In the West and since the Enlightenment, discussions of faith and its relationship to reason have been, more or less, dominated by a Kantian paradigm. Without going into the knotty details of whether or not the paradigm itself is a faithful representation of Kant's views, the influence of this paradigm is beyond doubt. Perhaps one quote from Kant will help set the contours of this paradigm, as well as summarize it. In the third part of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, speaking of transcendent ideas, Kant notes the following:

They [transcendent ideas] then no longer serve only for the completion of the empirical employment of reason—an idea [of completeness] which must always be pursued, though it can never be completely achieved. On the contrary, they detach themselves completely from experience, and make for themselves objects for which experience supplies no material, and whose objective reality is not based on completion of the empirical series but on pure a priori concepts. Such transcendent ideas have a purely intelligible object; and this object may indeed be admitted as a transcendental object, but only if we likewise admit that, for the rest, we have no knowledge in regard to it, and that it cannot be thought as a determinate thing in terms of distinctive inner predicates. As it is independent of all empirical concepts, we are cut off from any reasons that could establish the possibility of such an object, and have not the least justification for assuming it. It is a mere thought-entity.¹

"A mere thought entity"—such is the way most would view any notion of faith and religion, especially when it comes to any concept or idea of God. If one claims to have such an idea, it is automatically assumed that it is had without any empirical evidence whatsoever, and that holding such a notion can only be justified on the basis of the subject alone. That is, it goes without saying, given Kant's influence, that such notions can have no objective, or empirical, basis. They cannot be, therefore, knowledge claims; they can only be had by faith. Thus, we can see the impact of Kant's now famous dictum in the Preface to the second edition of his Critique: "I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith."

With this paradigm firmly intact, it has become customary to refer to any religious ideas or notions, not as knowledge, but simply as "faith." In other words, as Kant claimed to "make room" for faith, the room that he made was excluded from the house that knowledge built; it was a room with no view—dark and virtually invisible. It was a room, in other words, which could only exist in the mind.

So, when we see through a Kantian paradigm, we will view faith itself as purely subjective and completely without any empirical or evidential support. Any modern view of faith will almost inevitably see it as something that is, if not opposed to knowledge, of an entirely different kind of thing than knowledge. Knowledge has an evidential basis; faith is only and always a personal mental state. To put it in the words of atheist George Smith, "Faith is belief without, or in spite of, reason."²

This Kantian paradigm now informs and lies underneath the so-called "evidential objection" to Christian belief. This objection was one that held, in the words of W. K. Clifford, that it was wrong, always and everywhere, to believe anything except upon sufficient evidence.³ What one claimed to know had to have an evidential background. That is, to use Kant's categories, it had to be part of the phenomena of experience. Anything that lacked evidence was, in Clifford's words, simply wrong, meaning, irrational or somehow intellectually deficient; it could not be rationally held. Since it was assumed that any notion or idea of God was itself the product of insufficient evidence, it was deemed to be, if not utterly irrational, certainly sub-rational, and at best a part of one's subjective state.

There have been at least two responses to the evidential objection to belief in God that deserve mention here. One view attempts to demonstrate by way of syllogistic or evidential proof that the existence of God is properly concluded from evidential premises which we all can accept. So, for example, Thomas Aquinas's famous "five ways" seeks to prove the existence of God (as well as his unity) from universally accepted or acceptable premises, premises such as, "everything moved is moved by another." This is a premise, surely, that anyone with eyes to see and a mind to think should have no trouble affirming. But the proofs themselves have been subjected to intense scrutiny, not the least of which is just how we might move from the finite to the infinite, given Thomas's own premises and their presumed universal character.

But, there is another side to the discussion. There is a side that seeks to answer the evidential objection, not on the basis of universally agreed premises, but on the basis of what might be called an "acceptability thesis."⁴ An acceptability thesis obtains when any position seeks to affirm the rationality of (in this case) belief in God on the basis of something other than universally acknowledged premises.

You may be able to see how this view would be at home in our Western, postmodern culture. An acceptability thesis, by definition, argues for the

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⁴ The notion of an "acceptability thesis" is not original with me, but is a fairly standard label in this context.
acceptability of a belief, not because such a belief has attached to it any kind of universal obligation or affirmation, as if all ought to or do believe, but because, given something peculiar to one's own situation, or context, it is perfectly proper and rational to believe such a thing. Because, in part, of its conducive character to the current culture, the acceptability thesis has become the most predominant response to the evidential objection.

