

## ALVIN PLANTINGA'S REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY

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**ABSTRACT.** *Alvin Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology.* Alvin Plantinga is a well-known defender of Reformed epistemology. The main thesis of the Reformed epistemology argues that faith in God is rational and justified without the aid of arguments or evidence. In this paper, we intend to describe Alvin Plantinga's perspective, more precisely, the A / C model (Aquinas / Calvin) proposed by him, in which faith in God is innate and does not need arguments or evidence, and then to analyze the objections on this model, in order to determine whether faith in God can be considered basic.

**Keywords:** *epistemology, reformed, Alvin Plantinga, warrant, justification*

### Introduction

Almost every book or paper you begin to read about Reformed epistemology, almost every one of them starts with the simplistic definition "Reformed epistemology is the thesis about religious beliefs that can be rational without arguments or evidence", and this affirmation is true. But who says that to be considered rational you need arguments or evidence? After all, there are many domains in which we accept beliefs without arguments or evidence. William Lane Craig in a debate with Peter Attkins states five domains in which we accept truths without the help of arguments or evidence: mathematical and logical truths (science presuppose math and logic, trying to prove those kinds of truths is like arguing in circles), metaphysical truths, (for example, other minds, or the reality of the past, the reality of the external world cannot be proven by scientific methods), ethical truths (statements of values cannot be proven by the scientific methods) aesthetic judgments, and finally science itself which in many cases is based on unprovable assumptions.

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In his trilogy (*Warrant: The Current Debate, Warrant and Proper Function and Warranted Christian Belief*) Plantinga tries to refute the traditional epistemological perspective and to prove that belief in God is a basic belief and is rational without evidence or arguments.

In this article, we will try to present Alvin Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology. For doing that we will try to describe the A/C Model proposed by Plantinga which came in two versions, the shorter and the extended version. And after that, we will try to present some of the objections to these models and how Plantinga answer to those objections. This paper aims to describe and analyze if the reformed epistemology proposed by Alvin Plantinga can be a good source of knowledge regarding religious beliefs.

## 1. A/C Model

The A/C stands for Aquinas/Calvin. In *Warranted Christian Belief* Plantinga presents two versions of his model, the first one is called simply "A/C Model", which we think is a shorter version, and the „extended A/C Model". Before presenting the two models Plantinga claims that these models are first of all, possible, therefore theistic belief and especially Christian belief have warrant. The type of possibility involved here is not just logical possibility but according to Plantinga, these models claim epistemic possibility, in the sense in which these models are consistent with what we know.

Second, according to Plantinga, there is not any "cogent objection to the model", no objection of any kind, philosophic or scientific. The only objections that we can raise against this model are the same objections against the theistic and Christian beliefs. As Plantinga suggests, if the Christian belief is true, then his model „or some variation" is also true.

Third, according to Plantinga these models are not just possible and beyond philosophical challenge, but are also true, and Plantinga does not try to prove that, and he has a justification for that. The shorter version entails the truth of theism, and the extended version entails the truths of Christian belief. To prove that these models are true, he has to prove that theism and Christian beliefs are also true.

And finally, according to Plantinga, there are multiple models for warrant of Christian belief, which are similar to his models, and if indeed classical Christian beliefs are true, then one or more of these models is true. After those claims are stated in place, Plantinga makes a step forward in presenting his model. Plantinga begins from the writings of Thomas d'Aquino and John Calvin which both affirm

that we have a kind of natural knowledge of God. According to Aquinas "To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature".<sup>1</sup> In the opening of chapter III of *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Calvin states that the knowledge of God is naturally implanted in the human mind and "That there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity".<sup>2</sup> According to Plantinga, Calvin's concept of natural knowledge is taken from apostle Paul, in Romans 1:

"since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

So according to apostle Paul, Aquinas, and Calvin we have an innate human ability to know or to form beliefs about God which is called by Calvin "*sensus divinitatis*". In addition to that, the rejection of God, according to Calvin, is a testimony of this *sensus divinitatis*:

"All men of sound judgment will therefore hold, that a sense of Deity is indelibly engraved on the human heart. And that this belief is naturally engendered in all, and thoroughly fixed as it were in our bones, is strikingly attested by the contumacy of the wicked, who, though they struggle furiously, are unable to extricate themselves from the fear of God."

