



# Illumination Despite the Enlightenment

Saving the History of  
Fundamentalist Inerrancy  
from the Historians

# What are your Inerrancy Verses?

2 Tim 3:16

2 Pet 3:16

Heb 4:12

2 Pet 1:20-21

# Here are some of mine

## 1 John 1:3

- 3 Ὅ ἐώρακαμεν καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' ἡμῶν· καὶ **ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα** μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ·

That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim to you,  
So that you too may have fellowship with us,

And **indeed, the fellowship that is ours** is with the Father and  
with His Son, Jesus Christ.

# John 14:26

26 Ὁ δὲ παράκλητος, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὃ πέμψει ὁ πατήρ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει πάντα, καὶ ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν.

But the Paraklete, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name, that one will teach y'all all things, and He will bring to your memory all the things which I said to you.

# The immediate context

- **John 14:23–25**
- **23** Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.
- **24** “He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.
- **25** “These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you.

# What Should We Conclude?

Inspiration +

Divine Righteousness and Veracity +

Perspicuity of language as God designed  
(Gen 1)

= **Inerrancy** of the autographa

# “On Being a Christian Realist”

Realism? Skepticism? **Reid** or **Hume** for us?

Do the **Scots** know what they've done? Why all the epistemic fuss?

*Cogito ergo sum* gave way to **Hume** not knowing much;

He said a gap prevents our knowing things-as-they-are as such.

From Scotland Hume had distant reach, awakening from slumber

That **Prussian** brain from Königsberg whose great *Critique* still thunders.

For **Kant** we only know some things as interpreted in our minds,

Things-as-they-are are not accessible to us he finds.

Postmodernism came from Kant; objective truth is **noumenal**,  
Can we find no Christian man to bridge **Hume's gap**, to **scale Kant's wall**?

Well, hold your nose, a **Scot** has answered Hume and Kant quite well,  
Despite the hatred he has drawn from scholars bound for Hell.

An elder in the Presbytery turned moral philosophy chair  
Said you experience things-as-they-are; you see what's really there.  
We need not prove the things we know; we're made with dispositions.

Our God's design has placed us in a sound noetic position.

We all intuit cause-effect; our memories convince;

The things our senses perceive are real; that's **Scottish Common Sense**.



# Thesis

The background of the slide features a photograph of a Gothic-style building, likely a university or church, with several tall, ornate spires and a large statue on a pedestal in the foreground. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

This paper will argue that the Princetonians were biblical in their formulation of the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy and that many aspects of Thomas Reid's alternative to Hume and Descartes did and should resonate with those who adopt a biblical worldview.

# Method



The method of this study will be to examine the charge against the Princetonians and the various defenses raised in their favor. This analysis will be followed by a summary critique and partial endorsement of Thomas Reid's epistemology with a view to points it has in common with a traditional, fundamentalist view of the Scriptures. This study will conclude, based on a biblical perspective on the function of language and its underlying metaphysics, that some of the common sense features of Reid's system are derivative of biblical truth and not merely a conjectured prescription for how to approach the Bible itself.