The acceptability thesis comes in two main varieties. The first variety is sometimes called "Wittgensteinian fideism" due to its dependence on Wittgenstein's notion of "language games." For example, in his essay, "The Groundlessness of Belief," Norman Malcolm argues that one's belief in God, because it is embedded in religion, which is its own "form of life," needs no more justification than does science, which itself is another form of life. This does not, of course, mean that if one believes in God then God does, in fact, exist. It only means that one's belief in God, since it needs no ground, is perfectly acceptable within its own context. Says Malcolm, "The obsessive concern with the proofs reveals the assumption that in order for religious belief to be intellectually respectable it ought to have a rational justification [evidence]. That is the misunderstanding. It is like the idea that we are not justified in relying on memory until memory has been proved reliable." Our belief in God, therefore, to put it in Wittgensteinian terminology, is just one part of our religious "language game" and, thus, is justified by virtue of what it is. It is not difficult to see how Kant's influence is behind this view.

The second response is given by, among others, Alvin Plantinga and is sometimes called a "parity thesis." Plantinga has taken tenets similar to those of Wittgenstein and Malcolm, but has situated them differently, in order to argue for the same conclusion. The response to the evidential objection is not (or at least need not be) to answer the objection on its own terms. It does not seek to answer the evidential objection by mounting more evidence. Rather, this approach responds by reminding the evidential objector that, contrary to his own basic tenet, we all hold other beliefs that are not in need of evidence in order to be deemed rational or justified. In other words, the evidential objector has, and must have, beliefs that are assumed to be rational and (in that sense) justified even though there has yet to be a good argument for them—beliefs such as "I had an orange for breakfast this morning," or "I did not begin to exist just five minutes ago," or "I, like you, am a person." Surely, if we all have beliefs for which there are no evidential arguments, and if we can have and hold those beliefs rationally, then a belief in the existence of God is perfectly acceptable (though there may be no evidence available for such a belief) if I so choose to believe such a thing.

In the first response to the evidential objection, it is assumed that reason is not in need of faith in order to make its case against that objection. In the second response, it is assumed that belief (or faith) carries, in some way, its own rational warrant-conditions with it; it is acceptable because of what it, itself, is in the context of its own peculiar function.

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So, the discussion concerning faith and reason, in its current context, has to do with arguments of acceptability with regard to beliefs or truths that are either beyond (in Malcolm's case) or, perhaps, beside (in Plantinga's case) other beliefs or truths we might accept, or believe to be rationally acceptable. The relationship of faith to reason, then, is determined according to the status of "faith-truths" rather than, as in times past, according to the status of reason and its inherent abilities.

Take Plantinga's response to the evidential objection as an example of how religious, or Christian, belief can be rational, even if not "evidential." Based on his notion of the proper function of our cognitive faculties, combined with his modified, Reidian, foundationalism, Plantinga mounts an argument for the possibility of a non-evidential, rational, and properly basic belief in God. Not only so, but because Plantinga wants to address the \textit{de jure} question—that is, the question of whether or not belief in God is rational—and not the \textit{de facto} question—that is, whether or not theism, or Christian theism, is true—Plantinga is able to combine all of the concerns of Kant with the contemporary climate in epistemology, and to conclude that one who holds a belief in God is not thereby irrational.

In other words, the contemporary climate in epistemology demands that beliefs be defined and delimited by individuals, or individual communities. Plantinga's "acceptability thesis" argues that belief in God, if held, is properly basic and therefore rational. Stemming from his work in \textit{God and Other Minds}, he concludes that if belief in other minds is rational, even though no successful argument exists for such a belief, so also is belief in God.

So, Plantinga seems to combine the Kantian concerns by constraining his argument within the bounds of the \textit{de jure} question. In that way, he avoids any notion of truth. At the end of \textit{Warranted Christian Belief}, Plantinga asks this concerning warranted or rational Christian belief:

In keeping with Kant's emphasis, the truth question is a question that is "beyond the competence of philosophy." Elsewhere Plantinga says he "resists the temptation to make an excursion from the firm dry ground of epistemology into the misty miasmic morasses of metaphysics." So, Plantinga strikes the Kantian pose and argues for a rational theistic, even a rational Christian-theistic, belief, that itself does not address the question of truth, or the question of the nature of ultimate reality. It is rational, not because it squares with reality, but because we have other beliefs like it in our epistemological box, and so, if we add one more, no harm done. There is a decided aversion, if not a complete ignoring, of things metaphysical. Kant would only cheer such conclusions.

