

ABSTRACT

The thesis opens by examining how some definitions of religion either invite or exclude the notion of subjecting religious faith and belief to rational critique, and by examining how religions can be conceptualised in relation to the limits of the knowable.

Elements of Reformed Epistemology, such as ‘properly basic beliefs’, warrant, and Calvin’s *sensus divinitatis* are then examined, and historical antecedents are surveyed with special reference to the question of whether Reformed Epistemology can be accused being a form of *fideism* which paves the way for the *extreme fideist* mindset of Religious Fundamentalism in a contemporary Christian context. To this end, the thoughts of Plato, Augustine, Calvin and Plantinga are discussed.

An examination of the formation of mindsets with their necessary prejudices, and of Gould’s NOMA (Non Overlapping Magisteria), is followed by a discussion of how the ‘roles’ of science and religion may be perceived by various mindsets including the fundamentalist mindset.

An attempt is then made to evaluate the factors of delusion, deception, and epistemological irresponsibility in religious beliefs in conjunction with an analysis of verifiable/non-verifiable and falsifiable/non-falsifiable beliefs held by Christian Fundamentalists. To this end a detailed critique is mounted of the *Fascinating Facts Booklet* in relation to its claims in the areas of Biblical archaeological studies, the characterisation of AIDS as a homosexual illness, various eschatological themes, biblical inconsistencies, and the alleged *Bible Codes*. This is followed by a discussion of the claims of mysticism, divine insight, ‘Creation Science’, the fundamentalist claim to uniqueness, the consequences of fundamentalism, and concludes with a Fundamentalist Syllogism.

The thesis then presents a proposal for a *Theory of Implied Infallibility* which examines the notion that the process of a religious believer's discerning an allegedly infallible source of religious truth, knowledge, and enlightenment, necessarily implies a sense of infallibility on the part of the believer.

The conclusion of the thesis is that fundamentalist attitudes and mindsets with their attendant notions of exclusiveness, infallibility, and the urge to impose fundamentalist views on others, have been present throughout much of Christian history, that the unreliable nature of contemporary Christian fundamentalist claims of a verifiable or falsifiable nature examined in the thesis must cast doubt on the reliability of beliefs of an unverifiable or unfalsifiable nature, and that Reformed Epistemology with its flirtation with *extreme fideism* and its apparent inability to categorically state why 'properly basic beliefs' are not simply irrational, paves, by default, the philosophico-theological way for extreme fideist excesses in contemporary fundamentalism.

CHAPTER ONE: RELIGIOUS INTUITIONS AND RATIONALITY

Definitions

Definitions of religion are diverse, ranging from Otto's articulation of the concept of the 'numinous',¹ and Pals' view that religion consists of 'belief and behaviours associated in some way with a supernatural realm, a sphere of divine or spiritual beings',² to Pratt's statement that 'not all religions have a God-belief as the focus of faith, but arguably all have some belief in, or assumptions about, a Transcendent Other-worldly realm',³ and Ries' more specific formulation of 'a set of doctrines and practices that forms people's relationship with God.'⁴ But it is Müller's statement that 'one of the most essential elements of all religious knowledge is the admission of beings which can neither be apprehended by sense nor comprehended by reason'⁵ that challenges an epistemological critique of faith and reason in the area of religious belief.

That definition, arising, as it does, within the context of exploring the origins of religion, strives for a universality which is not only spatial but also embraces the gamut of temporal experience of religion inclusive of preliterate peoples. As James observes, preliterate people are perfectly capable of accurate observation and are frequently experimenting, improvising and improving upon their techniques and skills.⁶ They are neither philosophers, scientists nor prelogical mystics. They are just plain unsophisticated practical folk continually confronted with perplexing situations outside their control and beyond their powers of explanation or control. It is then, says James, that supernatural and supra-mundane elements are introduced to come to

¹ Rudolf Otto. *The Idea of the Holy*. London: Oxford University Press, 1928, 7.

² Daniel L. Pals. *Seven Theories of Religion*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 269-70.

³ Douglas Pratt. *Religion: A First Encounter*. Auckland: Longman Paul, 1993, 3.

⁴ Julien Ries. *The Origins of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, 7.

⁵ F. Max Müller. *On the Origin and Growth of Religion: The Hibbert Lectures, 1877*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882, 25-26.

⁶ E.O. James. *Creation and Cosmology: A Historical and Comparative Inquiry*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969, 2-3.

the rescue to prevent danger and disintegration, and maintain and strengthen the bonds of cohesion, co-operation and stability, and to ensure thereby continuity as well as social unity and solidarity.

If Müller's definition is taken as a kind of minimal inclusiveness, and if, in primitive thought, cosmic mythology is not something that is called into play at a point where abstract ratiocination can go no further, and if this has had a permanent effect on subsequent behaviour and the structure of society and its institutions, what point is there then in subjecting religious faith and belief to rational critique? In, for example, indigenous religious traditions such as those of the Australian Aborigines, each tribal group is the custodian of its own cosmic tradition, and responsible for the preservation and enactment of the myth and ritual associated with the sacred sites in its area, thereby making its particular contribution to the cosmology, culture and mythology as a composite whole. What their ancestors did and prescribed in the 'Dream Time' must be done now by their descendants because 'as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end'. So the cosmology lives on in its myth and ritual, and the reactive period is an ever present reality re-enacted in the traditional manner on the great recurrent ceremonial occasions.⁷

It would seem to be as pointless to criticise a lack of 'rational foundation' of this ancient tradition as it would be to so criticise a Beethoven symphony or a Schubert song-cycle or any other creative explication of human experience and human enterprise. Perhaps we can see as a sort of corollary to Müller's statement that a key element of religious knowledge is the admission of beings which can neither be apprehended by sense nor comprehended by reason, Arthur Koestler's comment that the belief in the irreplaceable deterrent value of the death-penalty has been proved to be a superstition by long and detailed inquiries and research, yet it pops up again and again. Like all superstitions, he says, it has the nature of a Jack-in-the-Box - 'however often you hit it over the head with facts and statistics, it will solemnly pop

⁷ James, *op. cit.*, 3-4.

up again, because the hidden spring inside it is the unconscious and irrational power of traditional beliefs'.⁸

So that in trying to understand the nature of belief or faith we need to come to an understanding how religion proclaims a central reality and then builds a structure of valuation around and in relation to it. We commonly understand a similar, although secular, manner of organising attitudes when we say that someone has made a "religion" out of say, tennis.⁹ What we mean is that the person thinks the game is all important and as a result makes all his or her choices on the basis of playing it. When considering new friends, there is a desire to enquire about their game; when deciding whether to go to party there is a need to consider the shape he or she will be in the next morning if tennis is to be played. Anything that brings the tennis player closer to the game is judged good, and anything that takes him or her away is deemed bad. Such an athlete will relate a personal history in terms of learning to play, developing a good backhand etc, and these become the significant factors. Our tennis player has created a myth, an attitude toward reality that makes his or her past sensible, the present meaningful, and the future possible. Around its central value, such a person constructs his or her life. The problem with this is that the game of tennis is not an *absolute* reality. It is highly dependent on fitness, ability, equipment, and so on, and as a viable centre of religion it is severely limited, and the meaning it offers for one's life is equally circumscribed. While it provides a certain amount of satisfaction in terms of bodily health and sporting fellowship, it does not really address itself to more far-reaching concerns. The tennis devotee, then, is reduced in our estimation to a 'jock', whom we consider to be somewhat limited in understanding of his or her self as a 'tennis player' only, and not more broadly and deeply as 'human'.

Regardless of what we think of the athlete's 'religion' of tennis, to the extent that we understand how that person constructs his or her life and determines values around what is for him or her the supreme reality of the game, we can comprehend the basic

⁸ Arthur Koestler. *Reflections on Hanging*. London: Macmillan, 1957, 6.

⁹ Barbara C. Sproul. *Primal Myths: Creation Myths around the World*. New York: HarperCollins, 1979, 5.

structure of all religion. The great monotheistic religions posit a supreme supernatural reality (i.e., God) and subsequently build an entire system of valuation around that perceived reality. Unlike the tennis player's 'religion', these religions proclaim, as the centrepiece of their belief-system, an absolute reality which is both transcendent (true for all times and places) and immanent (true in the here and now). This is what, in the minds of their adherents, distinguishes their religious point of view from all others. Such absolute reality is considered to be not relative to any human constructs, and not dependent on contingent or changing spatio-temporal factors. It is a reality of absolute value in relation to which other values (e.g., moral, ethical, political, social) can be established. From this central belief in the reality of absolute supernatural value flow religious beliefs of great certitude and conviction accessed through what are perceived as divine revelations of various types.

But religious knowledge, religious belief, and religious faith must, argues Stephen Bevans, be partial in two senses - that they can never grasp the Mystery that they seek so urgently to understand, and that the articulation of religious belief is always determined by theologians' varying contexts.¹⁰ Historical circumstances, culture, social location, gender, personal experience - all these play a decisive role in the way that faith finds intelligent expression. Even the so-called 'universal theology' that is embodied in Christianity's creeds and magisterial teaching, is in the end, historically, culturally and socially conditioned. Imagine, asks Bevans, the particular way in which Christians might express their faith in Jesus the Christ today if Christianity had expanded eastward toward India and China rather than westward within the Hellenistic culture of the Roman Empire. Would Christians today profess Jesus as *homoousios to patri*¹¹? Would they speak of the divine economy as the work of a *trinity*? Probably not, he suspects. Others might argue that the notion of a *trinity* was not exclusive to Hellenistic thought and that such a doctrinal concept could possibly have arisen out of religio-cultural concepts in the East. But if so, this only serves to

¹⁰ Stephen Bevans, 'Preface', *Australian Theologies: Themes and methodologies into the third millennium*. Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2000, 9-10.

