Truth with Love

The Apologetics of
Francis Schaeffer

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We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

James 3:13
Preface

This book developed out of a dissertation I presented to Trinity College Dublin for the Senior Sophister. I was encouraged to expand it and seek publication. However, the reality of ordained ministry in a local church with its innumerable demands upon one’s time has meant frequent delays in this writing project. Yet, I have also enjoyed some time off pastoral ministry, and so I wish to thank the officers of the congregation where I presently serve, All Saints’ Church in Belfast, for kindly releasing me from duty during the final stages of the book.

Among those who have helped shape and sharpen my thinking, I am very grateful to those who agreed to be interviewed. In particular, I wish to thank Jerram Barrs, Andrew Fellows, Jim Ingram, Ranald Macaulay, Gavin McGrath, John and Prisci Sandri, Barry Seagren, and John Stott. Jock McGregor and William Barker kindly read earlier drafts and made very helpful comments. I am also indebted to William Edgar, who took time to read a draft of the entire manuscript and graciously pointed out some mistakes in my interpretation of Cornelius Van Til. I trust the final book has benefited from all these helpful contributions. However, where there are any remaining errors of fact, judgment, or interpretation, the blame lies totally with me.

This is my first book with Crossway, and I want to say what a delight it has been to work with them. My sincere thanks to Marvin Padgett, former Vice President of Editorial, who invited me to publish with Crossway; to Ted Griffin and Jill Carter who have gently (but very professionally) guided me through to production; and to those who
have worked so hard to design and market the book. I deeply appreciate the efforts of everyone at Crossway.

Above all, it is to my dear wife Eleanor that I owe the greatest thanks. Quite honestly, without her encouragement I doubt I would have found the motivation to resume writing; and without her willingness to sacrifice family time and accept a greater share of the household burdens, I know I would never have had the time to write. In recognition of this and given Eleanor's constant love, kindness, and support to me, it is a joy and a delight to dedicate this book to her.

Although I never met Francis Schaeffer, he has had a profound influence on me. It was through his film series *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* that I was challenged and drawn back to Christ during a university mission. Thus I have retained a personal interest in his apologetics ever since. Then several years into my career (when I had a secular job), I realized that the reality of my faith in Christ was not as it once was. Reading Schaeffer on spirituality and then visiting L'Abri brought new and ongoing blessings. When Schaeffer is considered in the totality of his writings and ministry and we consider his stress on both rationality and spirituality, I believe he has still much to offer in the twenty-first century. It is with this conviction that I offer this book, in prayerful trust that the Lord may use it in some small way to help draw people closer unto Himself.

Bryan A. Follis
Introduction: Schaeffer in Context

This introduction will outline the historical backdrop against which Francis Schaeffer lived and worked: the retreat of evangelicalism from its position in mainstream society to being a fringe separatist movement. In 1870 “almost all American Protestants thought of America as a Christian nation,” and “Protestant evangelicals considered their faith to be the normative American creed.”¹ However, intellectual challenges to this consensus “eventually made unbelief as respectable as belief among the country’s intellectual elite.”² As Nancy Pearcey has observed, Darwinism was “the missing puzzle piece that completed a naturalistic picture of reality.”³ Much of the advanced scholarship from Europe in philosophy, science, and biblical studies appeared to erode confidence in the truthfulness of Scripture.

There was soon a growing liberal or modernist approach among church scholars that sought to reinterpret the Christian faith in the light of such developments.⁴ Modernism quickly won important victories in higher education, and by the early twentieth century it was exercising a growing influence within the Protestant churches. In reaction to this modernist trend, a series of pamphlets—The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth—were published in 1910–1915 that restated the basic tenets of orthodox theology. These pamphlets (funded by evangelical businessmen from different denominations) gave name to the fundamentalist movement that was militantly anti-modernist.⁵
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Although many of the original leaders of the movement were careful scholars such as Gresham Machen of Princeton, the momentum shifted toward what some writers have called “zealous but sometimes poorly informed persons.”

The famous “Monkey Trial” in 1925 about the teaching of evolution in schools in Tennessee was a disaster for the image of Fundamentalism. The 1920s witnessed a series of defeats for the conservatives within the main Presbyterian church, and in 1929 Machen and three other faculty members withdrew from Princeton in protest at its proposed reorganization, which they believed was designed to destroy its distinctive anti-modernist character. Westminster Theological Seminary was established to promote an unmodified Calvinism and to continue the Old School theology of Princeton.

