

BAVINCK AND THE PRINCETONIANS ON SCRIPTURE: A DIFFERENCE IN DOCTRINE OR DEFENSE?

JASON B. HUNT*

The doctrine of Scripture has always been an object of criticism for scholars who question the possibility of supernatural revelation. However, recently, even from within conservative evangelicalism, there has emerged criticism, specifically with regard to inerrancy.¹ Many conservative evangelicals have considered the classic formulation of the doctrine of Scripture to be that of old Princeton—A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield in particular. However, even their formulation has come under fire through the years. Charles A. Briggs was the first to offer prominent opposition to their formulation.² Much more recently, Ernest Sandeen argued that the Princetonian notion of inerrancy represented a doctrinal innovation not seen prior to the late nineteenth-century.³ Rogers and McKim have also taken aim at the Princetonian formulation. Specifically, they proposed that Princeton departed from the Reformers' doctrine and promoted a new "post-Reformation scholasticism," which elevated reason over faith.⁴ Moreover, they claimed that the Dutch Reformed theologians (Kuyper and Bavinck in particular), in reaction to Princetonian scholasticism, promoted a "functional" (organic) rather than a "philosophical" (mechanical) method, more akin to the Reformers and Augustine.⁵ Recently, A. T. B. McGowan has suggested that the Dutch school offered a *different* and more fruitful formulation of the doctrine of Scripture with regard to inspiration than did Princeton.⁶

* Jason Hunt resides at 302 Whitewater Drive, Irmo, SC 29063.

¹ See G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

² Charles Augustus Briggs, *Biblical Study: Its Principles, Methods, and History* (New York: Scribners, 1883); Ronald F. Satta, *The Sacred Text: Biblical Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2007) 75–96. Interestingly, Satta argues that "all the seeds of modern critical theory are present in the unsuccessful defense of Professor Briggs" (*The Sacred Text* 93).

³ John D. Woodbridge and Randall H. Balmer, "The Princetonians and Biblical Authority: An Assessment of the Ernest Sandeen Proposal," in *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 254. Satta has perceptively recognized that Sandeen's argument is a virtual duplication of Briggs's defense of his own views (*The Sacred Text* 97).

⁴ Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979) 323–69; Jack B. Rogers, "Van Til and Warfield on Scripture in the Westminster Confession," in *Jerusalem And Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (ed. E. R. Geehan; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1974) 164–65.

⁵ Rogers and McKim, *Authority* 389.

⁶ A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007).

Who is right? Did Old Princeton uphold the traditional orthodox position on Scripture or did they introduce a faulty innovation stemming from the milieu of theological controversy of their time, which the Dutch school reacted *against*? In this brief article, I will look at areas where McGowan suggests differences between the Princetonians and Herman Bavinck related to the concept of inerrancy. Though the concept of inerrancy entails a number of related issues, I will focus on three main ones highlighted by McGowan in his argument. I will argue that the differences cited are not in terms of actual doctrine, but rather in the *defense* of that doctrine.

I. INERRANCY OR INFALLIBILITY?

First, McGowan questions whether inerrancy is a valid concept to begin with, preferring instead the idea of infallibility.⁷ In fact, he claims that the stance of modern inerrantists is built upon a false dichotomy, as if one must either be for inerrancy or for the errancy of Scripture (i.e. for Warfield or for the Rogers and McKim proposal, respectively).⁸ Rather, he argues “that there is an older and better way to defend a ‘high view’ of Scripture, namely the ‘infallibist’ view.”⁹ He finds this view championed in the works of Kuyper and Bavinck. In particular, he sees this view as doing justice to God choosing human authors, “with all the implications of that decision.”¹⁰ Because the notion of inerrancy is bound up in debates involving a false dichotomy and emphasizes the divine side of Scripture to the neglect of the human side, it should be abandoned.¹¹

McGowan suggests that the evangelical obsession with inerrancy came out of the response of American fundamentalism to enlightenment and liberal theology.¹² This is not a new assertion. In fact, this was the argument of Rogers and McKim, though expressed via a false dichotomy, according to McGowan. Interestingly, McGowan surveys the debate over the Rogers and McKim proposal and sides with Woodbridge (who argues that proposal is both revisionist and anachronistic in its treatment of history in seeking support against inerrancy),¹³ yet with the qualifying statement that there are some references produced by Rogers and McKim which Woodbridge cannot explain.¹⁴ Consequently, McGowan implies that the way out of the impasse is not in terms of inerrancy or errancy, but through the use of “infallibility,” which does more justice to the nature and purpose of the Scriptures, rather than focusing narrowly on the *autographa*.¹⁵ Though not

⁷ Ibid. 48–49.

⁸ Ibid. 123. McGowan also endorses Orr’s supposed rejection of ‘inerrancy’, though he does not endorse his views concerning form and content and degrees of inspiration (ibid. 126–36).

⁹ Ibid. 123.

¹⁰ Ibid. 124.

¹¹ Ibid. 13.

¹² Ibid. 50–122.

¹³ John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

¹⁴ McGowan, *Divine Spiration* 99–100, 125. Curiously, he does not specify these references, but merely mentions their existence, leaving room for a way out of the false dichotomy.

¹⁵ Ibid. 125–26. The concept of an inerrant *autographa* will be addressed later.

as explicit and confident as Rogers and McKim, McGowan seems to insinuate that something new did develop out of Princeton's reaction to liberalism.¹⁶

Was inerrancy a *new* concept introduced in response to liberalism in the late nineteenth-century? Moreover, if such a development occurred historically, then can it be argued that inerrancy, as an aspect of the doctrine of Scripture, did not exist prior to this development? Much has been written (especially since the proposals of Sandeen and Rogers and Mckim) investigating the history of the doctrine of inspiration. However, as Muller warns us, it is improper to seek to understand the history of a doctrine anachronistically, introducing technical terminology of more recent debates into the thinking of theologians from the past.¹⁷ With that said, mere word-level arguments should be dismissed and attention placed on the conceptual level. On the surface, it would appear that from the Church Fathers onward, there was either explicit or implicit affirmation of Scripture being error-free, even down the very words.¹⁸ Though they may have disagreed with regard to *how* the Scriptures were inspired by God, "they never questioned the divine origin or the inerrancy of the scriptures."¹⁹ Luther and Calvin both speak of Scripture as verbally inerrant,²⁰ though at least in Calvin's case, he is more concerned with arguing on the basis of it being true rather than to give a justification for it.²¹ Those who followed the Reformers also affirmed at least the concept of inerrancy, even if not in word.²²

If Warfield and Hodge affirmed the concept of inerrancy and saw themselves as merely carrying on the torch of orthodox teaching of the Church Fathers and Reformers (which they certainly did),²³ what about Bavinck?