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This misprision of metaphysics is motivated, at least in its most popular form, by Kant's now famous transcendental dialectic, a dialectic in which there can be no synthetic *a priori* with respect to a notion or idea of God. All that is left, therefore, is some kind of faith, which, by definition, cannot be knowledge.

There are a couple of points that should be made here with respect to Kant's view of the relationship between faith and knowledge. First, it certainly seems to be the case that, when it comes to questions about God and our ideas of him, much more is involved than the transcendental intuitions of space and time, and the transcendental logical notions of quantity, quality, relation, and modality. That is to say, Kant has rightly recognized that *how* we know God is not easily categorized, especially compared to how we know other things.

But it should not escape our notice that Kant did not simply relegate notions of God to the noumenal realm; he also argued that both the so-called "transcendental unity of apperception," or the transcendental "I," as well as the "things in themselves" were all a part of the transcendental dialectic, in which evidential factors were inaccessible and irrelevant.

To put it in more common parlance, when it comes to knowledge and its relationship to faith, for Kant, not only God, but the "I" that just is who we are, as well as everything outside of us, can only be accounted for, given Kant's paradigm, by way of some kind of blind faith commitment on our part. Or, as one author has said, given Kant's paradigm, we have to live "as if" such things exist, even though we have nothing available to *pure reason* that would demonstrate their existence. As has been said, therefore, the Kantian paradigm seems to leave one with nothing more than solipsism. Clearly the elimination of metaphysical knowledge by way of Kant's noumenal creates more problems than it solves.

So, the question is, "What's a philosopher, or an epistemologist, to do, especially one who sees that faith must indeed be a part of the epistemological agenda?" To begin to answer that question, there is one more significant aspect of this discussion that deserves mention and that can move us forward in our analysis. Despite Kant's protestations, books on metaphysics have continued apace in the modern and contemporary era. One such book by Peter van Inwagen of Notre Dame, an introduction to metaphysics, states the following about its subject matter:

In the end we must confess that we have no idea why there is no established body of metaphysical results. It cannot be denied that this is a fact, however, and the beginning student of metaphysics should keep this fact and its implications in mind. One of its implications is that the author of this book . . . is [not] in a position in relation to you that is like the position of the author of your text . . . in geology. . . . All of these people will be the masters of a certain body of knowledge, and, on many matters, if you disagree with them you will simply be wrong. In metaphysics, however, you are perfectly free to disagree with anything the acknowledged experts say.¹⁸

What van Inwagen is saying here is quite remarkable—let’s call it “Peter’s principle.” Thinking of the history of Western thought, he is acknowledging that, after over 4000 years of debating and writing on the subject of metaphysics, there has yet to be an established body of facts available with which one must agree in order to delve into the subject. Therefore, as he puts it, in metaphysics, “you are perfectly free to disagree with anything the acknowledged experts say.”

So, it seems the best way out of Kant’s conundrum, at least initially, might be by way of Peter’s principle. To put it more provocatively, since it is the case, first, that we are perfectly free to disagree with anything the supposed experts say with regard to metaphysics, and, second, that Kant’s conundrum leads inexorably either to a blind faith commitment, or to utter solipsism, it seems to be a natural step to begin to think again about the relationship of metaphysics to epistemology, especially when our concern is the relationship of faith to reason (or knowledge). Or, more precisely, we need to think about the nature of reality whenever we want to discuss the nature of faith and reason (or knowledge). The crying need, therefore, in the discussion of faith and reason is first to understand the nature of reality, in order, thereafter, properly to understand what knowledge is and what faith is. Any notion that tries to excise the nature of reality from the knowledge discussion seems inevitably doomed to failure.

This proposal—that metaphysics be necessarily and inextricably linked to epistemology—is nothing new; it may simply sound new in the wake of Kant’s influence. Thomas Aquinas, for example, in the thirteenth century, made this same point, but it was not his point alone. He was commenting on Aristotle’s work entitled Posterior Analytics. The first statement in Aristotle’s work can help us as we consider Thomas’s commentary. Aristotle begins by affirming this: “All instruction given or received by way of argument proceeds from pre-existent knowledge.” Following this, Thomas attempts to delineate between that knowledge which is had by way of argument, which he calls “demonstration,” and that knowledge which is pre-existent. Demonstration, he says, by which he means syllogistic reasoning, must “proceed from principles that are immediate either straightway or through middles.” It is necessary, therefore, for the reasoning process that the knowledge gained thereby rest on knowledge that is not inferred. So far, we might think that Thomas is simply affirming here the basic principles and structure of foundationalism. It sounds as though he is classifying our knowledge as either inferred or immediate. And so he is.