# The “Received” Charge of Scholarship Against Old Princeton



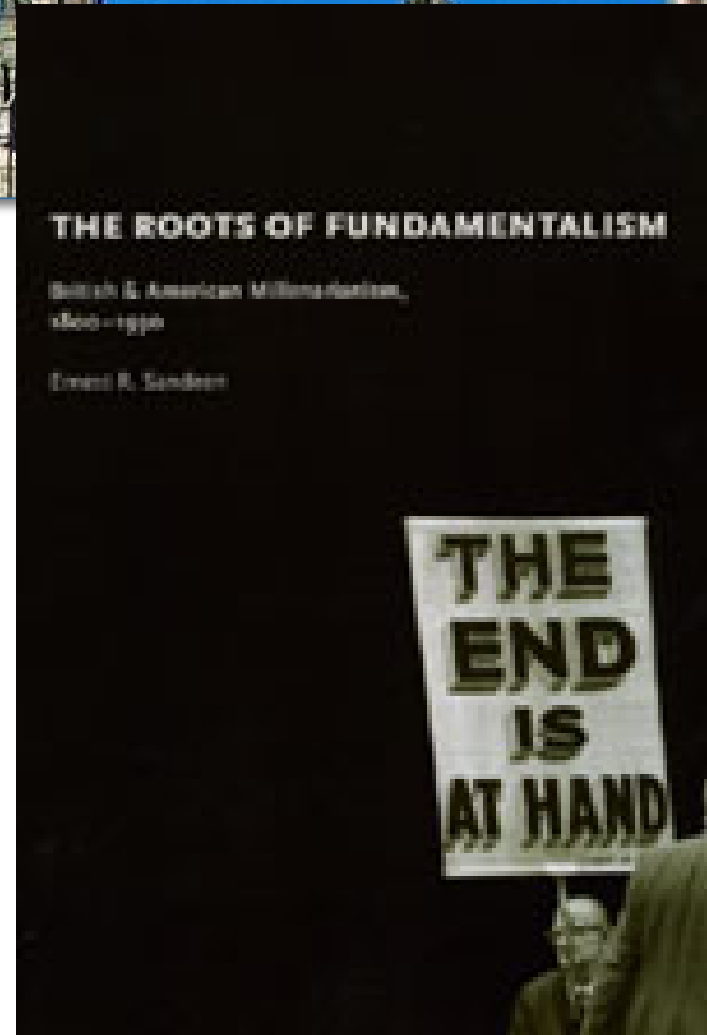
- 1955: Sidney Ahlstrom: *Scottish Common Sense Undergirds Princeton Inerrancy*
- 1970: Ernest Sandeen
- 1979: Jack Rogers and Donald McKim

# Sidney Ahlstrom

My theological cross-section is now sufficiently drawn. It began with a brief portrayal of the situation in Scotland and its universities, where Common Sense realism came into being as the Moderate voice of the Enlightenment against a background of violent ecclesiastical strife. We have witnessed the introduction of Scottish thinking into the nerve-center of American Presbyterianism by **John Witherspoon** and into the Moderate Calvinist tradition then developing at Harvard by **David Tappan**. We have seen it accomplish the liberation of **Channing** and nourish the confident Unitarianism of **James Walker**. It also appeared in the influential lectures of **Timothy Dwight**, and through his chief disciple, **Nathaniel Taylor**, came to occupy a central place in the "New Haven Theology." It informed the response to liberalism which was excogitated at Andover, first by the orthodox Hopkinsian, Leonard Woods, and then by his successor, Edwards Amasa Park. Finally, at Princeton the Witherspoon tradition was planted in the new seminary by Archibald Alexander and carried into the vast, polemical system of Charles Hodge. It remains to assay the meaning of this amazingly diverse philosophical conquest. —*Church History* Vol 3, 1955.

# Ernest Sandeen

- *The Roots of Fundamentalism*
- 1970
- Historiographical Attack on Fundamentalism
- Important Chapter on Darby
- Important Chapter on Warfield and Princetonian Inerrancy