¹¹ Οὐ ὁμοούσιος τῷ πατρὶ = 'of the same substance as the Father', as opposed to the Arian teaching of the 4th century of *homoiousios to patri*, or ὁμοιοῦσιος τῷ πατρὶ = 'of a similar substance of the Father', which at various times was the orthodox doctrine.

underline a general nexus between religion and the context of the prevailing culture within which it develops, and illustrates that if the beliefs expressed through the creeds and classical theologians are to be appropriated by Christians today, this must be done with an acknowledgement of their own contextual reality on the one hand and with contemporary theologians' recognition of their own historical, cultural and social conditionedness on the other. But at the heart of such belief systems seems to lie a concern for the relation of the known to the *unknowable*. They push at the limits of all thinking, as Wittgenstein puts it, reaching to the very edge of the world of matter and ideas. For instance, the creation of the universe represents the limit of being in time and space. Beyond it, or at its edge, begins the unknowable. This, as Sproul points out,¹² is true regardless of the size of the universe being described, for the relation of the finite to the infinite is mysterious whatever the relative size may be of the finite. Before the creation, there was nothing, and even "nothing" is too definite a term. You can still seem to be saying something by it. But religions seem to go beyond this, for they think about a "nothing-that-was-not" and focus on this *unknowable* because they believe it to be the key to determining and valuing everything that flows from it, the known and the unknown. Creation myths reveal this religious concern most clearly. They ask, essentially, what was before anything was, what is the cause, the *ground* of being? The word *ground* is useful here because it not only helps to demonstrate the unknowable nature of the source of being in pointing to the fact that we have no independent position from which to scrutinise and know that source, but it also will feature in my later discussions on the desirability or otherwise of having religious belief or faith *grounded* in some known quantity.

Rationality, Theism, and Fideism

Even though, as Nielsen observes: 'At the core of theistic belief there is a metaphysical belief in a reality that is alleged to transcend the empirical world'¹³, there are, perhaps, two very different religious intuitions about the place of

¹² Sproul, *op. cit.*, 7.

¹³ Kai Nielsen. 'Naturalistic explanations of theistic belief', *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip L. Quinn & Charles Taliaferro. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, 404.

knowledge in religion, and these opposed intuitions extend as well to the cognates of knowledge, including rationality.¹⁴ These opposite intuitions have formed into two antithetical perspectives on the cognitivity of religion. Each perspective has impressive strengths, and each has a strong intuitive appeal. Yet they systematically differ at the deepest level of their intuitions. As Fosl points out, one champions the rationality of religion, or in the case of Aquinas, regards philosophy as a means of explicating and supporting truths of faith which in important instances are not themselves open to rational assessment¹⁵ (although Gaskin suggests that a weakness of theism in grounding its basic belief upon evidence and reason is that it may be shown to be incoherent or false¹⁶). The other denounces the idea that religion should be subject to rationality (as with Kierkegaard who regarded reason as fundamentally hostile to religion), and holds that faith and reason are so disparate that faith is not undermined but strengthened, if we judge that reason can give it no support. The common name for this view is Fideism, although Proudfoot suspects that the underlying notion that faith is more to do with religious experiences than religious beliefs or practices is a claim put forward (especially through the writings of Schleiermacher,¹⁷ Otto,¹⁸ and Eliade¹⁹) largely to make religion immune to criticism from science.²⁰ Hatch comments on the transition of pre-Christian belief or faith as simple trust in God to the later Christian belief or faith as the acceptance of a series of propositions in abstract metaphysics.²¹ In Judaism, action (historically speaking) came before belief, and belief (even if initially absent) would eventuate and develop through such action. Good Jews are good by virtue of the commandments they follow, not the theological niceties they accept.

¹⁴ J. Kellenberger. *The Cognitivity of Religion: Three Perspectives*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1985, 1.

¹⁵ Peter Fosl. 'Warrant and Belief', *The Philosophers' Magazine*, 10, Spring 200, 48.

¹⁶ J.C.A. Gaskin. *The Quest for Eternity*. New York: Penguin, 1984, 31.

¹⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher. *On Religion*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

¹⁸ Otto, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Mircea Eliade. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. W.R. Trask. New York: Harper and Row, 1961.

²⁰ Wayne Proudfoot. *Religious Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985,

²¹ Edwin Hatch. *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, ed. A.M. Fairbairn, 2nd edn. New York: Burt Franklin, 1972, 310-12.

However, some fideists consider the case for Fideism to be made even stronger if one judges that reason cannot give us truth or assurance outside the sphere of faith any more than within it. In other words they sustain their fideism by an appeal to Skepticism. Penhelhum calls them Skeptical Fideists.²² One might say that Kierkegaard saw reason as a false alibi which distracted people from authentic faith and obedience to God, whereas Nietzsche saw reason as a false alibi which allowed people to put forward claims which served their interests *as if* these were objective thoughts.

But I am anxious to relate my discussion to the particularity of the 'real world' of faith and belief within particular traditions rather than devote myself wholly to a meta-discussion of issues of higher generality about religion-in-general, which may take us to ever-increasing higher levels of abstraction and further and further away from everyday human involvement in religious beliefs and practices. So that one of my major themes will be to illustrate that extreme Fideism generally has set the scene for, and has contributed to the development of, the phenomenon known as Religious Fundamentalism. In so doing, I will take the task of philosophy to be to critically comment on the belief-forming process or processes on which such fundamentalism relies.

²² Terence Penelhum. *God and Skepticism: A Study in Skepticism and Fideism*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983, ix.

CHAPTER TWO: REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE FAITH AND REASON DEBATE

Reformed Epistemology

Richard Swinburne proposes that: 'Beliefs are views, often true but sometimes false, about how the world is. When beliefs are true and well justified, they constitute knowledge.'¹ The questions of

- (a) what is required to constitute a proper judgement that a *religious belief* is 'well justified'
 - (b) if such a justification can be said to properly indicate that the belief is 'true' in order for it to be classified as 'knowledge',
 - (c) whether there can ever be, or indeed should be, universal consensus on these matters,
 - (d) the role which 'reason' might or might not play in determining these questions, and
 - (e) whether 'faith' can or should be equated with 'religious belief',
- are issues which form part of the 'faith and reason' debate in religious epistemology.

In this chapter I want to focus on those aspects of the faith and reason debate which are bound up in what is termed *Reformed Epistemology*. In the following survey I am indebted generally to Dewey J. Hoitenga for suggesting some antecedent lines of development,² and I will be taking up and discussing some of the issues he raises.

As Hoitenga points out, mid-twentieth century pronouncements of Logical Positivism which declared religious language empty of meaning have lost much of their former appeal, as a renewed interest in the philosophy of religion has developed in contemporary philosophy.³ The term *Reformed Epistemology*, with its emphasis

¹ Richard Swinburne. *Is there a God?* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 5.

² Dewey J. Hoitenga. *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga: An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

³ Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, ix.

on the notion of the immediacy of knowledge of God, seems to have been first introduced by Alvin Plantinga in his paper entitled *The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology* which he read for the American Catholic Philosophical Association in 1980.⁴

The word *Reformed* identifies the theological tradition founded by the French reformer John Calvin (1509-1564). The epistemological claim for the immediacy of our knowledge of God derives from what has become known as Calvin's *sensus divinitatis* ('sense or awareness of divinity') expressed in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a theological handbook for French Protestants originally published in 1536, which in its final much-revised version of 1559, became disseminated widely in many different translations to form, except in countries where Lutheranism dominated, the systematic theology of the Reformation⁵.

Near the beginning of the *Institutes* Calvin says:

'There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity.... To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty..... Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honour him and to consecrate their lives to his will.'⁶

This conviction, namely, that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, at it were, in the very marrow.... It is not a doctrine that must be first learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother's womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget, although many strive with every nerve to this end.'⁷

Hoitenga raises objections to what he perceives as two misconceptions by certain contemporary philosophers of religion regarding the nature of Reformed Epistemology *vis a vis* pre-Reformation thought and practice. Firstly, he disputes the notion that because Reformed Epistemology traces its roots to Calvinism, which

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ W.S. Reid. 'John Calvin', *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, rev. edn, ed. J.D. Douglas. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, 179.

⁶ John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge. London: Clarke, 1962, I, iii, 1.

⁷ *ibid.*, I, iii, 3.

arose as a theological protest against the thought and practice of late mediaeval Christianity, and because its central claim about knowing God lies at the heart of a modern (i.e. from the 16th century onward) tradition, it is therefore a typically *modern* claim, one ‘without the force of an ancient or mediaeval tradition behind it’.⁸

I will be arguing that Hoitenga is right to point to pre-Reformation antecedents of Reformed Epistemology and I will be discussing those in this chapter.