But there is a difference in what Thomas is saying from what many modern foundationalists want to affirm. It is certainly the case that Thomas affirms knowledge of propositions that are indemonstrable. Such is his meaning of immediate propositions. If immediate propositions were in need of demonstration they would not, therefore, be immediate. They would be mediated by way of demonstration.

Immediate propositions, however, are those in which "the predicate is included within the notion of its subject." These propositions are known by virtue of themselves, and not by virtue of any inference from predicate to subject. Thus, immediate propositions are stronger than mediate, and are known with more certainty. Immediate propositions, therefore, are not simply epistemic grounds for other, mediate, propositions, but, even more importantly, they are propositions which themselves are grounded metaphysically. So, says Scott MacDonald, in his article on Thomas’s epistemology, "Immediate propositions, then, are capable of being known by virtue of themselves and are, therefore, proper objects of non-derivative knowledge." This much could be said by virtually any foundationalist. What is more significant, however, is the following sentence: "But their actually being known by virtue of themselves requires that one be acquainted with the facts expressed by those propositions which requires that one conceive the terms of those propositions." In other words, one of the key elements necessary for a proposition to be immediate is that there be a particular structure of reality. Which propositions are immediate depends on the nature of the world.

Which propositions are immediate, then, depends solely on what real natures there are and what relations hold among them, that is, on the basic structure of the world, and also on the psychology or belief-structure of any given epistemic subject.

We can highlight the difference in Thomas’s view here perhaps by recalling one of the typical ways that foundationalism has been pictured in comparison to coherentism. Foundationalism has been pictured as a pyramid, the base of which pictures basic, non-inferential beliefs, and the two sides of which picture beliefs inferred from those basic beliefs. Coherentism, on the other hand, has been pictured as a raft, that is, a set of beliefs, each of which is consistent with the rest. The problem with this picture, however, if we take our cue from Thomas’s formulation, is that the pyramid itself is a raft. While it may have some kind of base, it nevertheless is “floating” around on its own without anything to tie it down. For Thomas, it is not the case that the structure of knowledge is a pyramid. Rather, it is a pyramid that needs its own ground; it is a pyramid that is grounded in the way the world is. Thus, says MacDonald, “Propositions are immediate by virtue of expressing what might be called metaphysically immediate relationships or facts, the relationships that hold between natures and their essential constituents.”

Thomas, therefore, sees a necessary and direct link between what we know and the nature of the world. This takes knowledge beyond the realm of

10 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 170.
epistemology *per se*, and requires, for a justification of knowledge, a metaphysical structure such that facts, natures, and their constituents, and the relationships between them, themselves be and be known, and known immediately. This is contrary to virtually any current understanding of foundationalism. Foundation- 
alism, in most of its current manifestations, with its allegiance to Immanuel Kant, will allow for no intrusion of metaphysics. So, MacDonald continues,

This metaphysical picture allows us to see the kind of objectivist requirement Aquinas incorporates into the theory of demonstration. When he claims that the first principles of demonstration must be immediate and indemonstrable, he is claiming that they must express metaphysically immediate propositions and not just propositions that are epistemically basic and unprovable for some particular epistemic subject. That a given proposition $P$ happens to be indemonstrable for some person $S$ because there are no other propositions in $S$'s belief-structure on the basis of which $S$ would be justified in holding $P$ is no guarantee that $P$ is, on Aquinas' view, an immediate, indemonstrable proposition. The structure of demonstration, then, is isomorphic with the metaphysical structure of reality: immediate, indemonstrable propositions express metaphysically immediate facts, whereas mediate, demonstrable propositions express metaphysically mediate facts.\textsuperscript{16}

It is the nature of the world, therefore, that gives us a foundation for knowledge of that world, including, to use Kant's noumenal categories, of things, of ourselves, and of God. The pyramid of any basic belief itself needs a place on which to stand.\textsuperscript{17}

I would like to use van Inwagen's insight as an invitation. Given that we are free to disagree with anything said thus far in the field of metaphysics, and given that attempts to ferret out the relationship of faith and reason from a purely epistemological standpoint have failed, it seems imminently plausible that the only way to view the relationship of faith and reason is from a standpoint that both transcends and defines that relationship.

Not only so, but the crying need in discussions of this sort is that there be access to some kind of universal principle, a principle that moves us beyond the relative discussions of truth and knowledge, and that sets those discussions on a firm foundation. That principle and that foundation is found only in Christianity.