# Sandeen on Inerrancy

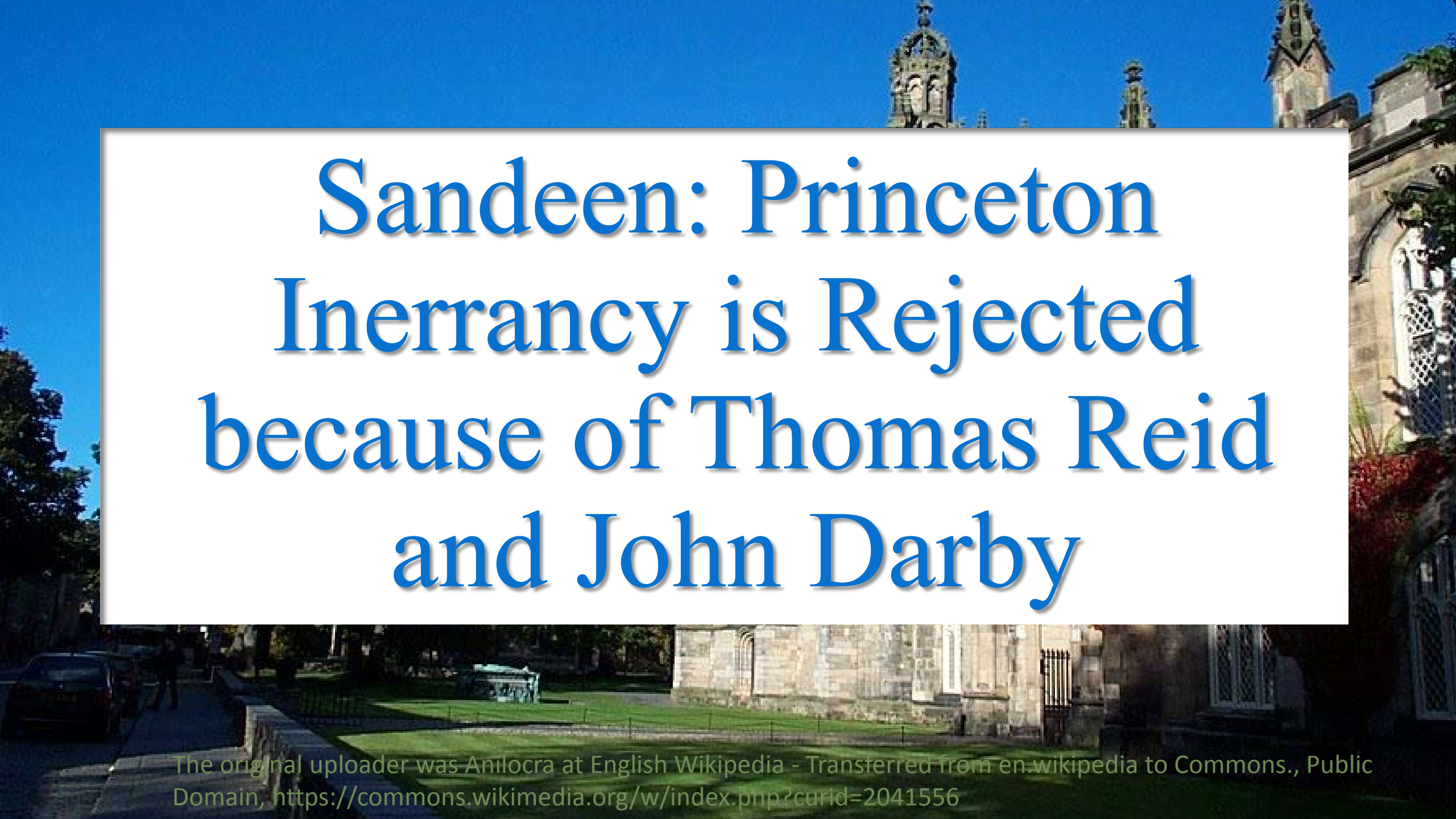


“Most Twentieth Century Fundamentalists and many twentieth century historians have mistakenly assumed that Protestantism possessed a strong, fully-integrated theology of biblical authority, which was attacked by advocates of the higher criticism. As we shall see, no such theology existed before 1850.”

# Sandeen's Thesis



Sandeen's thesis regarding the single most important unifying feature common to evangelicals—the doctrine of biblical inerrancy—is that the Enlightenment-tainted Princetonians invented the doctrine of biblical inerrancy out of their adherence to Scottish Common Sense realism.

The background of the slide is a photograph of a Gothic-style building, likely a church or university hall, with several tall spires and intricate stonework. The building is set against a clear blue sky. In the foreground, there is a well-maintained green lawn and a low stone wall. A dark car is partially visible on the left side of the image.

# Sandeen: Princeton Inerrancy is Rejected because of Thomas Reid and John Darby



# Sandeen's Problem with Princetonian Inerrancy

- 1) It arose as a reaction to European liberalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.
- 2) The appeal to the original autographs is novel and nonsense.
- 3) The modern view of evangelical inerrancy is monistic (thus denying the authority of mystical inner leanings)

# Robert L. Thomas

- “Sandeenists”
- Traces the impact of Sandeen’s history sketch in “The Nature of Truth: Postmodern or Propositional?” *TMSJ* 2007



# Jack Rogers & Donald McKim



## THE AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

*An Historical Approach*

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With a new Epilogue

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JACK B. ROGERS  
DONALD K. McKim