¹⁶ Indeed, McGowan argues that this development was unique to America (ibid. 13–14, 48, 126).

¹⁷ Richard A. Muller, *Holy Scripture* (vol. 2 of *Post-Reformation Dogmatics*; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 27, 256.

¹⁸ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (Peabody, MA: Prince, 2004) 60–64; L. Gaussen, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (trans. David D. Scott; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971) 146.

¹⁹ Klotsch quoted in John D. Hannah, "The Doctrine of Scripture in the Early Church," in *Inerrancy and the Church* (ed. John D. Hannah; Chicago: Moody, 1984) 33.

²⁰ Muller, *Holy Scripture* 66; Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* 49–63; John Murray, *Studies in Theology* (vol. 4 of *Collected Writings of John Murray*; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982) 158–75; J. I. Packer, "John Calvin and the Inerrancy of Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church* 178–84; John H. Gerstner, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines," in *Inerrancy* (ed. Norman L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 385–95; Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (vol. 5 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 64–65.

²¹ Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997) 110.

²² Gerstner, "Calvin and the Westminster Divines" 395–408; Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (vol. 6 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 332–33; *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* (ed. John E. Meeter; 2 vols.; Nutley, N.J.: P & R, 1973) 574; Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology 1812–1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 229, 231; Stanley N. Gundry, "John Owen on Authority and Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church* 203; Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *God's Word in Servant Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Scripture* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2008) 100.

²³ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* (vol. 1 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 26, 51–62, 77–111, 169–73, 397; *Shorter Writings* 2:561–79,

Did he affirm the concept, even if not in word? Though perhaps not as explicitly, Bavinck does recognize the concept of inerrancy being present in his survey of the history of the church's doctrine.²⁴ Unlike Kuyper, he does not emphasize the errorlessness of Scripture, but nonetheless he seems to assume that this is actually the case.²⁵ Interestingly, his use of "infallible" is fairly limited.²⁶ This makes McGowan's claim regarding the Dutch "infallibility" school even more perplexing and suspect. It seems as though he bases his argument against the Princetonian formulation on a supposed distinction between inerrancy and infallibility, but then ignores the concept actually used by the Dutch school, which contains great overlap between the terms. Bavinck's own understanding involves a notion of biblical infallibility which is not limited to error as the intent to deceive, but rather one that is not only ethical, but intellectual as well.²⁷ Referring to the soteriological nature of special revelation, he argues that since the whole man is tainted by sin, redemption announced in special revelation "ought not to consist only in the communication of life but also in the announcement of truth."²⁸ In speaking of Jesus, he attributes "infallibility" to him in the sense that he could not have erred, being "without error, lies, or deception."²⁹ In fact, Gaffin points out that Bavinck's notion of Scripture being without error, while present, naturally flows out of what he sees as the connection between the incarnation and inscripturation (and the sinlessness of Christ).³⁰ Bavinck's *concept* of infallibility actually contains the notion of what McGowan says belongs to inerrancy.³¹ This would seem to contradict McGowan's idea that Bavinck's idea of infallibility is not in the sense of inerrant *autographa*, but that it will surely achieve the purpose for which God gave the Scriptures.³² Rather, it would seem that Bavinck's concept encompasses both ideas.³³

615–36; A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972) 66–77; McGowan, *Divine Spiration* 85. It may be added that even an interdenominational cross section of Warfield's contemporaries show that his belief in inerrancy was not unique (Randall H. Balmer, "The Princetonians and Scripture: A Reconsideration," *WTJ* 44 [1982] 352–65; cf. Satta, *The Sacred Text* 102–3).

²⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena* (vol. 1 in *Reformed Dogmatics*; ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 402–8, 415. In addition, Bavinck shows his support of Princeton in their position *against* higher criticism (ibid. 418–19, 422). This subverts Rogers and McKim's claim that pits orthodox doctrine against the Princetonian formulation. Rather, in Bavinck's mind, he supports the orthodox doctrine (with Princeton) against the critical school (e.g. Briggs; Gaffin, *God's Word* 68–69).

²⁵ Gaffin, *God's Word* 102.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 398; Gaffin, *God's Word* 62.

²⁸ Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 345.

²⁹ Ibid. 398.

³⁰ Gaffin, *God's Word* 80.

³¹ However, Bavinck rejects the notion that inspiration can be described *merely* in terms of inerrancy (*Prolegomena* 428).

³² McGowan, *Divine Spiration* 149.

³³ In fact, the few places where Bavinck does mention the *autographa*, he does not deny their existence or inerrancy, but rather mentions them in comparison with fallible copies (*Prolegomena* 439, 444). Incidentally, Kuyper's concept encompasses both ideas as well (Gaffin, *God's Word* 28–32).

Here, perhaps, is the issue causing so many problems with McGowan's preference of "infallibility" over "inerrancy": the two ideas are inseparably related to each other, being two sides of the same coin. This fact has been pointed out by a number of scholars.³⁴ Murray argues that "to predicate verbal inspiration and infallibility of the Scripture is the same to speak of inerrancy . . . something cannot be infallible if it contains error of judgment or representation."³⁵ This conclusion finds expression in the way that Warfield, in particular, uses "infallibility" and "inerrancy" almost interchangeably.³⁶ In fact, McGowan anticipates the objection that Bavinck and Warfield's notions are complementary rather than contradictory. After his lengthy defense for the use of "infallibility," he suggests the term "authenticity." However, he expounds it with the same dimensions as "infallibility" in opposition to "inerrancy."³⁷ Contrary to his narrow conception of how the Princetonians use "inerrancy," the orthodox concept of it in the history of the church (including Warfield) did not call for scientific or mechanical precision which trumped the human nature of Scripture.³⁸ Perhaps the false dichotomy is not inerrancy vs. errancy, but inerrancy vs. infallibility. It would seem that inerrancy would only be incompatible with infallibility if Princeton understood it mechanically rather than organically. It is to this issue that I now turn.