What Christianity provides, and what no epistemological theory provides, is a Triune God who is himself self-contained and complete—perfect, in other words—and who freely determines to condescend both to create, and, given the reality of sin, to redeem the world that he creates.

Not only so, but, in creating human beings, he freely determines to make them "in his image," which means, in part, that their very identity is, in its totality, wrapped up in who he is and in what he has done. It stands to reason, therefore,

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} This, in part, is Quine's point as well when he notes that "truth in general depends on both language and extra-linguistic fact" (W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *Quintessence: Basic Readings from the Philosophy of W. V. Quine* [ed. Roger F. Gibson, Jr.; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2004], 45). Quine goes on to note that there is a "metaphysical article of faith" behind such empirical dogma as analytic and synthetic distinctions.
that anything that is known or understood would necessarily and automatically be related to him and his character and activity.

For example, this means that man (both male and female) is, always and everywhere, the image of God. Christianity maintains that God is the Creator of the universe. At the point of creation, God condescends to his creation, and to his creatures, in order to relate to them on their level. This is called God’s covenant. Whatever its particulars, and those are monumentally important, God’s covenant entails that he is in a relationship with all of his creatures, but most especially all of his human creatures. Thus, Christianity maintains that God is our ultimate environment. But what does it mean that God is our ultimate environment?

When God condescends to his creation, he does so in order to “relate” to that creation, to be involved in it (all the while remaining who he essentially is—see, e.g., Gen 1:2). More specifically, he creates man (both male and female) in his own image. Without detailing just exactly what that image is, there can be no question that it constitutes our basic identity as human beings. It means that we are, originally, fundamentally, and eternally, *image*. This truth goes hand-in-hand with the fact that God is our ultimate environment. In our environment, therefore, we all, as human beings, live our lives *coram deo* we live our lives in the presence of him in whose image we are.

The Lord God who made us as image gave us responsibilities with respect to his creation, responsibilities that presuppose our inextricable (universal) bond with creation. Part of our responsibility is to understand who God is and what he has done in creation in such a way that it acknowledges him and gives due credit to his character and activity. This means, more specifically, that our knowledge, to the extent that we are able, must be in conformity to his, in conformity to what he has said.

The point to be made here is that, in creating us as image, God bound us together, not only with himself, but with creation as well. There is a bond of humanity with (the rest of) creation such that, since creation, one will not, and cannot, exist without the other. The point to be made here is that there is an inextricable link between ourselves and the world, a link that is both established by God and is intended to reflect his character. Because of that, we are people who are created to know, and to interact with, our world, all to the glory of the Triune God, our Creator. It is this crucial but (almost) universally neglected truth—that our connection with the world is initiated, constituted, orchestrated, and sustained by the Triune God—that is the theological key to a Christian understanding of our “situated-ness” and our access (and knowledge of that access) to reality.

In relating himself to us, the Triune God creates the means by which he condescends to us. He takes on human language, meaning, experience, even flesh in order to faithfully maintain his covenant with us; and he does all of this while yet remaining fully and completely God.18

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18 This was, in large part, God's message to Moses in Exod 3, and was climactically revealed to us in the Person of the God-man, Jesus Christ.
As human beings, therefore, we are “situated” within the context of God’s presence, and are, by virtue of that situatedness, images of his. We live and move and have our being in him. This is true whether we are covenant-keepers (in Christ), or covenant-breakers (in Adam). In either case, we are covenant creatures, with God as our ultimate environment, responsible to image him in all our living, knowing, thinking, and doing.

This is who we are by virtue of God’s creation. Unfortunately, the story of creation is not the whole story. Something went wrong, terribly wrong. God’s fellowship with Adam and Eve that was a natural part of the created order was radically and decisively disrupted. The image of God as male and female, fully and completely revealed in the Garden prior to sin, became a source of shame after the fall (Gen 3:7). Though God graciously clothed Adam and Eve, the need itself for clothing, though necessary because of sin, was, nevertheless, fundamentally unnatural, not a part of the created design or order. What was true physically was just as true spiritually; the image of God that Adam and Eve fully exhibited prior to sin was now a source of shame, shame due to their real guilt, and was covered up because of sin.19

This, then, is the serious problem, even the terminal condition, that confronts us. After the fall, the image of God becomes a source of shame; our visceral reaction to who we are, as image (including the presence of God ever before us), is to hide and suppress whatever we can of that image (Gen 3:8-10).20 Though the image itself remains (see, e.g., 1 Cor 11:7), it has been fractured and broken because of sin. Thus, we would, if we could, hide from God and construe the world in such a way that we would not have to face him. We would pretend, if we could, that access to God by way of his revelation (both in the world and in his Word) is impossible. We might even think that it is our very environment or context that is a barrier to a sure and certain knowledge of anything—of ourselves, our environment, and of God.