The struggle against the modernists in relation to their control of the overseas missions board led to disciplinary action by the Presbyterian church against Machen and other conservative ministers who either resigned or were defrocked. A new denomination—the Presbyterian Church of America (later renamed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church)—was launched to stand in “true spiritual succession” to the beliefs abandoned by the Presbyterian church. Yet as a people they felt dispossessed. They had lost their original seminary and their original denomination, and they had passed from being leaders in a culturally powerful institution to being a very small, often ignored movement, and these experiences “tempted them at times to angry or bitter reactions.”

The failure of the attempt to combat modernism on an academic level weakened the conservative Presbyterian strand within the fundamentalist movement, and its predominant position was ended in 1937 with the death of Machen. Fundamentalism increasingly reflected the revivalist movement and the anti-intellectual populism of its grassroots evangelicalism. In particular, premillennial dispensational theology became central to its self-understanding and the fundamentalist view of church and society. A growing separatism from both liberal denominations and society characterized fundamentalists, and the intensity of the conflict pushed even less aggressive fundamentalists “toward sec-
tarian and anti-intellectual affirmations of faith for fear of being labelled modernists.” In May 1937 the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (which Machen had founded) split, and a minority—who were premillennialists and strongly espoused total abstinence—founded the Bible Presbyterian Church. Oliver Buswell and Carl McIntire were among the leaders of the new denomination, which described itself as “Calvinistic, fundamental, premillennial and evangelistic.” The first minister to be ordained into the Bible Presbyterian Church was Francis Schaeffer.

Francis Schaeffer

Born in 1912, Schaeffer grew up in a blue-collar family whose Christianity was only nominal. And the church he attended was very liberal. However, at the age of eighteen following a period of studying the Bible, he wrote in his diary on September 3, 1930, contrasting Scripture with secular philosophy, that “all truth is from the Bible” and converted from agnosticism to Christianity. In 1935 he married Edith Seville, the daughter of former missionaries to China, and they subsequently had four children. Until his death in 1984, Edith was his soul mate, constant companion, and fellow soldier in the struggle to advance Christ’s kingdom. Francis Schaeffer served three pastorates between 1938 and 1948 when he was sent to Europe by his denomination’s board for international mission. Based in Switzerland, Francis and Edith visited evangelical churches throughout western Europe—he to speak out against modernism and she to promote children’s evangelism.

In 1951 Schaeffer faced a spiritual crisis, and among the various doubts and problems he had to wrestle with was the lack of love among many within the fundamentalist movement. Referring to the conflict with modernism, he wrote to a friend, “I think we have to be involved in the combat. But when we are fighting for the Lord, it has to be according to His rules, does it not?” Gradually he saw the need to hold holiness in tension with love and to have a greater dependence upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. Returning to the United States on furlough in 1953, Schaeffer gave a series of sermons on the importance of true sanctification, but these addresses were badly received by many
in leadership positions within the Bible Presbyterian Church. Yet Schaeffer was now convinced that

if we are to know the fullest blessing of God, there must be no final loyalty to human leadership of organizations, or even to organizations as such. Rather, we must urge each other not even to give final authority to principles about Christ, but only to the person of Christ.18

Back in Switzerland, both Francis and Edith Schaeffer became increasingly convinced that the Lord was calling them into something new. Having experienced a number of difficulties and having received remarkable answers to prayer, the Schaeffers resigned from the mission board on June 4, 1955.19 Having opened their home in Huémoz as L’Abri (which means “shelter”), they wanted to develop this and decided that they would “ask God that our work, and our lives, be a demonstration that He does exist.”20 The vision of L’Abri that was forming in Schaeffer’s mind at this time was a place where he could help those in need, either spiritually or emotionally, whom God sent to him. The Schaeffers adopted as a guiding principle that “they would not publicise themselves but trust the Lord to send those people truly seeking and in need.”21 Looking back many years later on his spiritual crisis, Francis Schaeffer wrote:

This was and is the real basis of L’Abri. Teaching the historic Christian answers and giving honest answers to honest questions are crucial; but it was out of these struggles that the reality came without which an incisive work like L’Abri would not have been possible.22

Outline of the Book

This book aims to examine the apologetics of Francis Schaeffer and in particular to consider the role of reason and the importance of loving relationships. It also seeks to locate him within the Reformed tradition and to trace its varying intellectual influences on him. Chapter One will consider the importance of rationality in the writings of John Calvin
and the different interpretations within the Reformed tradition (such as the Old Princetonians and Abraham Kuyper’s Dutch School) of the use of reason in apologetics. Chapter Two will present a summary of Schaeffer’s apologetical argument and explain how this must be understood in relation to his writings on spirituality and the way he actually conducted his discussions at L’Abri.