II. INERRANCY AS "MECHANICAL"?

Second, McGowan argues that old Princeton, in the midst of the battle with liberalism, hardened their position on Scripture to the point that the divine side was emphasized to the expense of the human side.³⁹ Later, he commends Bavinck for his "organic" view of Scripture in contradistinction to the more mechanical view of Princeton.⁴⁰ Indeed, there is an "organic" understanding of Scripture in Bavinck's work,⁴¹ which seeks to do justice to

³⁴ Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority* 27–28; idem, "The Princetonians" 277; Murray, *Studies in Theology* 25; J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 94–96; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (2d. ed.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998) 70; P. D. Feinberg, "Inerrancy and Infallibility of the Bible," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (2d. ed.; ed. Walter A. Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 156.

³⁵ Murray, *Studies in Theology* 25. Gaffin rightly recognizes that though "strictly speaking, errorlessness and infallibility are not synonymous . . . the fact that something is without errors does not settle that it belongs to Scripture and is thus infallible . . . but if Scripture is infallible, then it decides there are no errors in it" (*God's Word* 28).

³⁶ Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 397, 408, 425–26; *Shorter Writings* 627, 636; Noll, *Princeton Theology* 221, 225, 227, 229, 270. In addition, McGowan concedes the fact that Hodge and Warfield rarely used the actual term "inerrancy" (*Divine Spiritation* 85).

³⁷ McGowan, *Divine Spiritation* 211–13.

³⁸ Murray, *Studies in Theology* 174; Gaffin, *God's Word* 4–5.

³⁹ McGowan, *Divine Spiritation* 121–22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 147–49, 157–59, 163.

⁴¹ Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 431–48; H. M. Vroom, "Scripture Read and Interpreted: The Development of the Doctrine of Scripture and Hermeneutics in Gereformeerde Theology in the Netherlands," *CTJ* 28 (1993) 358–71.

the human authors, redemptive history, and the relationship between Christ and the word of God. However, is it fair to say that Warfield and Hodge did not recognize such elements or inordinately downplayed them?

Trueman has argued that scholars have often given a truncated version of Warfield's trajectory on Scripture, which in actuality "makes more allowances for the human dimension than its popular image might suggest."⁴² Similarly, Lane recognizes that Warfield "had much to say about the humanity of scripture, about the genuine human authorship of the biblical writings."⁴³ In fact, Warfield was explicit in his rejection of any notion of mechanical dictation in the concept inspiration, which trumped the humanity of Scripture.⁴⁴ Moreover, Warfield went to great lengths to describe how the human authors were involved in the process. They were provisionally prepared for their divinely appointed role as secondary authors.⁴⁵ Though they were active instruments of God (with all their faculties engaged), the human authors were involved in a *concurrent* process,⁴⁶ in which the human and divine were distinct but inseparable. As such, no portion can be described accurately as being divine or human, but divine *and* human in every part.⁴⁷ In no way were the human authors "co-authors," but rather the message given by God was the same message given out through them, down to the very word.⁴⁸ To Warfield, this is consistent with a proper understanding of God's providence in general, in which God is wholly in control, but does not eliminate secondary causes, nor violates man's faculties as spontaneous agents.⁴⁹ This sounds much like a primary theme that runs throughout Bavinck's work. Namely, grace is not opposed to nature, but actually restores it.⁵⁰ After all, both are aspects of God's unified revelation to begin with. In sum, Warfield's doctrine of inspiration neither excludes nor violates the humanity of the secondary authors.⁵¹

What about other alleged mechanical violations, such as disengaging inspiration from redemptive history or technical precision which deviates

⁴² Carl R. Trueman, *The Wages of Spin: Critical Writings on Historic and Contemporary Evangelicalism* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2007) 99.

⁴³ A. N. S. Lane, "B. B. Warfield on the Humanity of Scripture," *VE* 16 (1986) 77. Lane suggests that the greater the emphasis Warfield put on the divine side was probably due to a combination of the following: a similar emphasis in the NT, the divine side being questioned by the critics of his time, and the human side often being assumed in his writings (*ibid.* 78–79). For an example of addressing such critics, see Benjamin B. Warfield, *Critical Reviews* (vol. 10 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 118–27.

⁴⁴ Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 99, 397; *Shorter Writings* 2:543–44, 628–29; Lane, "Warfield" 79–80.

⁴⁵ Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 101–2, 106; Lane, "Warfield" 83.

⁴⁶ He only deviates from this conception when speaking of how the OT prophets represented their own teaching (Lane, "Warfield" 87).

⁴⁷ Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 15, 23, 27; *Shorter Writings* 547, 627, 629.

⁴⁸ Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 23, 40, 44, 99, 399.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 106; *Shorter Writings* 546, 611, 615; Lane, "Warfield" 84–85.

⁵⁰ Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 18, 321–322; Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 45–46. Curiously, McGowan does not include this major theme in his summary of Bavinck's theological contributions (*Divine Spiration* 143–61).

⁵¹ Contra McGowan (*Divine Spiration* 148–49).

from the intent of special revelation? Again, we find in Warfield a great appreciation for inspiration as rooted in redemptive history, itself being a historical, redemptive event.⁵² Moreover, Hodge and Warfield were also aware of the dangers of making the Bible out to be a textbook with mechanical precision being imposed upon its intent, recognizing human variety and the use of different genres.⁵³ In fact, the human author's intent was very important to Warfield, as evidenced in his defense against critics of inspiration.⁵⁴ Van Til, in his survey of Warfield and Bavinck on Scripture, observes that *both* held to an "organic" view, giving proper attention to the human authors and the context of redemptive history.⁵⁵

Perhaps the failure to recognize Warfield's nuanced appreciation for both the divine and human qualities of Scripture is due to McGowan's quick dismissal of the incarnational analogy. He disapproves of inerrantists using such an analogy by claiming that they wrongly affirm that Scripture has a "divine and human nature," implying an actual hypostatic union.⁵⁶ He cites two main problems with the analogy. First, the concept is not taught in Scripture; and second, only God is divine and only he can have a divine nature.⁵⁷ Bavinck is referenced as one who denied that Scripture can have a divine nature. It has been rightly recognized that Warfield saw some value in the analogy, but with caution (as with all analogies).⁵⁸ However, did Bavinck oppose the use of such a model as McGowan seems to imply—that he saw the analogy ill-suited to the idea of inerrancy?