However, I want us to suppose, without going into the exegetical and theological details here (which we could do by way of Rom 1:18ff.; John 1:1-18; Ps. 9:1-6, and other related passages) that because we are God’s image, because we remain his image even after the entrance of sin in the world, we continue to relate to him (even if unhappily). And suppose that relationship is constituted, at its most basic level, by knowledge of him through the world itself. In other words, as even Plantinga has argued (though in a more modified form than mine), because we are God’s creatures, we have, universally and unambiguously, knowledge of him. This is called, by John Calvin and picked up by Plantinga, the sensus divinitatis. The sensus divinitatis, as a central aspect of our being made in God’s image, (1) just is God’s revelation to us; as revelation it is (2) implanted in us by God himself; (3) given

19 The theological implications of this clothing after the fall cannot be explored here. We should note, however, that, according to Paul, the graciousness of God’s clothing Adam (which should be seen as both physical and spiritual) reaches its eschatological fulfillment at the eschaton (cf. 2 Cor 5:1-5).

20 This is just another way of explaining what Paul details in Rom 1:18ff.
(1) and (2), the *sensus divinitatis* is knowledge of God, a knowledge that is universal and infallible. Let's look at these three in reverse order.

The first aspect of the *sensus divinitatis* is that we *all*, born as we are into our sinful state and continuing in that state by virtue of our wickedness, nevertheless, *know God*, and it is knowledge with significant and substantial content. Universally, clearly, and infallibly, we know much about God by virtue of this clearly perceived and understood revelation of God to us. We know his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity. And because we, as human beings, have been, since the beginning, image of God, we have known him "since the creation of the world." Presumably, then, human beings are created such that they know God to be a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.²¹ Important truths such as these (and we could say these truths are really the *most* important ones) God has seen fit not to leave to our own reasoning process to discover; they are not left to the schools or seminaries; they are not in any way dependent on the capacities of human creatures themselves for the process of knowing. They are given to us, revealed to and in us, implanted in us, by the creative power and providence of Almighty God the Creator.

This, of course, is altogether consistent with God's character. There would be something amiss if God chose to create creatures such as us, but also chose to hide himself from us, leaving us either without a witness to himself or, perhaps worse, leaving us to ourselves to try to figure out what he was like.²² Just what kind of knowledge this is and how it might function is another question, but the import of what we are saying here should not be lost. We are affirming that human beings, *all* human beings "since the creation of the world," know, and have always known, the character and attributes of the true God. This would indicate in fairly strong terms that, whatever else we might want to say about the *sensus divinitatis*, it is, in fact, knowledge.

The second aspect of the *sensus divinitatis* is that it, in its source, transcends the knowing subject; it is implanted by God himself. Because of this activity on God's part, we know him. And we know God, not because we have reasoned our way to him, or have worked through the necessary scientific procedures, or have inferred his existence from other things that we know, but we know him by way of his revelation; we know what God is like "because God has shown it" to us.

The knowledge we have of God is knowledge that has been given to us *by* God. It is "implanted" in us, "engraven" in our minds, "naturally inborn" in all of us, "fixed deep within" us, a knowledge "which nature permits none to forget." As Creator, God has guaranteed that he will never be without witness to the creatures who have been made in his image. He has insured that all of his human

²¹ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 4.

²² It is worth noting here that the Westminster Confession rightly attributes our inability to know and serve God, not, in the first place, to our sinfulness, but to our constitution as creatures. We are, as created, inherently limited in our ability to understand and to worship God. Thus, the revelation of himself to us, as Paul notes, was necessary, not simply because of or after the fall of man into sin, but at creation's inception. See WCF, 7.1.
creatures will, and will always, know him. The *sensus divinitatis*, then, is not “a doctrine” or teaching that is learned, but rather it is that which is present within us “from our mother’s womb.” Such is the case because this knowledge is not dependent on us to be acquired; it is given by God. So, we have the *sensus divinitatis*, because we are God’s image, and because, as image, God implants the knowledge of himself within each of us. And this knowledge is, *ipso facto*, universal and infallible; God gives it to all men, and what he gives is the truth.