In Chapter Three we will analyze the role of reason in his apologetics and will consider criticism that Schaeffer drifted into rationalism. Chapter Four will explore the alternative view that Schaeffer’s arguments were not rational enough and that his approach was that of a presuppositionalist. In rejecting this view, I will argue that Francis Schaeffer was more influenced by the verificationalist approach but that he should be seen primarily as an evangelist who pragmatically drew upon different streams. The Conclusion notes the development of postmodernism and questions whether the apologetics of Francis Schaeffer still has any relevance. I argue that the lack of trust today in the concept of truth makes his approach, with his strong emphasis on individual relationships, love, and truth, even more important.
Calvin and the Reformed Tradition

Introduction

To provide a benchmark against which to measure Francis Schaeffer, this chapter will examine John Calvin’s views on the knowledge of God. In particular, as Calvin’s writings often emerged in a polemic context, I wish to consider the point that his notion of the image of God in man took on different meanings in different contexts. This has led to different interpretations within the Reformed tradition of his teaching about the relationship of faith and reason. These different interpretations have thus affected the role accorded to reason in apologetics, and so distinctive schools of apologetics have developed.¹ This chapter will therefore also explain the different approaches of some key Reformed thinkers who have exercised an influence on Francis Schaeffer. This will help us evaluate Schaeffer’s own style of apologetics.

Calvin and Philosophy in Context

Given the fact that within Reformed Christianity the Scriptures occupy a primary place in Christian epistemology, some Reformed writers stress that without God’s revelation “we cannot trust reason, sense experience, intuition, or any other methods purporting to give knowledge.”² Sometimes in their eagerness to distinguish Calvin’s approach from that of the Roman Catholic philosopher and theolo-
gian Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), it is stated that Calvin found knowledge of God in Scripture alone. However, Calvin’s teachings on the sources of our knowledge of God are more complex than some are willing to accept. Calvin needs to be understood in the context of his time, and that means recognizing the intellectual influences that guided his thinking.

Calvin, more than Luther, came from a background colored by Renaissance humanism, and there was some continuity of thought with the humanist tradition after his conversion. Rejecting the other-worldliness of medieval scholasticism (which had developed from the writings of Thomas Aquinas), this humanism accepted the worth of earthly existence for its own sake. Following the French humanists, Calvin decried what he perceived as an overreliance on reason by the scholastics. He also attacked the scholastics for their view that grace is both operative (given by God alone) and cooperative (man working with God). Calvin believed that this implied a natural ability in human nature to seek the good. Indeed for the Reformers, the abuses of the medieval church and its whole penitential system resulted from a false epistemology. It was wrong knowledge that led to wrong practice, for a “natural knowledge of God is void of true soteriological [i.e., saving] knowledge.” Some Reformed commentators trace this to Aquinas, whom they view as the first great proponent of a natural theology distinguishable from revealed theology. He sought to draw upon the philosophy of Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) and to reclaim reason as a tool in Christian theology. Andrew Hofecker has even suggested that the synthesis produced by Aquinas included heretical elements from Pelagius (a fourth-century monk) insofar as reason remains “unscathed by the fall, and the will is only partially debilitated by sin.”

Although Calvin criticized those who followed Aristotle for their reliance on human reason and free will, and Zwingli, who led the Reformation in Zurich, was outspoken in his anti-scholasticism and anti-Aristotelianism, it is wrong to view the Reformation as completely overthrowing the Aristotelian inheritance bequeathed by Aquinas. Indeed as Alister McGrath has noted, Aristotelianism stubbornly persisted in Renaissance humanism to “the intense irritation of those who
Calvin was interested in humanism’s concept of natural law, and it is inconceivable that there was no Aristotelian influence in this. Colin Brown finds not only similarities between Calvin and Aquinas but also extensive use of Aristotelian ideas by Calvin, not least in his articulation of the doctrine of election and predestination. Brown regards it as “tantalizing” to ask about philosophical influences on Calvin, and he speculates as to whether the Reformer’s doctrines were “purely and simply biblical theology” as he believed them to be. However, without further evidence this is only speculation. Furthermore, recognizing a residual Aristotelianism in Calvin’s thought—such as Aristotle’s concept of a fourfold causality—does not allow us to say that his theology was not under the supremacy of Scripture. Indeed, in a comparison of Calvin’s exposition of Romans 9 (on election and predestination) with that by Aquinas, Steinmetz found that several of Aquinas’s most characteristic modifications of the Augustinian tradition found “no corresponding echo” in Calvin’s exposition.