Interestingly, one can find both Kuyper and Bavinck actually using the incarnational analogy, not in the problematic ways which McGowan describes, but to emphasize God's ability to reveal himself without being frustrated or subverted by his creation in the process. Kuyper emphasizes the servant-form of Scripture, which in God's hands not only fulfills his purposes, but does so error-free.⁵⁹ According to Kuyper's use of the analogy, sin and error, with regard to Scripture, are affirmed only in the sense that they were "applicable to Christ, in his state of humiliation" (in a finite, yet sinless post-fall body).⁶⁰ Apparently, Kuyper saw the sinlessness of Christ as an analogue to

⁵² Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 12–17, 28, 44, 46–48, 63; Lane, "Warfield" 82–83; Trueman, *Wages of Sin* 93–95, 100–101.

⁵³ Hodge, *Outlines* 72–73; Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority* 206–7, 419; Lane, "Warfield" 87–90; Gaffin, *God's Word* 4–5; Noll, *Princeton Theology* 223–25.

⁵⁴ Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 169–226. As we shall see later, the intent of the human author, however he expresses himself (with regard to genre, context, etc.), is tied to verbal inerrancy.

⁵⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *The Doctrine of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) 25–29.

⁵⁶ McGowan, *Divine Spiritation* 119–20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 120. However, it must be noted that in context he is arguing more against Peter Enns's misapplication of this analogy and with Torrance, arguing against those who would deify Scripture—something Hodge and Warfield both oppose (Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 108; Noll, *Princeton Theology* 223–29).

⁵⁸ Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 108; Lane, "Warfield" 84; Peter Enns, "Preliminary Observations on an Incarnational Model of Scripture: Its Viability and Usefulness," *CTJ* 42 (2007) 221–24.

⁵⁹ Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (trans. Rev. J. Hendrik De Vries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 401, 425, 454–60, 478, 480, 537–39; Gaffin, *God's Word* 8–15, 101–2.

⁶⁰ Gaffin, *God's Word* 15.

the errorlessness of Scripture.⁶¹ Bavinck, following Kuyper, also used the analogy in similar ways. Not only is Scripture in a sense a continuation of the incarnation, but also the analogy of the incarnation is the key to understanding the organic nature of inspiration.⁶² For example, Bavinck clearly states that “just as Christ’s human nature, however weak and lowly, remained free from sin, so also Scripture is ‘conceived without defect or stain.’”⁶³ Later, he asserts that as God’s revelation entered into the fabric of humanity, it “descends into our situation; it has become flesh and blood, like us in all things except sin.”⁶⁴ Recently, Enns has observed that Bavinck, even more explicitly than the Princetonians, articulated this analogy in his understanding of Scripture.⁶⁵ At this point, I must address McGowan’s particular assertion that Bavinck went so far as to say that “the guidance of the Holy Spirit promised to the church does not exclude the possibility of human error.”⁶⁶ Such a claim, says McGowan, could never be uttered by an inerrantist.⁶⁷ However, he clearly quotes him out of context, for Bavinck is merely claiming that human formulation of dogma (not immediately inspired Scripture!) is not free from the possibility of error.⁶⁸ It seems clear that neither Kuyper nor Bavinck (supposedly opposed to inerrancy) were averse to using the analogy. Moreover, they actually applied it in ways which highlighted the errorlessness of Scripture, even as they affirmed its humanity.⁶⁹

Perhaps the main issue for both the Princetonians and Bavinck, in the use of the analogy, was the relationship between the Creator and the creature as it relates to Scripture.⁷⁰ A. A. Hodge rightly observed that “the only really dangerous opposition to the church doctrine of inspiration comes either directly or indirectly, but always ultimately, from some false view of God’s relation to the world.”⁷¹ Warfield, in response to critics, alludes to the idea of a kenotic Christology as negatively influencing their opposition to plenary inspiration.⁷² The use of the incarnational analogy by both the Princetonians and Bavinck is primarily to guard against denying that God can reveal himself without that revelation inevitably being confounded with human error. After all, neither the sin of man nor the limitations of human language are obstacles for God saying what he wants to say.⁷³ In summariz-

⁶¹ Ibid. 40, 46.

⁶² Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 380, 432–35, 443.

⁶³ Ibid. 435.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 443.

⁶⁵ Enns, “Incarnational Model” 226–28.

⁶⁶ McGowan, *Divine Inspiration* 158 (quote from Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 32).

⁶⁷ Ibid. 158.

⁶⁸ Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 31–32.

⁶⁹ It should be noted that many other scholars have seen the value in this analogy without endorsing the errors that McGowan suggests (e.g. Gausson, *Inspiration* 54; William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* [3d. ed.; ed. Alan G. Gomes; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003] 109–10; Packer, *Fundamentalism* 82–84; Reymond, *Systematic Theology* 72).

⁷⁰ In fact, Bavinck devotes much attention to the various ways this relationship has been understood before presenting his “organic” approach (*Prolegomena* 355–76).

⁷¹ Noll, *Princeton Theology* 222.

⁷² Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 63.

⁷³ See J. I. Packer, “The Adequacy of Human Language,” in *Inerrancy* (ed. Norman L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 197–226.

ing the Dutch emphasis on the “organic” nature of inspiration, we must note that it was not formulated in opposition to verbal inerrancy, but rather in opposition to a mechanical view, which the Princetonians opposed as well.⁷⁴ With this point established, we are now ready to consider the next issue in which differences have allegedly been found.