Secondly, Hoitenga objects to the related view put forward by contemporary analytic philosophers of religion that Reformed Epistemology is best understood as a form of *fideism* in which faith not only repudiates the notion that it requires rational support but may even trump the claims of reason.⁹ I will be arguing that although Reformed Epistemology may not overtly portray itself as *fideist*, there are nonetheless important aspects in which apologetics seem to play but a minor role or no role at all and which, effectively, pave the way for the rise of religious fundamentalism.

In relation to his first objection, Hoitenga asserts that the impression that Reformed Epistemology constitutes a break with the past is reinforced by the way in which Plantinga and others do their Reformed epistemology, that is, by using ‘the new tools of modern logic and in a way that engages contemporary philosophers, many of whom are under the spell of modern Cartesian assumptions’.¹⁰ Accordingly, this gives the impression that their thinking is doubly modernistic. For they not only resist the authority of the Catholic Church and its favoured Thomistic approach to philosophy, but also embrace the essential skepticism characteristic of modern philosophy since Descartes’ time. I would add that although there is a very real sense in which Calvinism does represent a break with mediaeval Christianity’s formal doctrines of the authority of the Church and the Pope in interpreting and making accessible to ordinary people via priest and sacraments knowledge of God and of his teachings, there is also a sense in which the mystical tradition within the Church treads the same ground of the two main components of the Reformed view of

⁸ Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, x.

⁹ *ibid.*, xi.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

our knowledge of God, namely its intimacy and its vitality. But Hoitenga wants to reach into earlier antecedent realms and show that it is ‘not a new bird at all, but a wise old owl whose lineage can be traced to Athena herself, or at least to her ancient city, and to Plato, its first great philosopher’.¹¹

In relation to his second objection to the view that Reformed Epistemology is best understood as a form of *fideism*, Hoitenga points, for example, to Terence Penelhum, who, in his *God and Skepticism*, interprets Plantinga as an ‘evangelical fideist’ in the tradition of Pascal and Kierkegaard.¹² Penelhum makes the point that Plantinga, in answering criticism of his brand of Reformed epistemology, ‘makes use of arguments which, though original and contemporary, inevitably call to mind Skeptic attacks on the doctrines of infallible representations and Skeptic discussions of the criterion of truth’. However, Penelhum does not go so far as to accuse Plantinga of scepticism. He says that Plantinga successfully ‘fends off the charge of irrationality’ against his views.¹³ Nonetheless, Penelhum’s analysis of Plantinga’s position and his associating it with Wittgenstein’s approach¹⁴ may, in Hoitenga’s opinion¹⁵ (and I agree with him on this point) lend support to traditional Thomists and contemporary secular philosophers in their suspicion that Reformed Epistemology may be irrational after all.

So that I want to address the two questions of whether Reformed epistemology lacks antecedents, and whether it can rightly be accused of being a form of *fideism*.

Plantinga’s Reformed Epistemology is often lined up with the moderns against the ancients in that very important debate which has been going on since Jonathan Swift’s ‘Battle of the Books’, but this may overlook the ancient philosophical roots before Calvin. Like Augustine, Calvin appears to be appealing to the Platonic

¹¹ *ibid.*, xii.

¹² Terence Penelhum. *God and Skepticism*. Dordrecht: Reidel, c. 1983, 147.

¹³ *ibid.*, 154.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 148-51.

¹⁵ Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, xi & xii.

tradition of ‘innate ideas’ to explain how one comes to know of God's existence. The problem seems to be that if Calvin is utterly clear that human knowledge of God is originally immediate and direct, based neither on inference and argument nor on human testimony, how can it be claimed, as does Hoitenga, that one legacy of Reformed thought is an integration of faith and reason?¹⁶ For, *prima facie*, this seems to gloss over those sharp lines that have so often been drawn between natural and revealed theology.

Exploring antecedents

Plato:

As Hoitenga points out, Plato proposed the two long-standing main theories of knowledge and belief.¹⁷ The first view is described in his *Republic* where he proposes the theory that knowledge and belief are quite different and opposite mental states, and that while they may, in some formal respects be similar, knowledge is not capable of being defined in terms of belief. The second view, which is suggested in the *Meno* and explored in more detail in the *Theaetetus*, is that there is not so absolute a difference between knowledge and belief, in that knowledge is actually a form of belief, and ought to be defined in terms of belief. By this account, knowledge is *true* belief accompanied by an *account*, as Plato puts it, or, as Hoitenga suggests, in the language of contemporary philosophers, knowledge is *justified true belief*.¹⁸ The two views, as Hoitenga points out, are incompatible with each other, for in the former, knowledge is not only not definable in terms of belief - it is not definable at all.

‘Instead, by this account, knowledge is like some ultimate notions such as being, space, and time, or like some elemental sensations such as the sense of pain, the taste of salt, and the sight of the colour red - notions and sensations that are primitive and ultimate and therefore not definable in terms of anything else. Like them, knowledge is *sui generis*, in a class all by itself. We can call this the *indefinabilist* view of knowledge. By contrast, the second view is a *definabilist* view by which not only can knowledge be defined, but it must be defined if we are

¹⁶ Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, xv.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 1.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

to understand its nature at all. It must be defined in terms of truth, belief, and the ability to give an account'.¹⁹

It is in Book V of the *Republic*, as Hoitenga observes,²⁰ that Plato derives his account of knowledge and belief as two distinctly different states of mind, by contrasting the infallibility of what he terms knowledge with the fallibility of what he terms belief.²¹ His view is that on the one hand knowledge can be described as infallible because it bears an unchangeable relationship to truth, which relationship arises out of the unchanging character its objects (the Forms). On the other hand, belief can be described as fallible because of its changeable relationship with truth and this relationship arises out of the changing character of its objects (individual, physical things). It is because these objects represent an intermediate cognitive state between the Forms and nothingness, that Plato proposes that belief is therefore an intermediate cognitive state between knowledge and ignorance.²² Each cognitive state, knowledge and belief, is caused by a relationship of the mind to its object in that the mind is *in touch with* an object, that is, it has *contact* with it. Hoitenga suggests that while these terms are metaphors drawn from a relationship that can exist between physical objects, we might equally use the more literal term of *acquaintance*, to indicate the idea behind Plato's language of the intimacy that characterises the knowledge of something by direct experience of it.²³

In developing this thought, Hoitenga says:

'We may readily think of some of our beliefs as being formed by a direct *acquaintance* with sensible objects, but we may not so readily think of belief as a constantly changing 'intermediate state' that has no fixity or at least no fixed truth. This is because we think in terms of *particular beliefs*, each of which is true or false, depending on whether or not some object truly is, *at the time*, what we believe it to be at that time (or at any other time). But this view introduces a complexity into the nature of belief that is absent from the *Republic* account. This complexity becomes evident when

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*, 6.

²¹ Plato. *The Republic, Vol. I*, trans. Paul Shorey (Loeb Classical Library). London: Heinemann, 1953, Book V, Sect. 477, pp. 520-25.

²² *ibid.*, Sect. 478C-D, pp. 526-29.

²³ Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, 7.

Plato begins to explore his second approach to knowledge, namely, knowledge as true belief accompanied by an account.’

In the *Meno* Plato distinguishes knowledge, not from *belief*, but from *true belief*. Knowledge is still the more excellent mental state, but here it is more excellent than *true belief*, not belief as a general, changing state of the mind. He says that:

True opinions, so long as they abide by us, are valuable goods, and procure for us all good things: but they are not disposed to abide with us a long time; for they soon slip away out of our souls, and become fugitives. Hence they are of small value to man, until he has fastened and bound them down, by deducing them rationally from their cause. When they are thus bound and fastened, in the first place they become truly **known**, and in consequence of this they become stable and abide with us.²⁴

On this account then, knowledge has something that *true belief* (or opinion) does not have: it is fastened and bound down. But in the case of changing our belief about, say, the weather as it changes, we do not imagine that the truth of any one of the beliefs we have along the way changes. Thus, the truth of a belief about a temporal state of affairs can be seen to be as fixed and eternal as the truth of the knowledge of any of the eternal *Forms*. So that even when it refers to non-eternal things, Truth is fixed and eternal.²⁵

In the *Theaetetus* Plato elaborates this approach to knowledge when he explores the proposal that knowledge is true belief ‘tied down’ with an *account*.²⁶ In contemporary terms, Hoitenga suggests, I know something whenever: (a) I believe it, (b) it is true, and (c) I am justified in (or can give a justification for) my belief.²⁷ However, when, in the last section of the *Theaetetus*, Plato examines three possible interpretations of ‘giving an account’, only to reject each one, Hoitenga is tempted to conclude that Plato is not very committed to, or even that he is abandoning, the whole approach.²⁸ And we may also be tempted to conclude that his settled view is

²⁴ Plato. *Meno*, trans. Floyer Sydenham, in *Five Dialogues of Plato*, (Everyman edn). London: Dent & Sons, 1910, Sect. 98A, p. 128.

²⁵ Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, 9.

²⁶ Plato. *Theaetetus*, trans. R.A.H. Waterfield. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987, Sects 201D-210A, pp. 114-130.

²⁷ Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, 10.