While Calvin was prepared to draw upon non-scriptural sources, they were always subservient to Scripture and often used to confirm it, as is seen in his dialogue with Cicero in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. As McGrath notes, Calvin accepted classical wisdom in Christian theology “in that it demonstrates the necessity of, and partially verifies the substance of, divine revelation.” But when any secular or religious teaching or philosophical ideas were contrary to Scripture, such as natural theology on the scholastic pattern, Calvin regarded them as inadmissible. This was the same approach as that to his use of Patristic sources (which he frequently quoted). Calvin treats “the Fathers as partners in conversation rather than as authorities in the medieval sense of the term. They stimulate Calvin in his reflections on the text. . . . Nevertheless, they do not have the last word. Paul does.”

Yet Calvin did not say that without Scripture man does not have some natural consciousness of God. He believed that “there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity.”

What we need to consider is just what Calvin meant by this.
The Image of God

The Bible states that to be human means to be made “in the image of God,” but the relevant passages (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-2; 9:6-7) do not define precisely what this means. For Augustine—from whose intellectual well Calvin was to drink deeply—it was the human capacity to reason that distinguished human from animal nature and by which contact was made with the divine. Although Augustine saw knowing God as primarily an intellectual matter, Sherlock argues, it was not a rationalistic understanding of “image” in that something far richer than mere “head knowledge” (i.e., creative thought) was meant. Modern writers tend to have a very restrictive view of reason, and it is important that we do not read back into Augustine a contemporary understanding that is less than his concept of creative thought. Returning to the issue of the image of God in mankind, was it completely lost in the Fall? If one stresses the relational character of the image—that one stands in proper relationship with God—then for Calvin the image was destroyed by the Fall. However, Calvin also maintained that man still enjoyed “noble endowments which bespeak the divine presence with us.”

Brian Gerrish has noted that “scholars have found an ambiguity in Calvin’s answer to the question: ‘Is the image of God lost in the fallen man?”’ However, this apparent contradiction in Calvin’s thought is resolved when we understand the comprehensive conception he had of the image of God. Luther did not “seek the image of God in any of the natural endowments of man, such as his rational and moral powers, but exclusively in original righteousness, and therefore regarded it as entirely lost by sin.” By contrast, Calvin believed that the image of God extends to everything that makes human nature distinct from the other species of animals, and while the whole image was damaged by sin, only the spiritual qualities were completely lost. Indeed he said, “since reason, by which man discerns between good and evil, and by which he understands and judges, is a natural gift, it could not be entirely destroyed.” Man did not become a brute animal; he is still man, for in spite of his fall “there are still some sparks which show that he is a rational animal.” Calvin was convinced “that one of the essential properties of our nature is reason, which distinguishes us from the
lower animals.” Yet Calvin did not regard man as being made in the image of God simply because he has reason. Rather, as Edward Dowey points out, the ability to reflect God’s glory and worship Him was also a key distinguishing characteristic.

Although humanity retains the image of God (albeit in a reduced form), Calvin argued that this light was “so smothered by clouds of darkness” that in relation to a saving knowledge of God, people were “blinder than moles.” Nevertheless, Calvin is keen to stress Paul’s teaching that though we are unable without divine revelation to rise to a pure and clear knowledge of God, we cannot plead ignorance. Drawing upon Romans 1:18-28, Calvin argued that verse 20 clearly teaches that since people may know about God from His created world, they are “without excuse” and hence have “an utter incapacity to bring any defence to prevent them from being justly accused before the judgement-seat of God.” However, this knowledge about God is not saving knowledge of God and is inadequate because of our blindness. We are not so blind that we don’t realize the necessity of worshiping God, but our judgment “fails here before it discovers the nature or character of God.” The problem is not a lack of evidence or knowledge but a moral deficiency: we refuse to submit to the evidence that God provides. For Calvin (as for Paul) we see enough to keep us from making excuses, but our blindness prevents us from reaching our goal, and it is only by the gift of faith and its light that “man can gain real knowledge from the work of creation.”

The Character of Our Knowledge

Medieval scholasticism taught that there is a natural law—i.e., a moral order divinely implanted in all people that is accessible by reason. At times Calvin seems to go along with this view, but at other times he appears to stress that without divine revelation man would be left in a state of agnosticism. However, not in vain has God

added the light of his Word in order that he might make himself known unto salvation, and bestowed the privilege on those whom he was pleased to bring into nearer and more familiar relation to himself.
Susan Schreiner suggests that Calvin’s notion of the image of God took on different meanings in different contexts, though not, she argues, contradictory meanings. It is important to bear this in mind as we consider Calvin’s understanding of the character of our knowledge of God.

Calvin speaks of a double knowledge: the “simple and primitive knowledge to which the mere course of nature would have conducted us, had Adam stood upright” and the saving knowledge revealed through Scripture that focuses upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ who paid the penalty due to us, by which “salvation was obtained for us by his righteousness.” Creation continues to provide to all people important points of contact with God, but in His mercy to His Church, God supplements “these common proofs by the addition of his Word, as a surer and more direct means of discovering himself.”