1979

*Foreword by Ford Battles*

# Rogers & McKim's Position

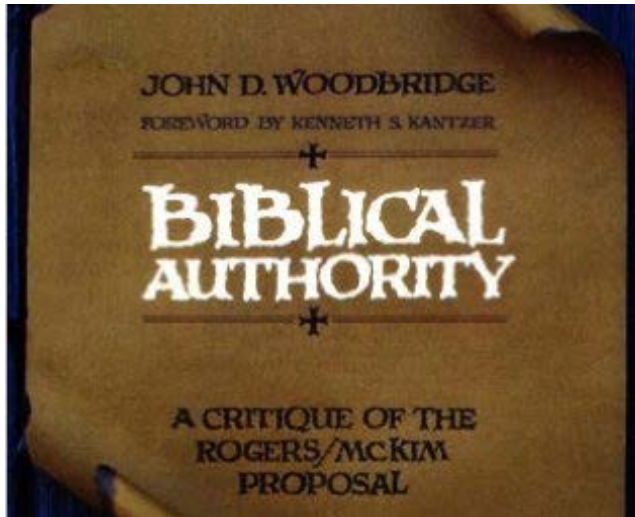
Three Steps in their Argument:

- 1) The nature of the Scriptures is accommodation (from infinite God to finite man). \*\*
- 2) The Scriptures are authoritative for salvation in Christ but not in the words used to convey this overall message.
- 3) The real locus of authority in the Christian life is the subjective inner testimony of the Holy Spirit and not the apparently errant words He somehow inspired.

\*\*Somehow implies it is infallible for salvation but not inerrant

# Roseland's Critique of R&M's Absurdity

The claim, then, is that Charles Hodge and especially B.B. Warfield rejected a Spirit-driven epistemology in favor of reasoned arguments for the inerrancy of the Scriptures. This claim that the Scottish Moderates' philosophy so tainted the American conservatives that their defense of the Scriptures is to be rejected in favor a *fallibility* view reminiscent of Barth and the neoevangelicals is shocking. The liberalizing moderates are claiming that a liberalizing influence from eighteenth-century Scotland ultimately resulted in Warfield's reasoned, conservative statements on the Bible's inerrancy, which are to be rejected for a liberal alternative.