III. INERRANT *AUTOGRAPHIA*?

Third, and perhaps most significant, is McGowan’s argument against the Princetonians’ notion of inerrant *autographa*. He wants to avoid the Scylla of inerrant *autographa* (Warfield) and the Charybdis of there being errors in Scripture (Rogers and McKim).⁷⁵ This seems to be the real crux of the issue for McGowan. However, is such a view tenable?

Where did the concept of inerrant *autographa* originate? According to McGowan, it came out of a rationalistic attempt to retreat back to an irrefutable base (since they are lost) in light of opposition from liberal theology.⁷⁶ To argue that this is of “relatively recent origin” may not be doing justice to earlier thought on the matter.⁷⁷ As I already mentioned, there is always the danger of anachronistic assumptions in a claim such as this—starting from a current debate and working backwards. In fact, Muller observes that there is no explicit discussion of the *autographa*, even as late as the seventeenth century.⁷⁸ The Westminster Confession emphasizes the final appeal must be made to the original language texts currently known to the church.⁷⁹ The main issue “for the orthodox was the establishment of an authentic and accurate text of the Hebrew and Greek originals, despite the loss of the *autographa*.”⁸⁰ In other words, though emphasis was placed on the *apographa*, the reality of inerrant *autographa* was not denied, but rather assumed, with textual errors due to scribal origin, rather than divine origin.⁸¹ Whether one questions the importance of assumed inerrant *autographa* or not, one cannot erase the fact that it was assumed in the church *prior* to

⁷⁴ Lane suggests that perhaps if Warfield had been stronger in affirming Calvin’s notion of *accommodation*, his doctrine of Scripture would have been enriched, and perhaps less maligned (Lane, “Warfield” 89).

⁷⁵ McGowan, *Divine Spiration* 124.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 87. To the contrary, Warfield rejected a simplistic retreat to solve all disputes by blaming all difficulties on mere textual corruption (as opposed to historical or any other ignorance on our part) (Ronald V. Huggins, “A Note on Archibald Alexander’s Apologetic Motive in Positing “Errors” in the Autographs,” *WTJ* 57 [1995] 469).

⁷⁷ McGowan, *Divine Spiration* 106.

⁷⁸ However, it must be noted that Satta does cite William Whitaker, a seventeenth-century theologian, whose doctrine of Scripture mirrors that of the Princetonians, though articulated over two-hundred and fifty years earlier (*The Sacred Text* 98–99).

⁷⁹ The Confession does mention the *autographa* implicitly as “immediately inspired by God” (*Westminster Confession of Faith* (repr. Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2003) 23).

⁸⁰ Muller, *Holy Scripture* 90, 414.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 414–15; *Westminster Confession* 23; John H. Gerstner, Douglas F. Kelly, and Philip Rollinson, eds., *A Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith: Commentary* (Signal Mountain, TN: Summertown Texts, 1992) 19–20; Warfield, *Westminster Assembly* 236–51; Noll, *Princeton Theology* 268–74.

Hodge and Warfield, even if not emphasized.⁸² Satta also points out that during the Briggs controversy, even fellow critics of the Princetonians on the issue of inerrant *autographa* acknowledged that the doctrine was not only the prominent position of post-reformation dogma on Scripture, but also had roots extending back to the time of the NT.⁸³

What was Bavinck's view of the *autographa*? Did he dismiss the concept of inerrancy as merely a contrived and unnecessary apologetic endeavor? It is fair to say that he was not as explicit in addressing the topic. However, that does not mean he rejected the notion. On the contrary, he acknowledges the loss of the *autographa* only to say that the *apographa*, in contrast, contain defective elements.⁸⁴ He recognizes that the unique God-breathing of Scripture (in inspiration) is not only in and through the original human authors, but also emphasizes that the Spirit does not withdraw from it, but continues to sustain and animate it (as living and active).⁸⁵ Interestingly, he mentions that because the *autographa* have been lost, we only have the Bible in "defective and fallible translations."⁸⁶ In relating the *autographa* in such terms, Bavinck links the notion of fallibility in opposition to the *autographa*, which are presumably infallible. Such a relationship undermines McGowan's supposed distinction between views concerning the *autographa*. He associates the Princetonian attention to the *autographa* with inerrancy, while the Dutch notion of infallibility is unconcerned with a "hypothetical *autographa*."⁸⁷ In sum, we can affirm that Bavinck *did* assume the reality of inerrant and infallible *autographa*, much like the Princetonians.

Seeing that both share this belief, an important question must be addressed. Why is it important to hold to the concept of lost *autographa*?⁸⁸ One reason is the relationship between form and content as it relates to meaning. Both Bavinck and the Princetonians make reference to the inseparable nature of this relationship in their writings on Scripture. Warfield and Hodge clearly affirmed the plenary inspiration of Scripture extending to all its parts in thought (or doctrine) and word.⁸⁹ Bavinck, though he em-

⁸² See Hodge, *Outlines* 75; Murray, *Studies in Theology* 172–75; Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Inerrancy of the Autographa," in *Inerrancy* 151–93; Satta, *The Sacred Text* 2–16, 89, 93, 99–103. Woodbridge points out that Hodge and Warfield's emphasis on the inerrancy of the originals was a needed response to higher critical attacks on Scripture, not as a retreat, but as a further nuancing of a doctrine already held by the church in order to meet such attacks (*Biblical Authority* 132–35).

⁸³ Satta, *The Sacred Text* 95.

⁸⁴ Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 439, 444.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 439–40.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 444.

⁸⁷ McGowan, *Divine Spiration* 162.

⁸⁸ McGowan sees this as a very important question (*Divine Spiration* 109). Carl Henry, in response to the objection that no one has seen the inerrant originals, says that no one has seen the errant original either (cited in Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985] 240).