Calvin believed that Scripture only gives “a saving knowledge of God when its certainty is founded on the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit.” Thus it is foolish to attempt to prove to nonbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God as it can only be known as such by faith. Taken in isolation—as it sometimes is—this appears to commit Calvin to fideism—i.e., the view that our knowledge of God is solely based on faith apart from any evidence or rational considerations. However, Calvin accepted that there were also rational grounds for arguing that Scripture is the Word of God and such human testimonies “which go to confirm it will not be without effect, if they are used in subordination to that chief and highest proof [the Holy Spirit], as secondary helps to our weakness.” He devoted a chapter in the Institutes to proving the credibility of Scripture “in so far as natural reason admits.”

While recognizing that such proofs were only “secondary helps,” Calvin seeks to argue against those who ask how we can know that Moses and the prophets wrote the books that bear their names and even “dare to question whether there ever was a Moses.” He draws upon both internal literary evidence and historical background to confirm belief in the Scriptures as God’s Word, while he regards the “many striking miracles” and fulfillment of divine prophecy as validating Moses and the prophets as messengers of God’s Word.
survival of the Scriptures over the centuries to be proof of their divine origin, given the intensity of human opposition to them. He believed that the highest proof of Scripture is taken from the character of Him whose Word it is. If people were reasonable and looked at Scripture “with clear eyes and unbiased judgment, it will forthwith present itself with a divine majesty which will subdue our presumptuous opposition, and force us to do it homage.” Nevertheless, Calvin knew that even if you establish the Scriptures as the Word of God in discussion with nonbelievers, it does “not follow that we shall forthwith implant the certainty which faith requires in their hearts.”

The Holy Spirit must seal the truth in people’s minds.

Yet Calvin’s willingness to use rational argument about God in preliminary discussion with nonbelievers and to strengthen the faith of believers shows him to be no fideist. He is balanced in his teaching about the positive role of reason in what we would now call apologetics, while still maintaining that the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. This balanced approach is also seen in his teaching about the Word and the Spirit working together and his warning against “giddy men” who make “a great display of the superiority of the Spirit and reject all reading of the Scriptures.”

Calvin’s writings on human nature and the knowledge of God were, as Schreiner points out, “often developed polemically and require attention both to this polemical context and to the perspective out of which he spoke.” This explains why Calvin’s notion of the image of God took on different meanings in different contexts.

Calvin and Natural Law

John McNeill has suggested that there was no disagreement between the Scholastic tradition and the Reformers on the subject of natural law, and that might explain why his discussions of it (according to Schreiner) seem “imprecise and unsystematic.” Calvin assumed that Scripture, particularly Romans 2:14-15, affirmed the existence of natural law, and in his commentary on this passage he stated that it is beyond all doubt that all men “have certain ideas of justice and rectitude which are implanted by nature in the hearts of men.” Apart from
the scriptural basis for natural law, Calvin also argued from experience that in addition to naturally knowing right from wrong, people realize in their hearts (as we have already said) that there is a God and that honor and worship are due to Him. Writing in his *Institutes*, he stated that the human conscience challenges those who would do wrong, and “every man, being stung by the consciousness of his own unhappiness, in this way necessarily obtains at least some knowledge of God.” Furthermore, the experience of observing the world around us and the glory of God that is engraved on it means that “we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him.”

Brown thinks that some might find it strange that Calvin was content to use non-scriptural arguments in this way, but he maintains that if all people “really have a sense of deity, scriptural proof is not needed. If they have got it, they have got it.” Calvin had no objection to using argument from outside Scripture for the necessity of revelation. He was ready to employ argument from either experience or natural law to make his point. For example, when opposing those who followed Plato and Aristotle and their reliance on human reason and free will, Calvin used natural law to disprove “the Platonic theory that sin resulted from ignorance.” This perhaps reflects his eclectic use of philosophy, which Dowey believes indicates that Calvin was not really “interested in technical epistemology.” Calvin was also content to draw upon tradition in the form of Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux to argue that the Fall did not eradicate the activity of the will but that the will (albeit enslaved) is never passive, and even when people can only will in the direction of evil, they choose to do so, for people act “voluntarily and not by compulsion.”