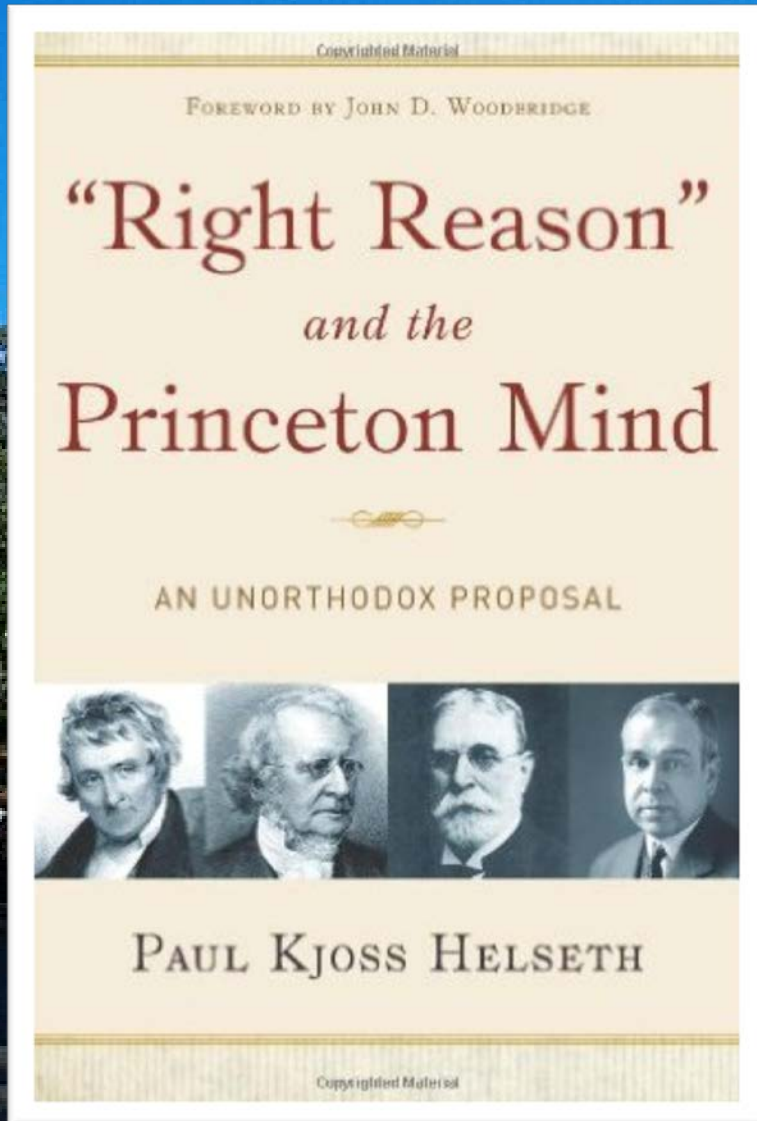


# John Woodbridge

## Thrashes Rogers and McKim in *Biblical Authority*

- 1) Demonstrates illicit use of selective quotations
- 2) Selectivity of evidence
- 3) Logical fallacy called “Inappropriate historical disjunctions”

# Paul Kjoss Helseth





# Paul Helseth

Sandeen, Rogers/McKim, et. al. Have misread Warfield and the Princetonians

- 1) Common Sense Realism did not trump a Reformed view of man after the fall
- 2) The Princetonians included the subjective work of the Spirit



# Helseth's Defense of Warfield

“While the unregenerated sinner cannot escape the knowledge that he is and always will be dependent on God for the entirety of his existence, he is morally incapable of entrusting himself to God because ‘he loves sin too much.’” The Warfield view is not, then, “bald rationalism” but a careful distinction between the objective facts which can be assessed cognitively and the salvific response to those facts in trust. While Warfield parses these things, he does not think that the fallen “knowing soul” of man has “the moral ability to see revealed truth more or less for what it objectively is, namely glorious.”

--Helseth, *"Right Reason" and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal*, 61.

# “Right Reason”

- “When Warfield’s emphasis on ‘right reason’ is interpreted within a context that regards the soul as a single unit that acts in all of its functions as a single substance, it becomes clear that the ability to reason ‘rightly’ is not a capacity that human beings possess apart from the work of the Spirit, but a capacity that presupposes the work of the Spirit on the ‘whole soul’ of the moral agent. Whereas Warfield certainly affirms that a saving, i.e., a ‘right,’ apprehension of what God has revealed entails the rational appropriation of objective evidence, he nonetheless recognizes that the ‘rightness’ of this apprehension is determined neither by the scholarly prowess of the perceiving mind nor by the objective sufficiency of the evidence presented to one’s consciousness, but by the moral or ‘ethical state’ of the knowing soul.”
- Helseth, *“Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal*, 129-30.

# Philosophical Genealogy



**Thomas Reid**  
1710-96

University of Aberdeen,  
University of Glasgow



**John Witherspoon**  
1723-94

College of New Jersey,  
President in 1768



**Archibald Alexander**  
1772-1851

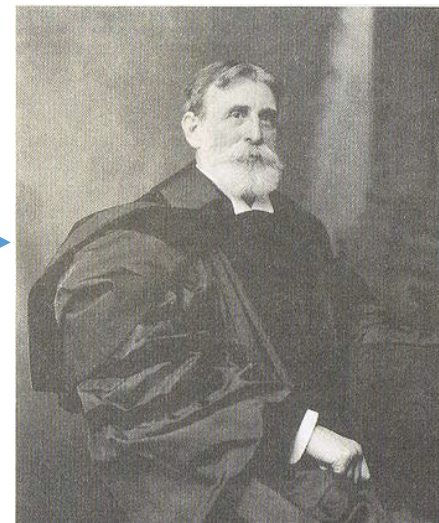
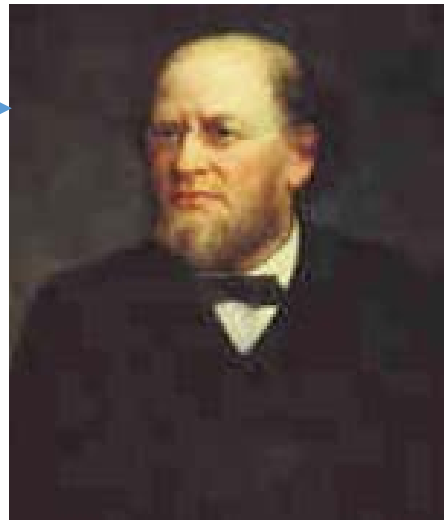
Princeton Theological  
Seminary, 1<sup>st</sup> President 1812