From these passages, Plantinga concludes that we have a kind of faculty or cognitive mechanism, called *sensus divinitatis*, which, under some circumstance produce beliefs about God. The circumstances are the triggers for this mechanism to produce theistic beliefs.<sup>3</sup> One thing to notice here is, even if Plantinga considers that the circumstances are the triggers for this kind of beliefs, the circumstances are not generating these beliefs, neither these beliefs are the product of my own cognitive mechanism:

„...rather these beliefs are formed in us; in the typical case we don't consciously choose to have those beliefs. Instead, we find ourselves with them, just as we find ourselves with perceptual and memory beliefs."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Volume 1, Cosimo, Inc., 2013, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, P. H. Nicklin, 1816, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 171-72.

<sup>4</sup> Plantinga, p. 172.

According to Plantinga, these kinds of beliefs are not in my control, you do not decide to have or not to have these types of beliefs, these beliefs are similar with the perceptual and memory beliefs. For example, says Plantinga, I look in my back garden and I see a tree, and I form this belief that in my backyard is actually a tree. Or I am asked, what I have had for breakfast, I check my memory and I remember that I have had had pancakes with blueberry. According to Plantinga, theistic beliefs are the same as perceptual and memory beliefs.

The second thing to notice is that Plantinga, and Calvin as well, thinks that knowledge of God is innate. In Plantinga's words „innate...such that one has from birth”, in Calvin's word „from his mother's womb”.<sup>5</sup>The objection that may arise from here is with the awareness of this kind of belief. Neither Plantinga, and neither Calvin, suggests that we are aware of the existence of this type of belief in God from the birth, but both of them suggest that we have a capacity for this type of knowledge, and that is innate. Plantinga compares this capacity for the knowledge of God, with the arithmetical knowledge, we don't know elementary arithmetic from birth, but we have the capacity for this type of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> According to Plantinga, this model has six features that worth to be mentioned.

First, *basicity*, according to Plantinga we do not arrive at this type of natural knowledge by way of inference or arguments, but it is a more immediate way. Plantinga refutes the natural theology argument by which someone can behold the night sky or the Australian outback or something like that and conclude that such a person like God exists. It is rather that upon the perception of these things that makes these beliefs arise within us. According to Plantinga, these beliefs „are occasioned by the circumstances; they are not conclusions from them”. The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands, but this must not be used as a premise for an argument says Plantinga, or, the awareness of guilt, „I am guilty, so there must be a God”, this type of argument is very weak. The perception of guilt may trigger the *sensus divinitatis* to produce belief in God, it does not work by way of an argument.

The *sensus divinitatis* resembles perception, memory, and *a priori* beliefs. Regarding the perception beliefs Plantinga says:

„I look out into the backyard; I see that the coral tiger lilies are in bloom. I don't note that I am being appeared to a certain complicated way (that my experience is of a certain complicated character) and then make an argument from my being appeared to in that way to the conclusion that in fact there are

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Metress ed., *Teaching the Reformations*, MDPI, 2018 p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Plantinga, p. 173.

coral tiger lilies in bloom there... It is rather that upon being appeared to in that way (and given my previous training), the belief that the coral tiger lilies are in bloom spontaneously arises in me. This belief will ordinarily be basic, in the sense that it is not accepted on the evidential basis of other propositions.”<sup>7</sup>

Regarding memory and *a priori* beliefs:

„The same goes for memory. You ask me what I had for breakfast; I think for a moment and then remember: pancakes with blueberries. I don't argue from the fact that it *seems* to me that I remember having pancakes for breakfast to the conclusion that I did; rather, you ask me what I had for breakfast, and the answer simply comes to mind. Or consider *a priori* belief. I do not infer from other things that, for example, *modus ponens* is a valid form of argument: I just see that it is so and, in fact, *must* be so. All of these, we might say, are starting points for thought. But (on the model) the same goes for the sense of divinity. It isn't a matter of making a quick and dirty inference from the grandeur of the mountains or the beauty of the flower or the sun on the treetops to the existence of God; instead, a belief about God spontaneously arises in those circumstances, the circumstances that trigger the operation of the *sensus divinitatis*. This belief is another of those starting points for thought; it too is basic in the sense that the beliefs in question are not accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs.”<sup>8</sup>

According to Plantinga, perception, memory, and *a priori* beliefs are not based on arguments, or some other propositions, these beliefs are basic in the sense that they are independent of other beliefs.

Second, *proper basicity with respect to justification*, according to Plantinga, on his model a belief produced by *sensus divinitatis* is properly basic in at least two senses. First is basic because the belief in question is not accepted on the evidential basis of other propositions. Second, the person is justified in holding this belief, meaning that is not violating no epistemic rights or duties in holding that belief in that way.<sup>9</sup>

Third, *proper basicity with respect to warrant*, on Plantinga's view: „*p* is properly basic for S in *this* sense if and only S accepts *p* in the basic way, and furthermore, *p* has warrant for S”.<sup>10</sup> According to Plantinga, perceptual, memory, and some *a priori* are seen not just as basic beliefs but they often have warrant. This means that are produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly in a congenial environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth.

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<sup>7</sup> Plantinga, p. 175.

<sup>8</sup> Plantinga, p. 175–76.

<sup>9</sup> Plantinga, p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> Plantinga, p. 178.

Then the A/C Model can also be properly basic with respect to warrant. According to Plantinga on his model, the belief can have warrant for the person, and this is often sufficient for knowledge. The *sensus divinitatis* triggers under the right conditions true beliefs that are not evidentially based on other beliefs. Therefore, these beliefs say Plantinga, meets the conditions for warrant, and if these beliefs are strong enough, they constitute knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Forth, *natural knowledge of God*, at this point Plantinga makes the distinction between this natural knowledge of God, which is part of our original cognitive equipment and the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit. The former applies to all human beings, the later

“is an element in the divine response to the human sin and the human predicament, a predicament in which we human beings require healing, restoration, and salvation. According to fundamental Christian teaching, the central divine response to our predicament is the incarnation and atonement: the life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the divine son of God. By virtue of this divine response, we human beings can be put right with God and live triumphantly with him in this life and the next.”<sup>12</sup>

According to Plantinga, the work of the Holy Spirit is a special type of cognitive instrument or „agency” which is not part of our original noetic equipment and is a response to our sinful condition, and again the *sensus divinitatis* is a response to our fallen condition.<sup>13</sup>

Fifth, *perceptual or experiential knowledge*? At this point, Plantinga says: if the A/C Model is correct and if knowledge of God does not come from inference from other things then it follows that our knowledge of God comes from perception, and the warrant of the Christian belief is actually perceptual warrant. Not necessarily, says Plantinga, there is a person like God, and we have the possibility and actuality of perceiving him. The problem involved here is what perceiving is? According to Plantinga if perceiving involves specifically sensuous imagery then perceiving God in this way is not possible. But Plantinga thinks we can take perception in other senses, for example, bat’s echolocation.<sup>14</sup> William Alston provides us with another example, putative perception of God, which does not involve sensors imagery. Another example is that Christian believer may feel (in Plantinga’s words this type of perception is called „palpable”) the presence of God,

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<sup>11</sup> Plantinga, p. 179.

<sup>12</sup> Plantinga, p. 179.

<sup>13</sup> Plantinga, p. 180.