As Schreiner says, Calvin was not so much interested in natural law in itself but as an idea to explain the continuation of society after the devastating effects of the Fall. The survival and stability of society were due not only to the restraining aspects of divine providence but also to the spiritual remnant of the divine image within each person. Calvin argued that man “is disposed, from natural instinct, to cherish and preserve society,” and “some principle of civil order is impressed on all.” Calvin also accepted the distinction between the two realms


of existence (i.e., heavenly and earthly) to show how (within the earthly realm) our natural abilities and insights in medicine, science, the arts, and manual skills are blessings to be used “for the common benefit of mankind.” Believing that society was the arena in which Christians should seek their holiness, Calvin believed that all have a divine calling to fulfill the cultural mandate, but in doing so we “must exercise moderation, patience, and fidelity in our daily vocation, working as unto the Lord before the face of God.”

**Faith and Reason: Different Reformed Interpretations**

In turning from Calvin himself to the role of reason in the Reformed tradition, we notice a variety of interpretations. While this section will examine some of the different interpretations, it is not intended to be a comprehensive history of Reformed thought on the subject. Instead it will highlight a few key Reformed thinkers who have influenced Schaeffer so that we may understand him in context. The different interpretations of the role of reason arise from multiple readings of Calvin’s writings. As noted above, Calvin was not developing a theology of natural law, and perhaps that is why McGrath suggests that his writings on natural law were “sufficiently ambiguous to permit any number of theories and applications.” Although Protestantism is less closely associated with natural law than is Roman Catholicism, it is Calvinism that has provided the stage for debate over the past century about natural law and in particular about common grace. Abraham Kuyper, founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, is best remembered for his development of the theological doctrine of common grace. In this he argued that common grace is the foundation of civilized society, since God’s great plan for Creation is achieved through common grace. Common grace is so called because it is believed to be common to all people. Among its benefits is a consciousness within every person “of the difference between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, justice and injustice.”

Without wishing to deny the doctrine of total depravity, Kuyper gave to common grace an independent role that helped make history
and culture possible. Thus he argued that the “tendency in devout circles to oppose the progress and perpetual development of human life was therefore quite misguided.” 44 Indeed he urged that the “view that would confine God's work to the small sector we might label 'church life' must be set side . . . for common grace encompasses the whole life of the world.” 45 While there has been considerable controversy over the doctrine of common grace, there has never been complete agreement within the Reformed churches about Calvin's teaching on the image of God. Berkhof points out that some have held to a restricted view (i.e., that the image of God be understood in terms of our relationship to Him and thus to have been destroyed by the Fall). However, it was the broader conception of the image of God (i.e., that the image also includes that which makes human nature distinct) “which became the prevalent one in Reformed theology.” 46

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), who has been described by Robert Jenson as the “greatest American Divine,” is an example of a Reformed thinker who gave a broader interpretation to the image of God. He regarded man’s natural reason as “the highest faculty we have,” and he believed that even the heathen realized that “the main business of man was the improvement and exercise of his understanding.” 47 Yet, as Edwards argued, the purpose for which God had given mankind the faculty of understanding was that “he might understand divine things.” 48 However, in view of man’s fallen state, divinity could not be learned “merely by the improvement of man’s natural reason” 49 but required God’s revelation in Scripture. Nevertheless, Edwards still envisaged a key role for reason as man came to know about God. He distinguished between a “natural” and “spiritual” type of divine knowledge, with the former being obtainable by the “natural exercise of our faculties.” 50 He therefore encouraged Christians to seek “by reading and other proper means, a good rational knowledge of the things of divinity.” 51

Yet Edwards realized that “there is a difference between having a right speculative notion of the doctrines contained in the word of God, and having a due sense of them in the heart.” 52 As James Packer has observed, for Edwards salvation was more “than an intellectual grasp of
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theological ideas . . . [it was] rather, the result of direct divine illumination accompanying the written or spoken word of God.“\(^5\) This may appear to contradict the earlier statement that reason plays a key role in a person’s coming to know God. However, any apparent contradiction is resolved by grasping Edwards’s understanding of the actual role of reason. While recognizing the limitation of any knowledge of God obtained by reasoning alone, he argued that we cannot enjoy a “spiritual” knowledge without first having a “natural” (or rational) knowledge of divine things. Thus the “special illumination of the Spirit of God” was not some abstract or mystical experience, for he was convinced that “God deals with man as with a rational creature.”\(^5\) Hence “no object can come at the heart but through the door of the understanding: and there can be no spiritual knowledge of that of which there is not first a rational knowledge.”\(^5\) Reason, for Edwards, was inadequate but essential: before one can know God, one has to know about God.