²⁸ *ibid.*

really the approach he adopts in the *Republic*. But two pieces of evidence do not seem to fit with that conclusion:²⁹ ‘Firstly, the *Theaetetus* definition of knowledge as ‘true belief with an account’ appears at too many critical points in Plato’s dialogues for us to dismiss it simply because he fails in the *Theaetetus* to elaborate it to his satisfaction. Importantly, he appears to rely on this approach in *Phaedo*³⁰, in the *Symposium*³¹, and in *Timaeus*³². Secondly, even in the *Republic*, there are key passages³³ especially where he declares that knowledge - even of the Good - requires an ability to give an account.’³⁴

Therefore, it would be a mistake simply to regard Plato’s identification of *knowledge* with *acquaintance* as his definitive theory of knowledge and belief. Hoitenga suggests that we should, perhaps, do what Plato did not do - that is, incorporate his acquaintance approach to knowledge into his more complex approach that knowledge is justified true belief. When Plato says that the knower needs to be able to *give an account*, it is fairly clear that what he means by this phrase is the ability to give a *reason* that will not collapse under questioning. And such questioning comprises not only the ability to infer conclusions from premises, but also the ability to discover the ultimate premises from which all conclusion can be derived. This ultimate discovery, however, takes the form of some direct intuition of reason - what Hoitenga calls its ‘acquaintance with an object’.³⁵

However, in the *Meno* we cover new ground when Plato explores the notion of testimony, and makes the distinction between first-hand experience which gives

²⁹ *ibid.*, 10 & 11.

³⁰ Plato. ‘Phaedo’, *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick & Harold Tarrant. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993, Sect. 76B, p. 133.

³¹ Plato. *Symposium*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (Loeb Classical Library). London: Heinemann, 1953, Sect. 202A, pp. 174-75.

³² Plato. *Timaeus*, trans. R.G. Bury (Loeb Classical Library). London: Heinemann, 1952, Sect. 51E, pp. 121-23.

³³ Plato. *The Republic, Vol. II*, trans. Paul Shorey (Loeb Classical Library). London: Heinemann, 1951, Book VI: Sect. 506C, pp. 92-94; Sect. 506D, pp. 94-95; Book VII: Sect. 531E, pp. 194-97.

³⁴ *ibid.*, Book VII: Sect. 534B-C, pp. 206-09.

³⁵ Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, 27.

‘knowledge’ (episteme, or ἐπιστημη), and second- (or other-) hand experience which gives various sorts of more or less justified ‘belief’ (doxa, or δοξα). Socrates asks, ‘A man who knew the way to Larissa, and went there and guided others would surely lead them well and correctly?’. ‘Certainly’ is the answer. ‘What if someone had had a correct opinion as to which was the way but had not gone there no indeed had knowledge of it, would he not also lead correctly?’. Once again, the answer is ‘Certainly’.³⁶

As Hoytenga points out, ‘This example suggests that the person who knows the way to Larissa has taken the way himself, and so is personally acquainted with it. Whereas the person who believes truly has not taken it, and so is not *acquainted* with what he believes’³⁷. Plato does not actually tell us how that person acquired such belief, but I agree with Hoytenga that we can probably safely assume that either the believer was told the way to Larissa by someone who *had* taken the way himself or by someone else possessing the true belief. Otherwise, he probably saw a sign or read a map. In all these cases, however, he surely acquired his belief by someone else’s *testimony* - which is ‘the only other way to find anything out (except for inference), if one is not, or cannot become, acquainted with it for oneself’.³⁸

Effectively, if we travel from Athens to Larissa, we ‘know’ the road, whereas if we learn how to get there from someone else what we have is true belief.

Augustine:

Christianity teaches that belief also arises from *divine* testimony, from faith in the word of God. No Christian account of knowledge, therefore, can overlook the nature and role of faith, which in the Hebrew sense has more to do with a volitional-emotional element of trust than with its intellectual element of belief. Hoytenga points out that St Augustine (AD 354-430) was the first great Christian thinker to synthesise the biblical concept of faith with the Greek concepts of

³⁶ Plato, *Meno*, *op. cit.*, Sect. 97A-B, pp. 126-27.

³⁷ Hoytenga, *op. cit.*, 13.

³⁸ *ibid.*

knowledge and belief - summed up in his formula, *fides quaerens intellectum*, 'faith seeking understanding'.³⁹ Augustine writes that, 'Now it is faith to believe that which you do not yet see; and the reward of this faith is to see that which you believe'.⁴⁰ Although Augustine acknowledges that the ancient philosophers discovered many things about human nature without the help of faith in Christian revelation, he nonetheless grants that the faculty of reason is something whereby God made us superior to all other living beings, and sees that faculty as a demonstration that 'we are made in the likeness of God'.⁴¹

In expressing these ideas, Augustine seems to approach the Reformed concept of an innate ability implanted by God to 'see' incorporeal realities, as expounded by Calvin's *sensus divinitatis* cited at the beginning of this chapter.⁴²

Calvin:

Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*, expressed in the sentence, 'There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity', suggests an immediacy of knowledge of God.⁴³ Hoitenga suggests that the term *awareness* (Latin: *sensus*) relates to our sensation of physical objects, and that Calvin sees an analogy between our knowledge of God and our acquaintance with these physical objects.⁴⁴ The directness and immediacy of such knowledge contrasts with the indirectness and remoteness associated both with conclusions which we derive from reasoning and proof (as in natural theology) and the beliefs acquired on the testimony of other human beings.⁴⁵

So that the difference between Calvin and Augustine seems to be that Calvin uses the

³⁹ Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, 57.

⁴⁰ Augustine. *Sermon 43*, in *Introduction to the Philosophy of St. Augustine: Selected Readings and Commentaries*, ed. J.A. Mourant. State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1964, 41.

⁴¹ Augustine. *Sermon 43*, *op. cit.*

⁴² Augustine. *On Free Will*, II, iii.7- xv.39, and *Against the Academics*.

⁴³ Calvin, *op. cit.*, I, iii, 43.

⁴⁴ Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, 150.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

language of experience signified by the term *awareness*, not the language of reason and rational vision of Augustine.

One might possibly argue then that Calvin's awareness of God, if interpreted as a natural revelation, makes any argument for the existence of God unnecessary. How, then, could the awareness of God be connected to reason as a faculty? Though Calvin does not say, it could be that reason *formulates* for its understanding the *content* of the awareness of God in specific propositions, e.g. that God exists and that he is our Maker, that God is majestic, that he ought to be worshipped, and that he is just one being, not many.⁴⁶ These are the main propositions that express the knowledge of God that all human beings possess by natural reason alone, that is, by the reason that formulates the content of their immediate awareness of God. It is true to say that Calvin does not thus explicitly link the awareness of God to reason. But it is true to say that he sees no conflict between the function of natural reason and the knowledge of God when he says: 'The more anyone endeavours to approach to God, the more he proves himself endowed with reason'.⁴⁷ Elsewhere, he declares that reason's highest and final purpose is to know God: 'Man in his first condition excelled in these pre-eminent endowments, so that his reason, understanding, prudence and judgement not only sufficed for the direction of his earthly life, but by them men mounted up even to God and eternal bliss'.⁴⁸ So that like Augustine, Calvin does see reason as one of God's great gifts to human beings.

Peter Forrest proposes that Calvin's *sensus divinitatis* is a 'natural capacity to know there is a God', that those without this 'capacity' could be termed 'God-blind', and moreover that this natural capacity is in fact 'an ability to reason implicitly to theism'⁴⁹. He likens this capacity to our natural capacity to know the colours of things. But he also raises the objection that we have excellent reason to believe the

⁴⁶ Calvin, *op. cit.*, I, iii, 1; x, 3.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, I, xv, 6.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, I, xv, 8.

⁴⁹ Peter Forrest. *God without the Supernatural: A Defense of Scientific Theism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, 18-19.

pink of the clouds at sunset to be an optical illusion. Whether we accept or reject the arguments of philosophers like Locke who deny that leaves are green except in the sense of causing in us the appropriate sensations, we should not dismiss them on the grounds that the leaves are *obviously* green. Forrest concludes that there is a moral in this for those who would rely on the *sensus divinitatis* to avoid the project of apologetics, and in fact I will be arguing that Christian fundamentalism, does, irresponsibly, either try to avoid the project of apologetics (and in many instances succeeds), or to subject its apologetics to the censorship of fundamentalism.

So that Hoitenga offers us a summary at this point: Both Augustine and Calvin teach that all human beings, including non-Christians, have ‘universal, immediate, non-inferential knowledge of God’⁵⁰ - in the language of rational vision for Augustine, and in the language of awareness for Calvin. while both use the ‘language of divine illumination of the mind’⁵¹. Hoitenga observes:

‘Their theory of knowledge can thus be seen as a combination of Plato's approach to knowledge in the *Republic*, which defines knowledge as direct acquaintance with an object, and his approach to belief in the *Meno*, which illustrates it as accepting a proposition on testimony. Neither Augustine nor Calvin considers the other Platonic approach in the *Theaetetus*, which defines knowledge as justified true belief’⁵² (my underlining).

Plantinga:

Instead of basing Christian doctrines on faith one might argue that they are basic beliefs, i.e.. beliefs that form the foundation of other beliefs. Such an approach to Christian doctrine has its source in a critique of the classical foundational approach to epistemology. Foundationalism was once a widely accepted view in epistemology and, although it has undergone modification, it still has many advocates. The

⁵⁰ Hoitenga, 175.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

motivation for the view was compelling. All of our beliefs cannot be justified in terms of other beliefs without the justification generating an infinite regress or vicious circularity. Therefore, there must be some beliefs that do not need to be justified by other beliefs. Because they form the foundation of all knowledge, these are called basic and the statements expressing them are called basic statements. Classical foundationalism considered only two types of basic statements: certain simple and true statements of mathematics, for example '2 + 2 = 4', and logic, for example, 'Either p or ~p', and those statements that are evident to the senses.