⁸⁹ Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 59, 181, 200–201, 207, 209, 397, 399, 424–25; *Shorter Writings* 627; Noll, *Princeton Theology* 226; Hodge, *Outlines* 66–69. Interestingly, Warfield often affirms verbal plenary inspiration against a mechanical view rather than as a part of it.

phasized the fact that Scripture is “God-breathed” primarily with a view to its origin,⁹⁰ was explicit in seeing the connection between form and content regarding inspiration.⁹¹ He recognized that “form and content interpenetrate each other and are inseparable.”⁹² Later, he says “the formal and the material meaning of the term ‘word of God’ are much too intertwined”—to warn against falsely distinguishing between historical and normative authority.⁹³ In other words, the Bible is authoritative in a historical sense as well as a moral sense, being true in regard to both. In fact, he warns those who would separate God’s revelation from its documentation, which would “render the authority of Scripture completely illusionary,” leaving people to “decide for themselves what that word of God in Scripture is and to this at their own discretion.”⁹⁴ These statements come out of the context of him emphasizing the “organic” nature of inspiration, which shows that he does not see this relationship between form and content as opposed to it in any way. Trueman summarizes his evaluation of the supposed “information-function” dichotomy alleged by Rogers and McKim by saying:

Warfield, like his Dutch contemporaries, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, refused to separate Scripture’s formal nature from its material content: both were intimately connected, with form being determined by the content or intention, whether that be the communication of historical information, the interpretation of God’s great saving acts, or the many kinds of speech-acts (to use the modern jargon) which God performs by Scripture.⁹⁵

Other scholars have noted this close relationship, seeing that a denial of an inerrant form (i.e. verbally inerrant *autographa*), necessarily renders the content or message errant.⁹⁶ If God’s message in human language is to be inerrant, the exact word choice must be without error.

There are other problems with regard to a dismissal of inerrant *autographa*. For instance, how can an inaccurate *autographa* give rise to accurate *apographa*?⁹⁷ One might also question whether such a dismissal undermines historical-grammatical exegesis in terms of the human author’s intended meaning. If we are not sure of the form (the words used), how can we be

⁹⁰ Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 429.

⁹¹ McGowan highlights this fact in support for an organic view (vs. mechanical; *Divine Spiration* 159–61).

⁹² Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 443.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 459–60.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 461.

⁹⁵ Trueman, *Wages of Spin* 92.

⁹⁶ Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* 101; James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910) 209–10; Murray, *Studies in Theology* 25; Loraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology* (Philadelphia: P & R, 1947) 11–13; Gaussen, *Divine Inspiration* 275–86; René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody, 1969) 73–75. Though McGowan cites Orr in support for an organic view which is supposedly incompatible with inerrancy (*Divine Spiration* 126–37), Orr is actually not opposed to the concept of verbal inspiration (down to the very words), but is merely cautious of mechanical misunderstanding. He actually cites Hodge and Warfield as avoiding this mechanical view in their affirmation of verbal inspiration (Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* 209–10).

⁹⁷ Huggins, “Autographs” 468; Balmer, “The Princetonians” 356, 361.

sure of the content?⁹⁸ Gaussen, in his response to an objection much like McGowan's (i.e. "Why are lost *autographa* important?"), highlights five reasons for affirming inerrant originals. Perhaps the most compelling is the fact that no one could correct that which was flawed from the start (as opposed to copies and translations).⁹⁹ The question could also be asked: if there are no inerrant originals, what is the difference between the inspiration of the original authors and those simply transmitting the text after them, if not in terms of error?¹⁰⁰

Finally, with regard to the concept of inerrant *autographa*, McGowan objects to the idea of holding such a concept in order to uphold God's veracity. To him, this underestimates God's ability (i.e. that God *must* deliver inerrant *autographa*).¹⁰¹ Yet, is such a theological argument unwarranted? Ironically, his criticism is also based on a theological argument, namely that God's unlimited ability enables him to reveal himself through errant texts. This begs the question: Who is really limiting God? Does God have more freedom in working against nature (through fallible authors and finite language?) or with nature in such a way as to preserve his truth down to the very word, making them both his words and their words at the same time?¹⁰² Why should God's freedom and ability be dependent on working through human error? It would seem that McGowan implies another false dichotomy in suggesting that God's freedom is in opposition to the giving of inerrant originals.¹⁰³ In contrast to this thinking about God's ability, the traditional emphasis in Reformed theology has been to maintain God's special providence over the transmission of the inerrant originals (rather than over errant originals).¹⁰⁴ Frame's summary of Van Til's observation on the importance of the *autographa* gets to the heart of the issue: "unless the infallible revelation has been given somewhere in space and time, and thus is accessible in principle to human knowledge (e.g. by textual criticism), then we have no access to the pure word of God."¹⁰⁵ In other words, unless the *autographa* were inspired without error, God's untainted word never made true contact with man in space and time history.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ See J. I. Packer, "Biblical Authority, Hermeneutics and Inerrancy," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (ed. E. R. Geehan; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1974) 147–48.

⁹⁹ Gaussen, *Divine Inspiration* 158; cf. Bahnsen, "Autographa" 192.

¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, what is inspired (in an inerrant sense), if not the originals or the copies? All that is left is a supposed message or content which is disengaged from history.

¹⁰¹ McGowan, *Divine Inspiration* 109, 113–14.

¹⁰² Even though he acknowledges that God *may* have chosen to reveal himself through inerrant originals, this adds little weight to his argument in light of the inseparable relationship between form and content discussed earlier.

¹⁰³ Later he asserts yet another false dichotomy in arguing that inerrant *autographa* violate the role of the human authors (*Divine Inspiration* 211).

¹⁰⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (combined ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 1:159; *Westminster Confession* 23.

¹⁰⁵ John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1995) 128.

¹⁰⁶ Moreover, if there were no inerrant *autographa*, "it would mean that at some point human interpretation would stand above divine interpretation" (Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* [2d ed.; ed. William Edgar; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007] 251).

IV. THE DIFFERENCE

After surveying the doctrine of Scripture in both the Princetonians and Bavinck via the recent claims of McGowan, I conclude that there is no substantive difference between them in terms of actual doctrine. However, I suspect that McGowan's concerns actually lie elsewhere, though he presents them in terms of doctrinal differences.¹⁰⁷ In fact, it seems as though his attack on the Princetonian formulation of inspiration in opposition to Bavinck and others actually comes out of a concern for the way in which Hodge and Warfield defended their doctrine rather than the doctrine itself.¹⁰⁸ In other words, the real difference between Old Princeton and Bavinck is not in their doctrine of Scripture, but in their apologetic for it.¹⁰⁹ The Princetonians did not create and endorse a false doctrine of Scripture, but merely presented a defense inconsistent with it.