In nineteenth-century America, Princeton became the premier seminary of Reformed scholarship, and B. B. Warfield, who taught there from 1887 until 1921, was its preeminent professor of theology. Dr. Carl Trueman suggests that “we have no one like him today in terms of the sweep of his interests and his apparently omnivorous theological mind.”\(^6\) Warfield frequently asserted that the Christian faith is a reasonable faith based on good and sufficient evidence, not a blind and ungrounded faith.\(^5\) Apologetics was therefore highly rated, and he even argued that “it is impossible to form any vital conception of God without some movement of intellect.”\(^5\) Warfield also argued that Calvin saw a role for theistic proofs (i.e., arguments proving the existence of God), albeit with value more “for developing the knowledge of God than merely establishing His existence.”\(^5\) Warfield felt that theistic proofs were “objectively valid” but recognized that they could not “work true faith apart from the testimony of the Spirit.”\(^6\) In other words, one cannot argue someone into the kingdom of God purely through intellectual persuasion. Nevertheless, he maintained that rational argument or apologetics plays a vital role since faith is “a form of conviction and is therefore, necessarily grounded in evidence. . . . Christianity makes its appeal to right reason.”\(^6\)
The Role of Reason

This emphasis on the role of reason has led some scholars, Peter Hicks being one, to conclude that Warfield “put more confidence in rational argument” than Reformed scholars in previous generations.\textsuperscript{62} Indeed Alister McGrath even claims to trace a “strongly rationalistic tone” in the writings of Warfield and notes with concern that Princeton absorbed uncritically a number of foundational Enlightenment assumptions. This led, he argues, to “a questionably high estimation of the role of reason in theology.”\textsuperscript{63} Warfield, along with Princeton in general, conducted theology in an epistemological structure provided by Scottish Common Sense philosophy. This philosophy held that “reality of the self, the law of non-contradiction, reliability of sense perception, and basic cause-and-effect connections provide people with considerable knowledge about nature and human nature.”\textsuperscript{64} Although Calhoun argues that the “Princetonians never allowed Scottish Common Sense philosophy to stand by itself or to determine their theological outlook,”\textsuperscript{65} it is clear that as an epistemological system it allowed the development of one’s theology in any particular direction. For example, building upon the same philosophical foundations, Yale developed a liberal theology, while Harvard was Unitarian in its outlook. Vander Molen suggests that there was a “rather easy accommodation of philosophy and theology” in Scottish Common Sense philosophy, and by being so amenable to the use of reason it enabled Reformed scholars to “adapt to modern rationalist and Enlightenment philosophy quite easily.”\textsuperscript{66}

Abraham Kuyper, coming out of a Dutch tradition that sharply criticized Enlightenment thought, was ready to offer a critique of the Princeton approach.\textsuperscript{67} For Kuyper, the consequence of the Fall was a radically abnormal world, and he held that only “the sovereign, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit can overcome the rebellion of unbelief. An absolute antithesis exists in all of life (including all scholarly work) between believer and unbeliever.”\textsuperscript{68} Whereas for apologists influenced by Common Sense, sin “was a factor which could prevent one taking an objective look at the evidence for the truth of divine things, for Kuyper unacknowledged sinfulness inevitably blinded one from true
knowledge of God.” Kuyper maintained that no one could achieve a knowledge of God through rational argument, “where reason is both a party to the dispute and its judge.” Thus he believed that only as God Himself breathes into the fallen minds of humans could He be known, and Kuyper argued that this work of the Holy Spirit provided “its own certainty.” Hence while Warfield held that it was the task of apologetics to lay the foundations for theology, Kuyper took the opposite view and regarded theology as the starting point for apologetics.

Through Dutch emigration to America and the subsequent founding of their own denomination and college (i.e., the Christian Reformed Church and Calvin College), coupled with Kuyper’s visit to America in 1898, his writings began to be more widely known. In the twentieth century a school of Reformed apologetics developed among those influenced by Kuyper that views as futile, and even unfaithful, the attempts of traditional apologetics to prove the existence of God by argument. Recognizing that all views of reality begin with certain ideas or presuppositions that exercise an enormous, though often unacknowledged, influence over what and how we know, it is argued that one must presuppose God before one can prove anything. Under Cornelius Van Til, who taught apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary from 1929 until 1972, this presuppositional apologetics has become the majority view within contemporary Reformed apologetics. Although Van Til argued that all intelligibility depends on or presupposes Christian theism, he was willing to “place himself upon the position of his opponent” merely “for argument’s sake” in order to show him or her that on such a position the “facts” that he or she looks to are not facts. As William Edgar has pointed out, Schaeffer’s favorite method in apologetics (pushing an unbeliever to the extreme of his or her own presuppositions to show how dark the world is without Christ) was “very similar, if not identical” to Van Til’s idea of placing yourself on your opponent’s ground for the sake of argument.