Plantinga offers his own theory of knowledge as *justified true belief*, but begins his epistemological investigations with a theory of *properly basic belief*, which demonstrates the continuity of his thought with that of Augustine and Calvin.⁵³ His theory of properly basic belief is a theory of belief in its intellectual sense. Belief that the proposition that God exists is true, represents the central properly basic belief in question, that is that a believer is entirely rational, entirely within his epistemic rights, in *starting with* belief in God, in accepting it as basic, and in taking it as premise for argument to other conclusions.⁵⁴

In other words, Plantinga argues against classical foundationalism, maintaining that belief in God should be considered a basic belief. He argues that traditional arguments for the existence of God are not needed for rational belief. He cites with approval Calvin's *sensus divinitatis* claim that God created humans in such a way that they have a strong tendency to belief in God. Although this natural tendency to believe in God may be partially suppressed, Plantinga argues that it is triggered by 'a widely realisable condition'⁵⁵ such as 'upon beholding the starry heavens, or the

⁵³ I rely principally on the following :

Alvin Plantinga. 'Reason and Belief in God', *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. A. Plantinga & N. Wolterstorff. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, 16-93.

Alvin Plantinga. 'The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology', and 'On Reformed Epistemology', *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael Peterson, et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 309-21; 330-36.

⁵⁴ Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', *op. cit.*, 72.

⁵⁵ Plantinga. 'Religious Belief Without Evidence', *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Louis P. Pojman. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1987, 464.

splendid majesty of the mountains, or the intricate, articulate beauty of a tiny flower'.⁵⁶ This natural tendency to accept God in these circumstances is perfectly rational, he says. No argument is needed. He maintains that the best interpretation of Calvin's views, as well as the other Reformed thinkers he cites, is that they rejected classical foundationalism and maintained that belief in God can itself be a properly basic belief. His theory of properly basic belief is a theory of belief in its intellectual sense. Belief that the proposition that God exists is true represents the central properly basic belief in question, that is that a believer is entirely rational, entirely within his epistemic rights, in *starting with* belief in God, in accepting it as basic, and in taking it as premise for argument to other conclusions.⁵⁷ In other words, a basic belief is a proposition that one believes without basing it, and without needing to base it, on other propositions that one believes. There is an immediacy of assent to such beliefs that does not rely on one having to first assent to other beliefs as their basis.

How is one to arrive at a criterion of being properly basic? According to Plantinga the route is 'broadly speaking, *inductive*'. 'We must assemble examples of beliefs and conditions such that the former are obviously properly basic in the latter.... We must frame hypotheses as to the necessary and sufficient conditions of proper basicity and test these hypotheses by reference to those examples.'⁵⁸ He argues that, using this procedure,

'The Christian will of course suppose that belief in God is entirely proper and rational; if he does not accept this belief on the basis of other propositions, he will conclude that it is basic for him and quite properly so. Followers of Russell and Madelyn Murray O'Hare may disagree; but how is that relevant? Must my criteria, or those of the Christian community conform to their examples? Surely not. The Christian community is responsible to *its* set of examples, not to theirs.'⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 465.

⁵⁷ Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', *op. cit.*, 72.

⁵⁸ Plantinga, 'Religious Belief Without Evidence', *op. cit.*, 468.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

Along with the Reformers he says that, 'for a Christian to accept belief in God on the basis of argument is to run the risk of a faith that is unstable and wavering, subject to all the wayward whim and fancy of the latest academic fashion'.⁶⁰ The problem, of course, is that this may be a properly basic and rational belief for a theist such as Plantinga, but it is hardly likely to impress the non-theist in the slightest. Anthony Flew, when he was visiting the Institute of Foreign Philosophy at Beijing, had discussions with his graduate student 'minder', who was acquainted with the concept of the theist God.⁶¹ But he had met that concept only as today any of us might happen to come upon the notions of Aphrodite or Poseidon. He had never had any occasion to confront it as, what William James called, a 'live option' - any more than, for any of our contemporaries anywhere, belief in the real existence of the gods of Mount Olympus constitutes such an option. So that the Beijing student of philosophy did not know whether to be more amused or more indignant when he first learnt from Descartes that our Maker has imprinted upon every human soul - as his trademark, as it were - the authentic idea of God, a concept that supposedly is too splendid to have been shaped by merely human agency, and from which it is allegedly possible immediately to infer the existence of the corresponding God. For were not his compatriots also supposed to be God's creatures, and if so, how had God failed to imprint his trademark upon their souls? Plantinga's effective reply (as cited above) is to say that for the Christian, belief in God is entirely proper and rational, and while others (agnostics, atheists etc) may disagree, this is not relevant. In other words, as Hoitenga puts it, it is not that epistemology is a religiously neutral inquiry or the arbiter of the legitimacy of religious belief, but that religious belief is the arbiter (or one of the arbiters) of epistemology.⁶²

So that whereas Calvin's position is that we have an *a priori* conviction that there is a God, Plantinga, without denying Calvin's *sensus*, seems to go further by considering convictions grounded in experience. In other words that we have an innate tendency to interpret experience in a theistic fashion and that this tendency is

⁶⁰ Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', *op. cit.*, 72.

⁶¹ Anthony Flew. 'Flying in the face of reason', *The Philosophers' Magazine*, 10 (Spring 2000), 41.

⁶² Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, 185.

on a par with the tendency to interpret experiences as of objects. As Hoitenga points out, Plantinga is saying, in effect, that just as we can point to the grounds of our memory beliefs, our beliefs in other persons, and our beliefs in physical objects, so we can point to the grounds of our belief in God. Theists can point to ‘conditions that justify and ground belief in God’ in the same way that we all can do the same thing for those other properly basic beliefs.⁶³

So that while Plantinga says that belief in God, like Calvin's natural awareness of God, is entirely rational and proper for human beings because it is, like some other important properly basic beliefs, immediate and based on no other beliefs that offer evidence for it, he also insists that although belief in God and beliefs about God's attributes and actions are basic, for Reformed epistemologists this does not mean that there are no justifying circumstances or that they are without grounds. The circumstances that trigger the natural tendency to believe in God and to believe certain things about God provide the justifying circumstances for belief. So that although beliefs about God are properly basic, they are not arbitrary and groundless.⁶⁴

This seems initially puzzling since one would normally suppose that basic beliefs by definition are groundless. Plantinga goes on to explain by drawing an analogy between basic statements of religion and basic statements of perception and memory. A perceptual belief, he says is taken as properly basic only under certain circumstances. For example if I know that I am wearing rose-tinted glasses, then I am not justified in taking the statement “I see a rose-coloured wall before me” as properly basic. If I know that my memory is unreliable, I am not justified in taking the statement “I remember that I had breakfast” as properly basic. Similarly, he maintains that not every statement about God that is not based on argument or evidence should be considered properly basic. A statement is properly basic only in the right circumstances. What circumstances are right? Plantinga gives no general

⁶³ Hoitenga, *op. cit.*, 186.

⁶⁴ Plantinga. ‘Is Belief in God Properly Basic?’, *Nous* 15 (1981), 46.

account, but in addition to the triggering conditions mentioned above, the right circumstances include reading the Bible, having done something wrong, and being in grave danger. Thus if a person is reading the Bible and believes that God is speaking to him or her, his or her belief is properly basic.

But does this assertion satisfactorily explain why just any belief could not be taken as properly basic, if the holder of that belief genuinely thought that it was not in fact an arbitrary and groundless belief? Plantinga seems to be answering this objection when he refers to the notion that some people may believe that the Great Pumpkin returns every Halloween.⁶⁵ He says that integral to the notion of being properly grounded is the notion that, as we've seen Calvin put it, God has implanted in all of us a natural tendency to see his hand in the world around us. The same, says Plantinga, cannot be said about the Great Pumpkin - there is no tendency implanted in me which suggests that the Great Pumpkin returns every Halloween, for there is no Great Pumpkin, and no natural tendency to accept beliefs about the Great Pumpkin. For Plantinga, therefore, no such belief could be taken as properly basic.

But suppose that the Pumpkinite made the claim that he was convinced that the Great Pumpkin had indeed implanted in him an innate belief in the existence of the Great Pumpkin and an innate tendency to see the hand of the Great Pumpkin in the world around him. Why should this subjective claim be any less compelling than Plantinga's subjective claim? The Great Pumpkinite may well discern with just as much passion and conviction, as do Plantinga or Calvin in respect of God, a natural tendency to accept beliefs about the Great Pumpkin, such that he returns every Halloween or, indeed, any other truths that might be revealed to him in mystic experiences of the Great Pumpkin and deemed worthy of adding to his armoury of beliefs. This would surely be quite sufficient for the Great Pumpkinite to take his beliefs as 'properly basic'. Let us compare those hypothetical experiences with other instances. Consider the religious/mystical experiences of Simone Weil,⁶⁶ St Joan of

⁶⁵ Plantinga. 'The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology', *op. cit.*, 320.

⁶⁶ M. Peterson et al. *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 117-18.