Not only so, but it is through the things that are made that God is known. This entails that we know something of the things made as well. So, now we have, at least formally, what Descartes wanted; we have a “clear and distinct idea.” Even more, we have a “clear and distinct knowledge” of God that is had by way of things in the world that we know. Thus, any knowledge that we ourselves acquire and gain, is knowledge that has its roots in what has been called the “primal and simple” knowledge of God’s own character. Unlike Descartes, however, we cannot affirm that just because this knowledge is clear and distinct that it is, therefore, indubitable. As a matter of fact, due to the entrance of sin in the world, and in our own hearts, doubting the truth of this knowledge is a natural aspect of each of us. We are natural-born doubters; we are born to reject that which is most obvious.

And herein lies the problem both with faith and with reason. If we are born to doubt what is clearly the case, then it takes a great deal of faith—faith in something besides God—to affirm anything at all. How can we affirm, for example, the very laws of physics _as laws_, when it is obviously the case that such laws themselves need something behind and beyond them in order to be affirmed as universal. Not only so, but, because we doubt the obvious with respect to knowledge, and therefore place our faith in something intrinsically weak, the knowledge that we do have loses its moorings and becomes unstable. It is not that we cannot have it, it is just that we cannot justify how we can have it.

But how could that be the case? How could it be the case that something within us, flawed and imperfect human beings, could be such that its content was always and everywhere infallible? This brings us to the third element of the *sensus divinitatis*—revelation.

The beauty of this approach to knowledge is that the knowledge of God which human beings possess is _not_ a knowledge that depends for its acquisition and content on something that is within us. It is a knowledge that is _given_, and it is given by God himself. It is the revelation of the character of God, given to man, in and through the things that are made. Thus, the *sensus divinitatis* is knowledge _itself_ which comes directly and repeatedly from God himself through the things that God made and sustains. The *sensus divinitatis* itself, then, is revelation from God, implanted in us by God, and is knowledge of God, the true God, which is clearly perceived and understood by us.

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23 To some extent it depends on us in that it would be impossible for us to have it if we did not exist, exist as human beings with cognitive capacities, etc. The distinction here is akin to that between an externalist and internalist notion of warrant. This knowledge does not depend on us in that it is acquired externally, as God himself implants it in us.
We should acknowledge, therefore, that the context, the situation, the environment, for all men everywhere, no matter what the language or customs, is the presence and knowledge of the true God, a knowledge that comes by way of God's self-attesting natural revelation. The implications of this for Christian epistemology, and for Christian philosophy generally, are multifold and abundant, exciting and stimulating.

As was said above, it seems to be altogether true and right, that man, by virtue of his being created in the image of God, always and everywhere carries the knowledge of God with him. This knowledge does not come by the proper and diligent exercise of our cognitive, emotive, or volitional capacities; it rather comes by God's own revelatory activity within us. Thus we could say that what we are affirming here is the basic, foundational reality of Universal Theism. This is not a "bare" theism in which we might believe that something, somewhere, somehow bigger than us exists. Rather, it is true and universal knowledge of the true God that is ours as his image.

One important qualifier needs to be added, and should be developed but cannot be elaborated upon here. Since this knowledge of God that all people have is both knowledge and implanted by God through the dynamic of his revelatory activity, it is a knowledge that is in many ways quite different from most (if not all) other kinds of knowledge that we acquire. It is a knowledge, we could say, that is presupposed by any (perhaps all) other knowledge. For this reason, it may be best to think of it as more psychological than epistemological. It is a knowledge that God infuses into his human creatures, and continues to infuse into them, even as they continue to live out their days denying or ignoring him (in Adam).

We should also note that this knowledge of God is a knowledge that he implants "through the things that are made." Thus, it comes, always and anon, whether or not the human creature claims to know God, or to have reason for not knowing. This means that entailed in our condition as human beings is access to the world as created. Behind every culture and every "situation," behind any context or conditioning, behind any linguistic construct, is the world known, and known as created by the true God who is known. As God reveals himself through the universe, the universe is known to us even as God is known to us.

To put the matter another way, we must know the world in order to know God, and we must know God because we are his image. There is, therefore, a universal

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24 Notice Paul's point that that which is known about God is made manifest within us, and Calvin's that "God himself has implanted" this knowledge and that "God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead." The actor, clearly, according to both Paul and Calvin, with respect to the acquisition of the knowledge of God, which is the sensus divinitatis, is God, not us; we are the (unwilling?) patients.

25 We cannot here delineate the implications of Paul's point that we, in Adam, suppress the truth that God gives us, and thus incur his wrath. We should note, however, that, because we suppress that truth, we are, in Adam, caught in a web of sinful self-deception from which only the power of the gospel can deliver us.