**Conclusion**

Because of such similarities, some, including Forrest Baird, believe that Francis Schaeffer was “heavily influenced by Van Til.” But it is impor-
tant to note that Gresham Machen—whom we discussed in the Introduction—also had a profound effect on Schaeffer’s thinking. Machen sought to continue the Old Princetonian approach of rational apologetical argument, and he was convinced that should God send a revival, one of the means that the Holy Spirit would use “is an awakening of the intellect.”

Schaeffer, as we shall examine in Chapter Four, drew upon the Old Princetonian approach and the presuppositionalism of Van Til to develop a new style of apologetics. Because of this blending of different apologetical models mixed with some originality on his own part, many scholars have difficulty in reaching agreement about Schaeffer’s methodology. However, Schaeffer made no definitive claims for his style of apologetics, and although he believed that unless “our epistemology is right everything is going to be wrong,” he did not even regard himself as an academic apologist. His principal interest was evangelism, and apologetics was but a means to that end, for Francis Schaeffer was convinced that if the Christian faith is to be effectively communicated, “we must know and understand the thought-forms of our own generation.”

This chapter has sought to demonstrate the complexity of Calvin’s understanding of the image of God. Although he maintained that the relational aspects of the image had been destroyed by the Fall, he believed that people still retained a divine presence in that, among other things, they were rational creatures. A certain ambiguity in Calvin’s writings has led some Reformed thinkers to give particular emphases to different aspects of his teaching. As shown, this has resulted in the emergence of distinctive schools of Reformed apologetics, each according a different status to the role of reason. By placing him in context and explaining his intellectual roots, this chapter has set the scene for Francis Schaeffer. We will now consider his own approach to apologetics, in terms both of the rational arguments he used and of the importance he gave to love as the “final apologetic.”
Introduction: Schaeffer In Context


4. By “liberal” or “modernists” is meant that type of Christianity that emerged in response to, and in basic sympathy with, the Enlightenment. It maintains “that religious beliefs are fallible and are thus to be held tentatively.” It holds that “theology should always interrelate the spirit of its own time and the Christian past in a manner that allows each to make an essential and substantive difference to the formulation of theological claims.” Alister McGrath, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), p. 325.

5. Among the doctrines stressed by the fundamentalists were “an inspired and inerrant Bible; the deity of Christ and His atoning death for sin on the Cross; His bodily resurrection and ascension; and His return to judge the world, consign the Devil and unrepentant sinners to hell and resurrect those who belonged to Christ to live eternally in heaven with God.” Ibid., p. 230.

6. Ibid., p. 189.

Chapter One: Calvin and the Reformed Tradition

1. By apologetics is meant the reasoned defense of Christianity, which might “be expected to include argument to the effect (1) that there is a God; (2) that human beings are estranged from God; (3) that the life and death of Jesus Christ would be such as to constitute a remedy for this estrangement; and (4) that this life and death occurred as a matter of historical fact.” Alister McGrath, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), p. 9.

2. W. Andrew Hoffecker and G. K. Beale, “Biblical Epistemology:

3. Ford Lewis Battles has shown how the great emphasis by the humanists on the Greek and Latin classics continued to be reflected in Calvin’s writings, while his plans for the Geneva Academy involved a curriculum that meant an integration of the Reformed faith and study of the classical writers. Robert Benedetto, ed., *Interpreting John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), pp. 62-65.


17. Ibid., p. 237.
21. Ibid., p. 32.
23. Calvin, Institutes, p. 64.
26. Ibid., p. 65.
27. Ibid., p. 83.
28. Ibid., pp. 76-82.
29. Ibid., p. 72.
30. Ibid., p. 84.
31. Schreiner, The Theater of His Glory, p. 72.
32. Ibid., p. 77.
33. Calvin, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, p. 48.
34. Calvin, Institutes, pp. 38, 51.
35. Brown, Christianity and Western Thought, p. 153.
36. Schreiner, The Theater of His Glory, p. 66.
38. Calvin, Institutes, p. 229.
39. Ibid., pp. 234-245.
40. Ibid., p. 236.
42. McGrath, Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought, p. 400.
45. Ibid., p. 176.
Notes

48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., p. 12.
50. Ibid., p. 13.
52. Ibid., p. 13.
55. Ibid., p. 15.
59. Ibid., p. 41.
60. Ibid., pp. 41-42.
65. Ibid.
68. W. R. Godfrey, “The Westminster School,” in David F. Wells, ed., *Reformed Theology in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 97. This point appears to contradict Kuyper’s doctrine of common grace, and it is one of the tensions in his writings that needs further consideration; but that is outside the scope of this book.
Truth with Love

74. Ibid., p. 100.
80. Burson and Walls, C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer, p. 143.

Chapter Two: Arguments and Approach