Arc,⁶⁷ and St Teresa of Avila.⁶⁸ It's unlikely that Plantinga would reject claims that their beliefs derived from their mystical experiences were properly grounded, but he may not have the same degree of confidence in respect of the belief-claims of members of the Heaven's Gate cult in California whose alleged religious experiences and/or God-implanted inborn disposition caused them to develop a belief that by mass suicide in 1997 they could rendezvous with a spacecraft that would take them to the Kingdom of God.⁶⁹ And yet these were highly intelligent and articulate people who would have no trouble in not only establishing to their own satisfaction that their beliefs were properly grounded, but in mounting a rational defence of their beliefs to justify them as true knowledge. That these beliefs were held with deep conviction is obvious in that they went to the lengths of sacrificing their lives in the hope of accelerated post-mortem glory. Plantinga would probably agree that these were 'deaths by delusion' as the heading of the source article suggests, but what is it that might enable us to differentiate between the supposedly non-delusionary grounds of the properly basic beliefs of Weil, Joan of Arc and Teresa of Avila, and the probably delusionary grounds of the non-properly basic beliefs of the Great Pumpkinite and the Heaven's Gate cult?

But have we really got to the heart of why just any sincerely held belief could not be accepted as 'properly grounded', and in particular how a Reformed Epistemologist can show a Great Pumpkinite, for example, that **his** belief is **not** properly grounded, and therefore not properly basic? This is precisely the sort of question that Van Hook poses.⁷⁰ But when Plantinga proceeds to answer it he does a most extraordinary thing. Instead of addressing himself to the objection as a good Reformed Epistemologist might be expected to do, he dismisses the question as apparently irrelevant, although giving no reason for so doing.⁷¹ Then, in its place, he poses a *different* question by asking us to suppose that the theist can't show the

⁶⁷ M. Magnusson. *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*, 5th edn. Edinburgh: Chambers, 1990, 783.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 1442.

⁶⁹ R. Lusetich. 'Death by Delusion', *The Weekend Australian*, 29-30 March 1997, 21.

⁷⁰ J.M. Van Hook, 'Knowledge, Belief, and Reformed Epistemology', in *Philosophy and Religion: Selected Readings*, ed. M. Peterson, et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 327.

⁷¹ Plantinga, 'On Reformed Epistemology', *op. cit.*, 334.

Pumpkinite that he is mistaken in rejecting the theist's belief in God - a shift from the problem of being unable to show that someone's else's belief is not properly basic, to the problem of being unable to show the mistake in someone's else rejection of one's own allegedly properly basic belief. This 'mistake' of *rejection*, it should be noted is not shown to be connected to the pumpkinite's 'mistake' in *accepting* his own properly basic belief. Plantinga then makes a further shift by asking why we should suppose that the theist's inability to show how the Pumpkinite is mistaken in rejecting the theist's belief in God, would show that the theist doesn't really know that, for example, God created the world, because the theist can't prove such a contention to the satisfaction of the sceptic. But the problem is that no one is **doing** any such supposing. Why should they? It's completely irrelevant to the original question posed by Van Hook, and looks suspiciously like a ploy by Plantinga to divert attention from the original issue, and to avoid answering a perfectly legitimate, and, I would have thought, obvious, question. In effect what Plantinga does is to shift from the problem of one's being unable to point out the flaws in someone's claim (the first scenario), to the problem of being unable to prove one's own contention to the satisfaction of a critic (second scenario). He concludes that the second scenario does not necessarily disprove one's own contention, as if that were somehow an adequate response to the original question of how one can show how and why someone else's belief is not properly basic, in order to differentiate between proper and improper basicity.

So does Plantinga really convince us that Reformed Epistemology is not really a less crude form of fideism, or is not some metaphysical sleight-of-hand? Isn't Kierkegaard simply exercising intellectual integrity when he advocates a 'leap of faith' which he says must be taken when the ladder of reason has been climbed to its fullest extent? Plantinga's argument that belief in God is analogous to other properly basic beliefs such as 'our beliefs in physical objects', does not seem to sufficiently meet the objection that whereas we can realistically expect universal consensus that beliefs arising out of our direct experience of empirical observations concerning the existence of trees, the hardness of steel, and the ability of most birds to fly in the air,

are indeed properly basic, there is no way we can expect anything like universal consensus on the question of whether belief in God is similarly properly basic. And if he does rely on this to avoid the charge of irrationality and crypto-fideism, then I think his argument is inadequate. His protest that Calvin's *sensus divinitatis* may not be true for all people and cannot be expected to be endorsed by those outside a theistic community, seems to be an attempt to edit and dilute Calvin's claim which surely is intended by its author to be universally applicable to all people, not just to those already subscribing to a form of theism.

I am going to suggest an analogy that I consider comes very close to demonstrating that a belief which is highly subjective can be seen to be both obviously properly basic for the believer and to be analogous to 'beliefs in physical objects'. Consider a group of people who identify as homosexual and have so identified ever since early childhood. It's perfectly feasible, I would suggest, that they would not feel the need to justify their belief in their homosexual orientation by rational argument before they acknowledged its vivid reality; as far as they were concerned their sexuality was perfectly rational, not odd, nor irrational; they would see their sexual orientation as something which was innate and not learned; it would not be something which they arrived at following a process of weighing up the evidence for and against the proposition that they were homosexual; they would not have to rely on knowledge of other beliefs to arrive at knowledge of their own homosexuality; they would certainly not feel mistaken in their conviction concerning the reality of their sexuality. By all of Plantinga's criteria, they would undoubtedly believe that their sexuality was something which was, for them 'properly grounded' in the sense that it would be inconceivable that there could be any other reality or truth for them concerning their sexuality. And moreover, the belief would seem to meet any objection that is it not relevantly similar to other properly basic beliefs that fall outside the criterion of classical foundationalism, and that it is too close to comfort to irrational beliefs like belief in the Great Pumpkin.

But some might argue that this analogy between the proper basicity of the group's belief about their sexuality and the proper basicity of Plantinga's belief in God is not justified. For although what one might call the essential quality of the group's sexuality could be tested empirically by observing and measuring erotic responses, it is the impossibility of similarly testing the essential quality of religious belief that keeps the debate about proper basicity going. Secondly, whereas the awareness within each member of the group of their sexuality was formed in all probability *despite* the prevailing heterosexual culture in which they were raised, Plantinga's awareness within him of God's existence was formed in all probability *because* of the prevailing religious culture in which he was raised.⁷²

So that the properly basic religious belief formed within a person belonging to a specific culture or religion, may be entirely at odds with the properly basic religious belief of another person from a different culture or religion. I would suggest that for many people, such beliefs do tend to mirror the dominant beliefs or one of the prevailing beliefs found in the culture in which they have been raised.⁷³ So that what properly basic beliefs are grounded in may well be determined wholly or predominantly by any one of the diverse, contradictory, and pluralist cultures or religions which are to be found in the world.

People who hold beliefs directly justified by religious experience invariably regard their beliefs as necessarily true, especially if they have, to their satisfaction, answered contra-arguments - otherwise they would not hold those beliefs, nor (at times) undergo martyrdom rather than relinquish them. In other words, Reformed Epistemologists are, to use Basinger's term, Reformed Exclusivists⁷⁴ who, effectively, believe that *their* belief-forming mechanisms are functioning properly while the equivalent mechanisms in others who hold beliefs contrary to theirs, are faulty. This is consistent with most Christians' conviction that they hold divine truth

⁷² Ronald James Skilton. *Ways of Knowing: Implications of theories of cognition for religious education*. University of Queensland: PhD Thesis, 1996, 76-77.

⁷³ D. Basinger. 'Reformed Epistemology and Hick's Religious Pluralism', *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, ed. M. Peterson, et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 341-42.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 341.

whereas dissenting believers are somehow mistaken. So we have somehow to account for the fact that other Christians, equally earnest and sincere as Plantinga, have, using their apparently God-given belief-forming mechanisms, formed within themselves what they regard as properly basic beliefs, which are quite at odds with some of Plantinga's similarly acquired beliefs. Plantinga's argument is that because of 'the fall' and the entry of sin into the world, some people suffer from religious epistemic blindness. That is, they do not possess properly functioning belief-forming mechanisms. All of which means that exclusivist Christians come to the conclusion that only those people whose religious belief-forming mechanisms produce the same beliefs as held by them, do **not** suffer from epistemic blindness. And this raises the exquisite problem of how it is possible to distinguish between (a) those who suffer from epistemic blindness and (b) those who are blessedly free of epistemic blindness, and how, consequently, it is possible to differentiate between (a) those who hold properly grounded beliefs and (b) those who hold improperly grounded beliefs, given that both groups would claim that they hold authentic properly basic beliefs and that their own belief-forming mechanisms are perfectly reliable.

I suggest that this illustrates the fundamental problem of the subjective nature of what is supposedly proper basicity. Surely, with no empirical and objective criteria being available to differentiate what is a properly basic religious belief and what is not, it's an impossible task. And the same problem is encountered when trying to differentiate between reliable and unreliable belief-forming mechanisms. (Later on in this thesis, I will be suggesting ways and means of empirically testing the belief-results which flow from certain belief-forming mechanisms.) The exclusivist has to try to explain why it should be the case that only those Christians whose belief-forming mechanisms produce exclusivistic beliefs compatible with their own beliefs are the only people who do not suffer from epistemic blindness.