# Thomas Reid and Common Sense



If there are certain principles, as I think there are, which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, --without being able to give a reason for them; these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd.

# Philosophical Genealogy



Charles Hodge  
1797-1878

Princeton Theological  
Seminary, 1840

A. A. Hodge  
1823-86

Princeton Theological  
Seminary, 1877

B. B. Warfield  
1851-1921

Princeton Theological  
Seminary, 1887-1921

J. G. Machen  
1881-1937

Princeton Theological  
Seminary, 1906-1929  
**Westminster Theological  
Seminary, 1929-37**

# John Witherspoon on the Scriptures



It is observed by some when on this subject, that the gospel has introduced the greatest improvements of human as well as divine knowledge; not but that those arts which depend entirely upon the exertion of human talents and powers, were carried to as great perfection before, as since the coming of Christ, in the heathen as in the Christian world, such as poetry, painting, statuary, &c. But natural knowledge, or the knowledge of the constitution and course of nature, began with, and increased by religious light; all the theories of the ancients, as to the formation and preservation of the earth and heavens were childish and trifling.

# John Witherspoon on the Scriptures

From revelation we learn the simple account of the creation of all things out of nothing, by the omnipotence of God; and perhaps there are few things more delightful, than to observe that the latest discoveries in philosophy, have never shewn us any thing but what is perfectly consistent with the scripture doctrine and history. There is one modern class or sect of divines, who affirm that all human science is to be found in the Bible—natural philosophy, astronomy, chronology.—This I am afraid is going too far; but I think it had not been possible for any writer or writers in the age of the sacred penmen, to have wrote so much on the creation of the world, and its history since that, without being guilty of absurdities and contradictions; unless they had been under the direction of an infallible guide

# Summary



This argument has traced some of the key movements in popular “evangelical” historiography away from the Warfieldian view of the Bible in an effort to relocate the authority for the Christian faith in the subjective inner experience of the Christian. From Ahlstrom to Sandeen to Rogers and McKim, the consensus attack on the evangelical view of inerrancy has been to suggest that the Old Princeton theologians were overly humanistic-rational, merely clinging to the rationalistic arguments of the Scottish Enlightenment epistemology of Thomas Reid. John Woodbridge and Paul Helseth have presented counter evidence to the claims that Warefieldian inerrancy is novel and that it was derived from an overly rationalistic dependency on Scottish realism.



# Summary

The value of Woodbridge's critique of Rogers and McKim is in his rigorous examination of their errors in reasoning, along with his tracing of the doctrine of the Scriptures through church history. Woodbridge's method of turning their evidence against them using the context in which their quotes arise has proven useful in the examination of John Witherspoon's views of scripture and theology. Helseth's work has been more focused on the actual statements of the Princetonians, in which we find warrant for Van Til's thoroughgoing endorsement of Warfield's theology as properly Reformed. The anthropological oversights of Reid are not shared by Warfield, though his apologetic approach is indeed to reason the world to belief in Christ. Warfield held that the Spirit must work on the whole soul of the recipient of evidence, or the evidences will be futile.

# Summary



Finally, a brief look at some of the more prominent features in Thomas Reid's thought, especially in its historical setting, has suggested a tacit endorsement of Reid's worldview and an explanation for why Scottish Common Sense was a fit for the American evangelical intellectual tradition when properly qualified and adjusted to account for a more Reformed anthropology. Despite certain well-documented exceptions, Reformed scholarship has not blindly adopted humanistic rationalism or empiricism by agreeing with Reid; rather Reid's readjustment of Scottish philosophy to the real world in which we live and serve breathed new life into a wasteland of Humean and later Kantian skepticism.