26 That is, knowledge that is initially and centrally focused in the soul, rather than centrally focused in the mind.
and necessary access to the world in such a way that we know God through knowing it.

So, what is needed is an epistemological structure that can support the "why and wherefore" of the knowledge situation. Because of God's creative activity, because he has made us as his image, because all of this presupposes God's revelatory activity to us, only revelation can provide the roots needed for a coherent discussion of faith and reason. Thus, what is needed is not foundationalism, or rationalism, or empiricism, but revelation, as the source and structure of epistemology. But just what is a revelational epistemology? According to Cornelius Van Til,

Primary and fundamental for revelational epistemology is the contention that man can have true knowledge of reality. No form of agnosticism is consistent with any form of Christianity. Oh yes, there have not been wanting those that have asserted the contrary, but they are not typical. Agnosticism is suicidal. Arguments from the possibility of error have amply demonstrated that we must choose between real knowledge or suicide. All that the argument of the possibility of true knowledge can and does mean is a negation of agnosticism. Then comes the following question, not to be identified with the former, whether the possibility of true knowledge, which in this case must also be an actuality, is attained and can be attained by theistic argument or is in itself historically a product of revelation. Suffice it here to state that all forms of revelational epistemology take their stand on the trustworthiness of the human consciousness in the most general sense of the term.

Two elements of a revelational epistemology mentioned here need some elaboration.

First, there is the affirmation that we can have knowledge of reality. Without arguing the case here, this rejection of our access to reality has nothing of Christianity, and much of Kant, to thank. The reason that a revelational epistemology can provide an affirmation of knowledge is that our knowledge of the world is inextricably tied to our knowledge of God. And our knowledge of God is a necessary element of who we are as image of God. Since, God has covenantally bound himself to us, his image, we must, and do, necessarily know him. We know him because he makes himself known to us through all that he has made. Just as certainly as we know God, therefore, we know the world. Therefore, "the trust-
worthiness of the human consciousness" has its foundation in God's revealing activity. As we can see, this epistemological theory can only be sustained within the context of a metaphysical structure that affirms that the Triune God is who he is, and that he freely determined to create.

Secondly, we should note that any idea of knowing anything as it truly is must find its ground in God's revelation (natural and special). As God reveals himself in and through creation, and in his Word, we believe what we see, hear, taste, and so forth, because all comes from God and shows us something of who he is.

What this means is that, with respect to the knowledge situation, knowledge must be grounded in something else. It cannot have or find its ground within itself, or within us. As we have said, knowledge must be grounded in the nature of (ultimate) reality itself. The nature of ultimate reality is the Triune God, who made heaven and earth. Since he himself is the only one who knows all, all knowledge which comes from him is true, based as it is on exhaustive knowledge.

But the way to get to that knowledge is not simply via created facts. As we have indicated, we all have a built-in disposition to submerge and suppress the One of whom those facts speak. We are happy to take the facts, in and of themselves, but we do not like or want what the facts themselves say. Thus, the knowledge question is in jeopardy, especially if we need to know the facts as created, and related to us and the rest of creation, in order to know them as they truly are.

The only solution to this problem is faith itself. But not the kind of faith that works itself out, as in Kant, as an "as if" situation; not the kind of faith that itself has no real object, content, or ground. Rather, the only way to a full knowledge of any one given fact is through faith in Jesus Christ. That one in whom we have faith is able himself to break down the epistemological barriers that give us a truncated and distorted view both of reality and of knowledge. He is the only one capable of destroying those perverse reactions that are ours naturally. He breaks the chains that bind our knowledge to ourselves, and sets us free so that we can see and affirm that it is only in his light that we are able to see anything at all.

Thus, we can think of it this way. We know anything at all, to the extent that we do, because we have a clear and distinct knowledge of the true God. But we also, because of our hard hearts, reject what God himself provides for us in the world, that is, a revelation of his perfect character. In rejecting that revelation, we also suffer the fate of rejecting the fullness of knowledge that takes us beyond the merely formal. So, faith is necessary, not so that we can move from utter ignorance to a semblance of knowledge, but so that we can move from a perverted and distorted view of knowledge, to knowledge that, in its fullness, is seen for what it is.


31 This means, of course, that while we may trust our consciousness, generally speaking, just why we may trust it remains a mystery to those outside of Christ. They will do all within their power to attribute such trust to anything but the true God and his activity.
The nature of reality is such that faith is required for true knowledge. Anything short of such faith will inevitably enslave us to knowledge that is unable to move us beyond the solipsism and skepticism of Kant and his progeny.