Plantinga, however, does not dismiss the possibility that, as Gutting's Catholic character avers,⁷⁵ at best they have a right to accept their particular version of Christianity as a matter of personal opinion, or maybe as a matter of peer-group relativism, for Plantinga himself said that, 'Perhaps a religious belief (as opposed to a memory belief, or a sense belief) is properly basic only if it shared by a community; perhaps a merely private religion is irrational'.⁷⁶

Traditional Protestant fideism ignores or denies the rationality of belief in God, seeing neither an inherent opposition between faith and reason, nor their peaceful co-existence side by side in two different orders of nature and grace, as in the Thomist tradition. Plantinga's current position in the faith and reason debate is summed up in his recent interview with Peter Fosl.⁷⁷ Plantinga feels that from his perspective, which is shared by most Christians, faith and reason are two partly separate sources of warranted belief. They are also two separate sources of true belief. Hence they are two separate sources of knowledge. Reason, as he thinks of it, comprises the cognitive powers and faculties of properly functioning human beings. He holds that God has created us human beings with a battery of faculties, or cognitive powers - faculties like memory and sense perception. Another faculty is what we might call *testimony*, whereby we are inclined to believe what other tell us, and thus can learn from them. Still another faculty is *induction*, whereby we can learn from experience because we expect the future will be like the past in relevant respects. In addition, he says, there is a *rational insight*, whereby we know something of mathematics and logic, and can see that the conclusion of a good argument follows from the premises. We can group perception, memory rational insight, induction and testimony together, and call that group of faculties 'reason'. So there is much we know by reason, including what we know in the sciences. But from the Christian perspective there is also what we know by faith. These are what Jonathan Edwards calls 'the great things of the gospel': that God has created us

⁷⁵ G. Gutting. 'The Catholic and the Calvinist: A Dialogue on Faith and Reason', *Faith and Philosophy*, 2, 1985, 237.

⁷⁶ Van Hook, *op. cit.*, 328.

⁷⁷ Peter Fosl. 'Warrant and Belief', *The Philosophers' Magazine*, 10 (Spring 2000), 48-50.

human being in his image; that by virtue of the greatest catastrophe ever to befall the world, human beings have fallen into sin, thus requiring redemption and renewal; that God has provided a means for this redemption by way of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Divine Trinity who emptied himself, became incarnate and took on our nature. Plantinga uses the term 'know' or 'knowledge' advisedly. Faith is not to be *contrasted* with knowledge. Here he follows John Calvin in holding that faith is a certain sort of knowledge, a special case of knowledge, 'a firm and certain knowledge', as Calvin says, 'of God's benevolence towards us'. Plantinga's main point here is that faith is a special source of *knowledge*, knowledge that can't be arrived at by way of reason alone. So that he arrives at the following two-part conclusion:

(1) Faith and reason are separate, in that the main deliverances of faith are not among the deliverances of reason. We can't by philosophical reasoning or by science discover those 'great truths of the gospel'. And of course there is much that we know by reason but not by faith.

(2) However, he maintains that reason can assist in supporting faith in a variety of ways - the two most traditionally emphasized have been positive and negative apologetics. The first is a matter of giving rational proofs or arguments (proof or arguments from reason alone) for central propositions of the faith, for example that there is such a person as God. This is the locus of traditional (ontological, cosmological, teleological) and nontraditional theistic arguments. The second, negative apologetics, is a matter of rebutting or refuting arguments against propositions of the faith, for example, the free will defence with respect to the claim that the existence of evil and that of God are logically incompatible.

Plantinga started out as an internalist in his portrayal of properly basic belief along the lines of the Calvinist's *a priori* model, but has now moved to being an externalist by proposing that religious properly basic beliefs are warranted if they can be shown to be analogous to other properly basic beliefs of an experiential nature.

The problems with Plantinga's defence of the thesis that belief in God is basic can be summarised as follows:

First, to consider belief in God as a basic belief seems completely out of keeping with the spirit and intention of foundationalism. Whatever else it was and whatever its problems, foundationalism was an attempt to provide critical tools for objectively appraising knowledge claims and to give knowledge a nonrelativistic basis. Paradoxically, Plantinga's foundationalism is radically relativistic and puts any belief beyond rational appraisal once it is declared basic.

Second, Plantinga's claim that his proposal would not allow just any old belief to become a basic belief is misleading. It is true that it would not allow just any old belief to become a basic belief *from the point of view of Reformed epistemologists*. However, it would seem to allow any belief at all to become basic from the point of view of *some* community. Although Reformed epistemologists would not have to accept voodoo beliefs as rational, voodoo followers would be able to claim that insofar as they are basic in the voodoo community they are rational, and moreover, that Reformed thought was irrational in this community.

Third, on this view the rationality of any belief is absurdly easy to obtain. The cherished belief that is held without reason by *any* group could be considered properly basic by the group's members. There would be no way to evaluate critically any beliefs so considered. The community's most cherished beliefs and the conditions that, according to the community, correctly triggered such beliefs would be accepted uncritically by the members of the community as just so many more examples of basic beliefs and justifying conditions.

Fourth, Plantinga seems to suppose that there is a consensus in the Christian community about what beliefs are basic and what conditions justify these. But this is not so for those Christians who believe in God on the basis of the traditional arguments or on the basis of religious experiences. Their belief in God is not basic.

More important, there would be no agreement on whether certain doctrinal beliefs, for example, ones concerning the authority of the pope, the composition of the Trinity, the nature of Christ, or the means of salvation, were true, let alone basic.

Fifth, as we have seen, Plantinga, following Calvin, says that some conditions that trigger belief in God or particular beliefs about God also justify these beliefs so that although these beliefs concerning God are basic, they are not groundless. Although Plantinga gives no general account of what these justifying conditions are, he presents some examples of what he means and likens these justifying conditions to those of properly basic perceptual and memory statements. The problem here is, however, the weakness of the analogy. As Plantinga point out, before we take a perceptual or memory belief as properly basic we must have evidence that one's perception or memory is not faulty. Part of one's justification for believing that one's perception or memory is not faulty is that in general it agrees with the perception or memory of our epistemological peers.

But lack of agreement is commonplace in religious contexts. Different beliefs are triggered in different people when they behold the starry heavens or read the Bible. Beholding the starry heavens can trigger a pantheistic belief, or a purely aesthetic response without any religious component, or even no particular response or belief at all. From what we know about the variations of religious belief, it is likely that people would not have theistic beliefs when they behold the starry heavens if they had been raised in nontheistic environments. In short, there is no consensus in the Christian community, let alone among Bible readers generally. So, unlike perception and memory, there are no grounds for claiming that a belief about God is properly basic since the conditions that trigger it yield widespread disagreement among epistemological peers.

Christian Fundamentalism

I would argue that the acceptance of the doctrine of proper basicity in Reformed Epistemology, all too often divorced from the restraining influence of apologetics

and warrant, carries with it the germ of religious fundamentalism with all its potentially negative connotations of exclusivist claims for privileged epistemological status. Many contemporary fundamentalists demand the freedom to express, and if possible to impose by legislation, force or coercion, their own brand of religious beliefs and practices, while seeking to deny or limit religious freedom to others who find themselves occupying positions on faith and morals which happen to be not aligned with fundamentalist norms.

In many cases fundamentalist excesses have only been reigned in by secular laws and prohibitions. However, judging by frequent public pronouncements by fundamentalists on morality and public behaviour, one is left with the distinct impression that they still hanker after the 'good old days' of control and repression, as exemplified by the Catholic Inquisition, or by Calvin's Genevan Laws which sought total control over citizens' lives, with punishments such as drowning prescribed for adultery.

The moderating influence of secular laws designed to stay such overt violence, can be seen as analogous to the restraining influence of apologetics on the enthusiasms of extreme fideists.

CHAPTER THREE: MINDSETS, SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Mindsets

Allan Snyder of the *Australian Centre for the Mind* has this to say about mindsets:

‘We can only see this world through our mindsets - our preconceptions derived from past experiences and prior knowledge. Our brains have craftily evolved this particular strategy for good reason. Mindsets are a biological necessity if we are to manoeuvre rapidly in important and familiar situations. Our interpretation of the world depends on our frame of reference. This is why two people who look at the very same cloud often see completely different meaningful pictures in what are obviously randomly formed cloud formations. But as a consequence of mindsets, we are vulnerable to prejudice in the form of illusions and assumptions. Put simply, there is a cost for adopting any strategy that accelerates our decision-making process. Nothing can be seen within a neutral frame of reference.’¹

I would agree that nothing can be seen within a neutral frame of reference. And I would argue that although, in the formation of a mindset we necessarily form prejudices in the form of illusions and assumption, these become, by the due process of that formation, transformed into a kind of pre-reflective thought (akin, say to Kant’s belief in the phenomenal/noumenal worlds which he held since childhood long before he started to philosophise in order to establish them by rational argument²) which comes to be relied upon without question.

But I would also argue that the only way to avoid falling prey to prejudice in the form of illusions and assumptions as a consequence of adopting an accelerated decision-making process, is to deliberately focus on one’s own mindset in such a way that the pre-reflective thought which inhabits it is held up to examination at critical points of decision-making to an extent sufficient to enable us to question our mindset assumptions in order to offset the otherwise ever-present vulnerability. This process effectively constitutes the rational or scientific approach to exploring and explaining the workings of the universe. An unwillingness or an unwitting failure to engage in such a process is, I would argue, an important hallmark of the religious

¹ Allan Snyder. ‘Game, mindset and match’, *The Weekend Australian*, December 4-5 1999, 30.