<sup>14</sup> Plantinga, p. 181.

according to Alston, when Moses met God on Sinai, God had neither form, color, odor, no taste, no localization.<sup>15</sup> According to Plantinga, there is no doubt that perception of God or „something like it” occurs but is not easy to say that in every situation when *sensus divinitatis* operates it will make use of perception to produce warranted beliefs. It seems that in some situations the operation of *sensus divinitatis* involves perception but in others not. Plantinga and Alston as well make the distinction between the indirect perception of God, in which the presence of God is mediated by something else (the sky, the mountains), but in other cases God doesn't seem present or presented in the various form, powerful, glorious, obeyed, worshiped. And in other cases such as guilt, danger, gratitude, the operation of *sensus divinitatis* may trigger the sense that God is actually present. So according to Plantinga, the *sensus divinitatis* does not necessarily involves perception of God.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding the experiential knowledge, Plantinga proceeds the same way, first by defining what religious experience is. In his opinion, this definition is constructed in thousands of different ways which are very ambiguous between them, but none the less the *sensus divinitatis* will always involve experience of some sort or another. Plantinga presents some examples, in some cases, there is sensuous imagery when sometimes the believer feels the presence of God, no sensuous imagery is present, „but perhaps something (necessarily hard to describe) like it”. In other cases, we have the experience that comes with being frightened, feeling grateful, angry, pleased, etc. According to Plantinga, none of these are connected strictly to the operation of the *sensus divinitatis*. But we have a type of experience that is always connected to the operation of *sensus divinitatis* and that is called by Plantinga *doxastic experience*.

“The sort of experience one has when entertaining any proposition, one believes. Entertaining, for instance, the proposition that  $3+2=5$  or that Mount Everest is higher than Mount Blanc *feels* different from entertaining one you think is clearly false  $-3+2=6$ , for example, or Mount Blanck is higher than Mount Everest. The first two feel natural, right, acceptable; the second two feel objectionable, wrong, eminently rejectable.”<sup>17</sup>

Even so, with all these varieties of experience, we cannot conclude that knowledge by way of *sensus divinitatis* is based on experiential knowledge. Plantinga is aware that this question involves “a long and essentially irrelevant effort to answer” and for the moment is better to lay it aside.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> Plantinga, p. 183.

<sup>18</sup> Plantinga, p. 183.

Finally, the last characteristic of this model, *sin and natural knowledge*. According to the A/C Model this natural knowledge of God “has been compromised, weakened, reduced, smothered, overlaid or impeded by sin and its consequences.” And the *sensus divinitatis* is restored „to proper function by regeneration and the operation of Holy Spirit”. According to Plantinga, the *sensus divinitatis*, the operation and the knowledge produced by the operation of the *sensus divinitatis* prior to faith and regeneration “is both narrower in scope and partially suppressed”, or as well this faculty may be “diseased and thus partly or wholly disabled.” By faith and regeneration and the work of Holy Spirit, the *sensus divinitatis* is partly healed and restored to proper function.<sup>19</sup>

After presenting all the characteristics for the A/C Model, Plantinga says that this model is incomplete, and we must proceed forward to the extended A/C Model to complete this picture.

## 2. Extended A/C Model

As we mentioned before, the extended A/C Model applies to the Christian belief, according to this model the classical Christian doctrines are justified, rational, and warranted. In presenting this model, Plantinga addresses topics such as, the Bible, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, and faith.

Plantinga starts by defining what *faith* is and *how does faith work*. In his acceptance, faith is not as Mark Twain explains it “believing what you know ain’t true”. The definition of faith used in developing this model is the same or „closer” to Heidelberg Catechism definition of faith:

“True faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his word is true; it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation. (Q. 21)”

According to this definition, Plantinga concludes that faith is a cognitive activity, and it involves the will, affection (faith... “it is sealed upon our hearts”, the believer says Plantinga manifest affections like gratitude, love, etc.), and it involves executive function.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Plantinga, p. 185–86.

<sup>20</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2015, p. 54.



