a revisionist interpretation of fundamentalism, this thesis contains several implications that should be explored in future projects.

This thesis is an exercise in intellectual history, focusing on the development of an idea that was articulated by theologians and ministers over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While intellectual history is a valuable enterprise, it can also be limited. Historians run the risk of separating ideas from the concrete reality of everyday occurrences. Further exploration into the role of presuppositionalism in fundamentalism would benefit from contextualization resulting from social history. The danger of social history lies in diminishing the importance of ideas in favor of strictly material concerns, although current historiographical models offer pathways to minimizing that. Nevertheless, material concerns provides context by which one can analyze the contribution of ideas. Connecting presuppositionalism and its strains of separatism and activism in material social and cultural matrices would further demonstrate its importance in fundamentalism. Particular avenues for this research could involve studies of fundamentalist private schools, the numbers of which have expanded exponentially since the 1960s. Education policy and philosophy would provide further insight into the early intellectual instruction and training of fundamentalist youth as they are prepared to enter "the world."

Likewise, youth ministries, which provide programs and social outlets that promote fundamentalist ideology to its participants, can provide further insight into presuppositionalism's application and influence. Educational institutions and youth ministries, when successful, produce a new generation of fundamentalists. These institutions could be sources of hard data to further investigate presuppositionalism's influence within the fundamentalist community.

Additionally, this thesis emphasizes a non-Anglo-American source of presuppositionalism. Instead, this thesis demonstrates that one of the important bases for fundamentalist epistemology resulted from Dutch immigration which occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This begs the question of what further influences existing in fundamentalism derive from non-Anglo-American sources. Much of current scholarship focuses on the American South, northern intellectuals (the Common Sense Realists and, now, the presuppositionalists), and British pietistic influences. Ultimately, this scholarship is severely Eurocentric. To what degree have Hispanics, African-Americans, and various immigrant communities contributed to American Christian fundamentalism? Fundamentalism is not a strictly white phenomenon. Indeed, like Pentecostalism, it had extended its roots into various ethnic communities in the United States. Further investigation into the intellectual and social contributions of these segments of the fundamentalist community will expand our understanding of fundamentalism.

Similarly, this thesis implies that American Christian fundamentalism was not entirely an American movement. Instead, it was transatlantic. Dutch presuppositionalism was formulated by theologians and ministers who reacted against the encroachment of modernism into the state church in the Netherlands. This idea travelled across the Atlantic Ocean through emigration, where it arrived just in time to participate in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy. The

idea then followed Francis Schaeffer to Switzerland, where he modified it as he sought to convert Europeans and Americans. American students would travel to L'Abri to study there, and he often returned to America to preach and teach. Thus, presuppositionalism crossed the Atlantic back and forth several times, each time changing according to its context. Christian fundamentalism should not be seen solely as American. Instead, fundamentalism includes intellectual and social developments that occurred both inside and outside the United States.²⁷⁹ Further recognition and exploration of the transatlantic development of fundamentalism will further clarify the academic community's understanding of the movement.

This thesis also broaches the intersection of religion and politics. An emphasis on presuppositions exists within the American conservative movement. In 2005, San Francisco-based radio talk show host Michael Savage wrote a *New York Times* bestseller entitled *Liberalism Is A Mental Disorder*.²⁸⁰ This is only one example of the existence of rhetoric within conservatism that excoriates political liberals as irrational and “beyond hope” and permeates popular conservative literature and media outlets. Ayn Rand likewise believed that “collectivists” were irrational, since Objectivism possessed the most consistent ideals of any philosophy. Indeed, she shared with Bavinck, Kuyper, Van Til, and Schaeffer an emphasis on rationality that can only be consistent if based upon correct presuppositions, which of course she held. This led to outright rejection of her opponents' views.²⁸¹ Perhaps this emphasis on liberal

²⁷⁹ Though perhaps outside the realm of fundamentalist studies, the missionary activities of conservative African Anglican priests seeking to strengthen traditional Anglicanism in the United States would be another example of the transatlantic nature of conservative American Protestantism. A similar movement exists within Roman Catholicism in the United States.

²⁸⁰ Michael Savage, *Liberalism Is A Mental Disorder: Savage Solutions* (Nashville: Nelson Current, 2005). Interestingly, this book was published by a subsidiary of Thomas Nelson Publishers, which is an evangelical publishing company.

²⁸¹ There has been a recent spike in academic studies of Ayn Rand and Objectivism that could contribute to a connection between fundamentalist and libertarian/conservative activists on the grounds of presuppositionalism. See Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press,

irrationality and false presuppositions connects the interests of conservative evangelicals and libertarian atheists who march under the same flags at Tea Party rallies, in which devotion to the “principles of the Founding Fathers” attracts activists questioning Barack Obama’s Christianity and others waving signs inquiring “Who is John Galt?” This unusual alliance is personified in popular talk show host Glenn Beck, a devout Latter-day Saint who recommends Ayn Rand’s books as a tool to combat collectivism while also attacking the education system for promoting a false, anti-Christian and anti-individualist understanding of American history.

Presuppositionalism may serve as a grammar that is able to unite disparate groups of Christians and non-Christians in the anti-government fervor that has erupted since 2009 and in the conservative movement in general.

2009); Anne C. Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* (New York: Anchor, 2010); and Gary Weiss, *Ayn Rand Nation: The Hidden Struggle for America’s Soul* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2012).

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Adam S. Brasich was raised in south-central Wisconsin. He majored in religion and minored in political science and Ancient Greek at Wabash College, where he graduated *summa cum laude* in 2011 and was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa. As a graduate student at Florida State University, his research interests focus on twentieth century American Protestantism.