Two main issues come to the forefront with regard to apologetics. First, what is the relationship between reason and faith? Second, what is the role of apologetics in relation to doctrine? With regard to the doctrine of Scripture,

the place and importance of rational argumentation concerning the divinity of Scripture in Protestant dogmatics has been a matter of debate at least since Barth declared that these 'proofs,' like rational arguments for the existence of God, had no place at all in the teachings of the Reformers.¹¹⁰

Though this is surely an overstatement on Barth's part,¹¹¹ it raises key questions regarding the doctrine of Scripture. How should one defend the doctrine? How did the Princetonians and the Dutch school defend it?

It is important to note from the outset that it was in terms of apologetics (not doctrine) that Warfield saw differences between himself and his Dutch contemporaries.¹¹² In a review of Bavinck's *Certainty of Faith*, he writes that he was surprised that Bavinck made so little of apologetics.¹¹³ Kuyper, in his Stone Lectures at Princeton (1898), argued that in the struggle between two "life systems" (Christianity and modernism), "apologetics have advanced us not one single step."¹¹⁴ This was clearly a surprise to Warfield,

¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, though apart from his notion of degrees of inspiration, Orr also seems to express concerns primarily over the use of 'inerrancy' to *prove* or *defend* inspiration, rather than as an aspect of inspiration (see *Revelation and Inspiration* 197, 199, 201, 207, 217).

¹⁰⁸ See McGowan, *Divine Spiration* 31–38, 50–122, 131, 140–46, 163–64.

¹⁰⁹ Heslam makes this same point (Peter S. Heslam, "Architects of Evangelical Intellectual Thought: Abraham Kuyper and Benjamin Warfield," *Them* 24/2 [1999] 3–20); cf. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1969) 230.

¹¹⁰ Muller, *Holy Scripture* 256.

¹¹¹ Both Calvin and his Puritan successors saw a place for rational arguments subordinate to illumination (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [ed. John T. McNeil; 2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960] 1.6–8; *Westminster Confession* 21–22).

¹¹² Noll, *Princeton Theology* 303–7.

¹¹³ Donald Macleod, "Bavinck's *Prolegomena*: Fresh Light on Amsterdam, Old Princeton, and Cornelius Van Til," *WTJ* 68 (2006) 269–70.

¹¹⁴ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures in Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931) 11.

who enthusiastically endorsed Kuyper's work, but faulted him on this point.¹¹⁵

Let us briefly map out the main differences in their approach to apologetics. First, Bavinck and Kuyper essentially held the same position, with their main principle being that "God can only be known through God . . . without revelation there can be no theology."¹¹⁶ The role of apologetics was to defend the unified system of dogmatics. Hence, the truth of revelation was to be assumed in one's defense of it.¹¹⁷ As Macleod summarizes, "apologetics, therefore, cannot precede faith . . . nor can it precede dogmatics, either as introduction or as foundation . . . instead, it has to assume the truths set forth in dogmatics."¹¹⁸ Kuyper adds that faith cannot rest on reason. In fact, the nature of Scripture (biblically defined) cannot be demonstrated to autonomous human reason, which assumes a position above Scripture.¹¹⁹ The starting point for theology is from *within* theology, its very foundation being theological rather than philosophical in nature.¹²⁰

Hodge and Warfield saw a more significant role for apologetics. In fact, Warfield believed the task of apologetics was to establish the grounds and presuppositions of theology.¹²¹ In particular, apologetics, without assuming the whole of revealed truth, seeks to establish three things: reality of its subject matter (God), the capacity of the human mind to rationally receive this subject matter (religion), and the existence of communication between the subject matter and its recipient (revelation).¹²² With regard to Scripture, the Christian must not take his stand above them, but *in* them.¹²³ However, according to Warfield, he must "first *have* scriptures, authenticated to him as such, before he can take his standpoint in them."¹²⁴

Why such differences? Many have suggested that the influence of Scottish Common Sense Realism steered Princeton toward more of a rationalistic defense of doctrinal truth.¹²⁵ However, others have cautioned against an over-

¹¹⁵ Warfield, *Shorter Writings* 2:95, 117; Heslam, "Architects" 10; Also, see Warfield's introduction to Kuyper's, *Principles* (xi–xix). However, it should be noted that in light of the great similarities in their thought, Warfield saw these differences, while perplexing, of minor importance (Heslam, "Architects" 14).

¹¹⁶ Macleod, "Fresh Light" 268.

¹¹⁷ Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 54.

¹¹⁸ Macleod, "Fresh Light" 269.

¹¹⁹ Kuyper, *Principles* 381.

¹²⁰ Bavinck, *Prolegomena* 320–21.

¹²¹ Hodge, *Outlines* 65–66; Benjamin B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (vol. 9 in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 3–19, 53–64.

¹²² Warfield, *Studies in Theology* 10–11.

¹²³ Macleod, "Fresh Light" 270.

¹²⁴ Warfield, *Shorter Writings* 2:98.

¹²⁵ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *CH* 24 (1955) 257–72; David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003) 48–49; Darryl G. Hart, "The Princeton Mind in the Modern World and the Common Sense of J. Gresham Machen," *WTJ* 46 (1984) 1–25; George M. Marsden, "J. Gresham Machen, History, and Truth," *WTJ* 42 (1979) 157–75; Noll, *Princeton Theology* 30–45.

simplification concerning the connection between the two, seen, for example, in the work of Rogers and McKim.¹²⁶ Though it probably had a general influence, it would be inaccurate to say that Hodge and Warfield wholeheartedly adopted the philosophical stance of, say, a Thomas Reid or James Oswald. Their strong Calvinistic doctrine, rooted in the Reformers and the Westminster standards would not allow such unbiblical assumptions as the arbitrary nature of Reid's notion of first principles or autonomous human reasoning.¹²⁷