How does faith work? What is involved, what sort of phenomenology is taking place in a person to accept the great truths of the gospel. According to Plantinga, there are three things, reading Scriptures, internal invitation or instigation of the Holy Spirit, and faith which is “the human belief that results”.<sup>21</sup> On this model, the Holy Spirit produces the “internal invitation or instigation” this can happen when some reads Scriptures, hear the gospel preached, or is exposed in one way or another to the Bible teachings. Under these circumstances the Holy Spirit cause people to have faith.<sup>22</sup> At this point, Plantinga mentions that Scripture could be seen as, I will call it, simple testimony, one that is taking place between two friends for example, but Plantinga is referring to another meaning of testimony, a special type, called divine testimony. So, faith is the belief in the divine testimony, that results from the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Another thing worth mentioning is that on this model, *faith has a positive epistemic status*, this means that belief will have justification, rationality (internal and external), and warrant. According to Plantinga, Christian belief is deontologically justified, or at least there should be a little doubt, in fulfilling the duties and responsibilities. Plantinga is aware that are some intellectual obligations and duties that require to be fulfilled, but clearly, there is no violation of intellectual obligation in accepting faith as a result of the instigation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup> Of course, there are some objections to that, as John Macquarrie mentions, someone how thinks that his beliefs come from God is arrogant, hence is not justified.<sup>25</sup> This type of objection is very simple to answer by appealing to *argumentum ab auctoritate*. We will deal whit this type of objection in the next section.

Internal rationality requires first, proper function of the cognitive mechanism and second that you have done your best in forming the belief in question, how it fits with your other beliefs, what are the weakest and strongest points, what are the objections. Clearly, says Plantinga, someone who is accepting the Christian beliefs in this way can easily meet these conditions, and belief in this way, on the testimonial model, enjoys both justification and internal rationality.<sup>26</sup>

External rationality and warrant, according to Plantinga faith is knowledge, and should not be *contrasted* with knowledge, because faith *is* knowledge of a special kind (Plantinga’s emphasize). Is of a special kind, because, according to Plantinga, is the most important thing a person could possibly know, and because of the way

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<sup>21</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 250.

<sup>22</sup> Erik Baldwin, “Could the Extended Aquinas/Calvin Model Defeat Basic Christian Belief?,” *Philosophia Christi* Vol. 8, no. 2 (2006): p. 384.

<sup>23</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 252.

<sup>24</sup> Plantinga, p. 253.

<sup>25</sup> John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, New York: SCM Press, 1977, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 255.

in which is known. It involves the activity of God.<sup>27</sup> This is one of the reasons Plantinga is to be placed between externalists, in his acceptance, the „belief-producing process is dual” in which both the Holy Spirit and the Scripture are involved in revealing the great truths Christian beliefs.

Now, faith is a belief-producing process, like memory and perception, but differs from these because it involves the activity of the Holy Spirit. Memory and perception must meet some conditions to qualify as knowledge, the same is for belief. In *Warrant and Proper Function*, Plantinga states some conditions under which belief is warranted. First, belief must be produced in me by my cognitive faculties that are working properly. Here the meaning of „properly” is to work as they ought to, the subject in cause must not suffer from any cognitive dysfunction, says Plantinga. Not only to be free of malfunction in the production of beliefs but as well in sustaining them. The second condition is to work according to a design plan, according to Plantinga, the „design plan of an organism or artifact specifies how it works when it works properly...it specifies how the organism *should* work.”<sup>28</sup> And third, this belief-production mechanism should be successfully aimed at production true beliefs. The belief production mechanism could produce a belief that has other purposes, for example, survival, or wish fulfillment, as Freud thought.<sup>29</sup>

According to Plantinga, this model is also *proper basic* meaning that Christian belief is not the conclusion of an argument nor is accepted on the evidential basis of other beliefs, nor because is a “good explanation of phenomena of one kind or another.”, and Christian beliefs are neither conclusions from religious experience. Christian belief is immediate, says Plantinga, and if the belief is basic this means the belief is justified, rational, and warranted. On the other side, we have *Scriptures* which has “its own evidence with it”.<sup>30</sup> Here Plantinga makes use of Calvin's writings. According to Calvin, Scripture is „self-authenticating”, meaning that, Scripture is knowledge that “has flowed from the very mouth of God”<sup>31</sup>

From the writings of Calvin, Plantinga draws the conclusion that self-authenticating means that, the truths of the Scripture are indeed evident and their evidence is immediately, and they are not evidently by way of propositional evidence, nor are based on other basic beliefs. What Calvin means is that we do not need arguments, from examples, history, or authority and reliability of Scripture to conclude that Christian beliefs are true.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Plantinga, p. 256.