² Bryan Magee. *Confessions of a Philosopher*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997, 262-63.

fundamentalist mindset. And this may well result in distorted perceptions of ontological reality when such a process is appropriated by the fundamentalist mindset to interpret natural phenomena in religious terms. Indeed, Stephen Jay Gould goes so far as to draw clear distinctions between the operation of a scientific mindset and the operation of a religious mindset in mutually exclusive ways. Is, therefore, the movement from religion to empirical science accurately described as a movement from one system of thought and feeling to another system of thought and feeling?

Gould's NOMA

Stephen Jay Gould answers in the affirmative with his thesis of NOMA (Non Overlapping MAgisteria, where a magisterium is a domain of authority) which states that science and religion have a clearly demarcated boundary, and cannot conflict because each operates in utterly different realms.³

Margaret Wertheim comments that this might be so if everyone agreed on the same boundaries, but that it's the boundary itself that is the issue.⁴ Compare this with the observation by Shermer that the famous Scopes trial of 1925 (charged with teaching evolution in school) was a monument to the 'conflicting-worlds model of religion and science'.⁵ Under that model, only one is valid and you would need to adopt either one or the other of these conflicting worlds, whereas Gould suggests that both mindsets are valid for different purposes at different times. Steven Mithen in his investigation of the prehistoric development of the mind asserts that: 'it was a domain-general processor that made us human. The switch from a specialized to a generalized type of mentality (cognitive fluidity) enabled people to design complex tools, to create art and believe in religious ideologies.'⁶ Shermer suggests that we

³ Stephen Jay Gould. *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*. New York: Ballantine, 1999.

⁴ Margaret Wertheim. 'A Rock and a hard place', *The Australian's Review of Books*, October 1999, 22-23.

⁵ Michael Shermer. *How We Believe: The Search for God in an Age of Science*. New York: W.H. Freeman, 1999, 131.

⁶ Steven Mithen. *The Prehistory of the Mind: A Search for the origins of art, religion and science*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1996, 195.

evolved a more general *Belief Engine*, and that it is Janus-faced - that is under certain conditions it leads to magical thinking while under different circumstances it leads to scientific thinking.⁷ John Hick's take is that 'the universe is religiously ambiguous - capable of being construed both religiously and naturalistically'.⁸

Hick's principle was illustrated in USA in November of 1833 when impressive meteor showers were plainly visible in the skies. Known as the great Leonid Meteor Storm, this phenomenon was credited both with starting the serious scientific study of meteors, as well as with contributing to a series of religious revivals that gripped America in the 1830s.⁹ In Matthew 24, Jesus describes the darkening of the Sun and Moon, and a falling of stars from the sky, as signs of his approaching return. William Miller preached that the darkening of the Sun and Moon actually took place in 1780, and that the falling star prediction was fulfilled in 1833 by the Leonid Meteor Storm. The generation witnessing these events, Miller predicted, would be the generation that would also see the Lord return in glory.¹⁰

Here we see both religious and naturalistic construals, or both the religious/fundamentalist and the scientific mindsets operating simultaneously as a result of people observing exactly the same celestial event, but responding in different ways to what I term a 'semiotical arousal'. This can be seen as analogous to Shermer's 'conflicting-worlds model of religion and science' which on the religion side was concerned with fundamentalist religious belief that, effectively, could be said to have invested the biological origin of humans with a supernatural significance by virtue of the **religious belief** (derived from a literal interpretation of accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 recording ancient creation myths) that God acted as instant creator of full-formed human life - a belief consciously opposed to the Darwinian **scientific theory** (deduced or inferred from empirical observation of the natural world) of evolution of

⁷ Shermer, *op. cit.*, 37.

⁸ John Hick. *Philosophy of Religion*, 4th edn. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990, 56.

⁹ The Economist. 'The fireworks next time', reprinted in *The Australian: Higher Education Supplement*, November 17 1999, 39.

¹⁰ Martin Gardner. 'Notes of a Fringe-Watcher: The Second Coming of Jesus', *Skeptical Inquirer* January 2000. URL: <http://www.csicop.org/si/2000-01/gardner.html>

the species. Expressed thus, it presents us with a dichotomy between religious belief and scientific theory, or a religious mindset and a scientific mindset. I consider that it only appears thus because of the particular (and in my view, unwarranted) literal interpretation which fundamentalists have placed on the Genesis creation stories, and that this failure to appreciate the inappropriateness of such interpretation represents what I have termed earlier in this chapter a failure to engage the process of subjecting the pre-reflective thought of a mindset to critical examination at the point of decision-making. Many people who possess a religious mindset may well avoid falling into this trap, but I submit that it is a hallmark of the fundamentalist mindset that it is predisposed to such failure. In the case of the Leonid Meteor Storm of 1833 the fundamentalist mindset was led into the error of investing natural happenings with supernatural significance and the consequential error of wrongful prediction of the Second Coming of Jesus.

The ‘roles’ of Science and Religion

Much of the Science/Religion debate centres on how their respective ‘roles’ are conceptualised. Some imagine that there are ‘necessary roles’ which each play. Professor George Howe relates how in the 1950s, at the end of a brilliant lecture by C.A. Swanson a distinguished DNA scientist, he asked the lecturer how the original DNA came to possess such precise and intricate information regarding most aspects of plant life. ‘With a knowing smile, Swanson wisely replied, “Howe, that is a question science cannot answer!”’¹¹ There seems to be a clear but tacit assumption here that since science cannot answer that question, it is the proper and necessary role of religion to provide a definitive answer. Richard Dawkins explores a similar theme when he says that he has lost count of the number of times a member of an audience has stood up after a public lecture he has given to say something like: ‘You scientists are very good at answering “How” questions. But you must admit you’re powerless when it comes to “Why” questions.’ ‘Behind the question’, says Dawkins, ‘there is always an unspoken but never justified implication that since science is unable to answer “Why” questions, there must be some other discipline that is

¹¹ George F. Howe. ‘Botany’, *In Six Days: Why Fifty Scientists choose to believe in Creation*, ed. John Ashton. Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 250.

qualified to answer them. This implication is, of course, quite illogical'.¹² (I suppose one could say that Dawkins' own "Why" question is: 'Why must there be a purpose?').

In the latter part of the 19th century, scientific inquiry was reaching back into the remote past, and finding there something far different from Christian orthodox beliefs, as apparently propounded in the Bible. As scientist John Tyndall said in 1874:

'We claim, and we shall wrest from theology, the entire domain of cosmological theory. All schemes and systems which thus infringe upon the domain of science must, in so far as they do this, submit to its control and relinquish all thought of controlling it. Every system which would escape the fate of an organism too rigid to adjust itself to its environment, must be plastic to the extent that the growth of knowledge demands.'¹³

Scientists could make such claims as these because they firmly believed themselves to have been emancipated from bondage to *a priori* theories. Instead of using some deductive method they worked by induction, from the specific instance to the general law - a method which seemed to be diametrically opposed to that of Christian theology. And their views achieved a large degree of popular acceptance in the succeeding decades, including eventual support from liberal theologians. But in the late 20th century these views are being strongly repudiated by conservative Christians. Kenneth Oldmeadow quotes Whitall Perry as saying that:

'The scientific pursuit of religion puts the saddle on the wrong horse, since it is the domain of religion to evaluate science, and not vice versa'.¹⁴

Oldmeadow cites this in support of his contention that the theories of Freud, Durkheim and Levy-Bruhl, for instance, are all variations on the reductionist theme. My position is that Perry's idea that it is the domain of religion to evaluate science might have had some cachet prior to Galileo's indictment in 1633 for the heretical support of Copernicus's heliocentrism. In his April 1993 address to the Pontifical

¹² Richard Dawkins. *River out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995, 96-97.

¹³ Eric J. Sharpe. *Comparative Religion: A History*, 2nd edn. London: Duckworth, 1986, 29.

¹⁴ Kenneth Oldmeadow. 'The Religious Tradition of the Australian Aborigines', *Fragments of Infinity: Essays in Religion and Philosophy*, ed. Arvind Sharma. Lindfield, NSW: Unity Press, 1991, 174.

Biblical Commission, Pope John Paul II apologised for the church's action in presuming to evaluate Galileo's science by using a religious mindset. As if to demonstrate that the Catholic Church has learned its lesson from the horrors of its earlier fundamentalism, he explained in that address that, 'it is necessary to determine the proper sense of Scripture, while avoiding any unwarranted interpretations that make it say what it does not intend to say', and that in order to do so, 'the theologian must keep informed about the results achieved by the natural sciences'. His 1996 address, entitled *Truth Cannot Contradict Truth*, was written to update and revise Pope Pius XII's 1950 Encyclical *Humani Generis*, in which Catholics were told that there is no conflict between reason and faith when dealing with the theory of evolution.¹⁵ Protestant fundamentalists, of course, view this as an unwarranted and misguided secularisation of Church teaching - not for them the Catholic recognition that they might have got it wrong in the first place.

¹⁵ Shermer, *op. cit.*, 127.