More accurately, a case could be made for inconsistency rather than the logical necessity of a certain apologetic stemming from faulty doctrine. Take, for example, Warfield's concern to establish the truth of the Bible and its inspiration in the trustworthiness of the human authors and related historical facts.¹²⁸ Is this consistent with his observation that critics being "blind" toward the evidence of plenary inspiration due to anti-supernatural presuppositions, leaving them unwilling to believe?¹²⁹ Moreover, Warfield presents an apologetic method which seems to appeal to general revelation ("general evidences of Christianity") in order to establish the "the general trustworthiness of the Scriptures as sources for Christian doctrine" (i.e. special revelation).¹³⁰ This would seem to undermine what he says elsewhere concerning the relationship between general and special revelation—as intimately connected.¹³¹ As Van Til put it, "it is therefore quite impossible to take the organism of revelation apart and to defend one part of it before the other."¹³² It seems as though Warfield was chiefly concerned with reason being discarded and replaced with faith (i.e. an irrational faith). He saw faith as reasonable, based on credible evidence.¹³³ Curiously, he argues for the Holy Spirit preparing someone to receive this evidence along with faith, though just before this statement, says "that all forms of convictions must

¹²⁶ D. Clair Davis, "Princeton and Inerrancy: The Nineteenth-Century Philosophical Background of Contemporary Concerns," in *Inerrancy and the Church* 361–78; J. Ligon Duncan III, "Common Sense and American Presbyterianism: An Evaluation of the Impact of Scottish Realism on Princeton and the South" (M.A. thesis; Covenant Theological Seminary, 1987); Donald Fuller and Richard Gardiner, "Reformed Theology at Princeton and Amsterdam in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Reappraisal," *Presb* 21/2 (1995): 89–117. I must say that I disagree, however, with Fuller and Gardiner's evaluation of Kuyper and Bavinck as having affinities with Kant.

¹²⁷ Ahlstrom, "Scottish Philosophy" 261.

¹²⁸ Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 64, 180, 204, 206, 210, 218, 221, 226, 399–400, 422–23, 430–34, 441–47.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 409–10, 440. This same type of inconsistency is seen in his approval of Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God in the *Institutes* ("the plan of a complete structure of Christian Apologetics"), which his own statements concerning the role of apologetics seem to contradict (Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* 30).

¹³⁰ Warfield, *Shorter Writings* 632–33.

¹³¹ Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* 5–10, 45. This would also undermine his approval of Calvin's notion of special revelation being the "spectacles" through which to properly understand general revelation (*Calvin and Calvinism* 69–70).

¹³² Van Til, *Scripture* 58.

¹³³ Warfield, *Studies in Theology* 15.

rest on evidence as their ground, and it is not faith but reason which investigates the nature and validity of this ground.”¹³⁴ This inconsistency begs the question, what determines that which is most reasonable to someone—the evidence or the “preparation”?

The apologetic method of old Princeton is inconsistent with traditional Reformed theology for a number of reasons. I will only highlight three. First, to put apologetics in a place which paves the way for theological truth is problematic, for it paves something which is not part of that truth in the first place. Instead of being an aspect of theology, apologetics becomes the “neutral” basis for it. However, “if apologetics is not ‘neutral,’ then there is no particular reason to say that it furnishes the ‘basis’ or ‘presupposition’ for theology . . . theology supplies the presuppositions for apologetics.”¹³⁵ Indeed, “for believers, Scripture is the principle of theology. As such, it cannot be the conclusion of other premises, but it is *the* premise from which all other conclusions are drawn.”¹³⁶ Second, Warfield, in contrast to his Dutch counterparts, seemed to assume a “normally working mind” on the part of unbelievers when presenting them credible evidence.¹³⁷ However, this undermines the fact that the unbeliever’s mind is alienated from God and seeks to suppress such credible evidence in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18–32).¹³⁸ Third, an apologetic based on mere evidential arguments is at best only *probable* in its truth claims. Van Til sums up Warfield’s precarious position well:

It follows that if we accept this view of theology and of the doctrine of Scripture as Warfield has himself often enough set it forth, it is impossible to follow him in his method of apologetics as outlined above. This method would lead to the very mysticism or rationalism which it is his great desire to oppose. For mysticism is involved in the principle of equivocism and rationalism is involved in the principle of univocism, and they are both based upon the idea of human autonomy . . . this idea of human autonomy lies back of the idea of abstract possibility . . . a theism that is merely said to be more probably true than its rivals is not the theism of the bible.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Ibid. 15. This would also seem to go against his affirmation of Augustine’s view on the relationship between revelation and the pursuit of truth (Benjamin B. Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* [vol. 4 in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003] 160–62).

¹³⁵ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987) 87. See also Van Til’s “messenger boy/scout” analogy for the relationship between apologetics and theology (Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* [2d. ed.; ed. William Edgar; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003] 21–23).

¹³⁶ Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge* 233.

¹³⁷ Warfield, *Shorter Writings* 104. Though inconsistent, this is not due to a low view of sin in terms of his doctrine of man (Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge* 243).

¹³⁸ Rightly and creatively, Van Til asks: “Why did Warfield allow that those who are in fact drowning next to the ship on which he is sailing can rightly determine whether the ship is seaworthy?” (*Scripture* 62).

¹³⁹ Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge* 251. It should be noted that McGowan favorably cites Van Til’s insights regarding apologetic methodology, yet fails to recognize that Van Til’s critique of Warfield centered on inconsistency rather than doctrine (cf. *Divine Spiration* 32–38, 71, 77–82, 131, 143).

V. CONCLUSION

In light of the evidence, we can confidently say that Old Princeton did uphold the traditional orthodox position on Scripture in terms of inspiration and inerrancy. Though differences in emphasis can be detected, their doctrine of Scripture is fully compatible with that held by Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper. The only significant difference was in how they defended that doctrine. What of McGowan's case for a difference in doctrine? In light of the evidence, it would seem that he wrongly interprets an inconsistent Princetonian apologetic for Scripture as evidence of a faulty doctrine behind it. It was not their doctrine which tended toward rationalism, but their apologetic. After all has been sorted out, there is no middle ground of infallibility between inerrancy and errancy. To find such a ground constitutes a false dichotomy. Properly understood, inerrancy and infallibility, though distinct, are inseparable. Hence, a call back to an infallibist conception in opposition to inerrancy is illusory.