<sup>28</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 22.

<sup>29</sup> Plantinga, p. 12–20.

<sup>30</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 259.

<sup>31</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 87.

<sup>32</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 262.

Finally, *cognitive renewal*. Plantinga suggests that we cannot believe until our cognitive mechanism, or belief producing mechanism is renewed. He quotes, the words of Jesus Christ “unless a person is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3), and apostle Paul, who states that believer becomes a new person in Christ. So, the believer must be regenerated, transformed, renewed, restored brought in the state it was originally created. According to Plantinga, sin has damaged our nature, sin induces blindness, dullness, stupidity, imperceptiveness, sin induces some sort of madness of the will, but by the work of the Holy Spirit “regeneration heals the ravages of sin” and this work begins in this life and is perfected in the afterlife. What are the benefits of regeneration? First says Plantinga, the *sensus divinitatis* is repaired, now we can see God. We can see much clear “the beauty, splendor, loveliness, attractiveness, glory of God. It enables us to see something of the spectacular depth of love revealed in the incarnation and atonement.” At the same time, it gives us a much clearer view of the abomination, „heinousness” of sin. Second, not only that I see who God is, but now I can see clearly what my place in the universe is. “Perhaps I will no longer see myself as the center of things, or see my wants, needs, and desire as more important...than anyone else’s.” Third, it enables us to see what is most important about ourselves. Meaning that we are created in the image of a loving God, and our origins are rooted in the person of God, belief which is, as Plantinga says, “the Achilles heel of naturalism”.<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion, the extended version of the A/C Model is the classical, Christian perspective on how someone can have warranted beliefs in the absence of arguments or evidence. In this process, the Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and faith are involved to produce in us belief. These beliefs are justified, rational (internal and external), and warranted. The Holy Spirit is responsible for the regeneration act, in which our cognitive mechanism, or our belief production mechanism or our *sensus divinitatis* is renewed, in this way the Holy Spirit is working in accordance with God’s teaching in Scriptures.

### 3. Objections

Plantinga in WCB analyzes analyze and refutes five objections, some of them have to do with religious experience, the great pumpkin objection, and circularity objection. We will not go in all the details; we will try to summarize the objections and how Plantinga refutes them.

First, a belief cannot have warrant from religious experience. Anthony O’Hear in his book *Experience, Explanation and Faith* writes how difficult is for a non-believer

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<sup>33</sup> Plantinga, p. 281.

to grasp the idea of “direct personal contact with a non-sensory reality”. What O’Hear is trying to show is the point to which a belief can be justified by experience.<sup>34</sup> According to Plantinga, this objection is not very specific, O’Hear although is writing about justification he is not being very accurate. Plantinga ask’s “is O’Hear talking about *justification, rationality, or warrant, or what?*”

O’Hear is neither very specific about the contact with a nonsensory reality like God. He just presupposes that there is a problem or difficulty in this type of thinking, but he does not respond to the problem. According to Plantinga, “This *sounds* like he thinks the way to answer the question”. The way he tries to answer is (1)theistic belief can have warrant from religious experience only if there is a good argument from the existence of God and (2)this argument has to involve a premise in which the existence of God is the best explanation of religious experiences.<sup>35</sup> According to Plantinga, (1) is just an assumption, another way to put it is that “theistic belief can have warrant by way of religious experience only if some theistic argument from religious experience is successful. According to Plantinga, this type of objection is false, we have to discuss if a belief can receive warrant by way of religious experience and not whether there is a good argument from the existence of religious experience to the existence of God. Plantinga compares religious experience and belief to, perceptual experience and belief, memory experience and belief, *a priori* experience, and belief, and concludes that all resemble with Christian belief.<sup>36</sup>

The second objection that Plantinga tries to refute must do also with religious experience. “Theistic belief could never receive warrant from religious experience because the religious experience could never indicate or show anything as specific as that there is such a person as God”.<sup>37</sup> This objection originates in John Mackie's writings. According to Mackie, religious experience is incapable of showing that the traditional doctrines of theism, or that the attributes of God or the uniqueness of God are actually true.<sup>38</sup> What Mackie really says, according to Plantinga, is that “I can’t be sure.” In trusting my experience but does not follow that my experience cannot reveal a creator who displays these attributes like God.

Plantinga refutes this objection based on past experience. All of us belief in the fact that we exist for many years, but it is logically possible that I “have existed for only a microsecond or two” and displaying all the properties that I do in fact

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<sup>34</sup> Anthony O’Hear, *Experience, Explanation, and Faith: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1984, p. 27.

<sup>35</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 327–28.

<sup>36</sup> Plantinga, p. 328.

<sup>37</sup> Plantinga, p. 331.

<sup>38</sup> J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God*, Oxford [Oxfordshire]: New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 182.

display. If I existed for two or three seconds, I wouldn't have the properties of being sixty years old, says Plantinga, but I would have other properties like thinking. So, again it does not follow that my present experiences cannot reveal a person like God. It is also compatible, with my present experiences. Plantinga thinks that my past experience could be compatible with my present experience and even if existed for two or three seconds. It is possible that I have existed for two or three seconds and display the same beliefs as one that is sixty years old.<sup>39</sup>

Plantinga suggests that there are other types of experiences that reveal something to us, for example, perceptual experience that reveals an external world, this type of experience involves sensuous imagery. There is also *doxastic experience*, which involves sensuous imagery and affective experience. According to Plantinga, we use all the time our experiences to form some belief.<sup>40</sup> In the end, there is a fallacy in Macky's argumentation the conclusion does not follow the premises.

The third objection targets the cognitive aspect of religious experience. Richard Gale tries to refute an argument associated to many other philosophers; the argument goes like this:

1. Religious experiences are analogous to sense experience.
2. Sense experiences are cognitive.

Therefore:

3. Religious experiences are cognitive.<sup>41</sup>

According to Plantinga, Gale is objecting strictly the first premise, therefore, his conclusion would not be that religious experience is not cognitive, but only this particular argument for its cognitivity fails. Second, he believes any experiential awareness of God would have to be like the perceptual awareness of God, therefore he concludes, that is impossible to have knowledge of God by way of experience because the religious experience is not cognitive.<sup>42</sup> So, according to the second premise, any religious experience would be cognitive if it is part of a veridical perception of God. But Plantinga, in presenting the extended A/C Model is speaking about knowledge of God by way of experience, not perceptual knowledge. According to Plantinga, Gale's arguments, „doesn't even begin to show that perception of God is impossible, or that religious experience is never cognitive, or that there couldn't be knowledge of God by way of *sensus divinitatis* and IHS. Gale's argument depends upon a lot of assumptions that have little or no claim to assent. All these assumptions seem monumentally dubious at best.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 333.

<sup>40</sup> Plantinga, p. 335.

<sup>41</sup> Richard M. Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 288.

<sup>42</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 336.

<sup>43</sup> Plantinga, p. 342.

Son of great pumpkin, the fourth objection. On the A/C Model, *simpliciter* or extended, a belief can have warrant, not by way of arguments or evidence, or to have warrant transferred from other's beliefs. These beliefs are like memory beliefs, perceptual beliefs, and some *a priori* beliefs. Therefore, these beliefs are considered to be basic beliefs.

According to Michael Martin, if a belief is considered basic belief, then it is beyond rational appraisal, meaning that arguments and objection are not relevant to it. „Plantinga’s foundationalism is radically relativistic and puts any belief beyond rational appraisal once it is declared basic.”<sup>44</sup> According to Plantinga, this objection is false because theistic belief is not immune to arguments and defeaters by being basic beliefs.<sup>45</sup>

But according to Martin, reformed epistemologists can take any proposition *p* in the basic way, and that proposition could legitimately claim that *p* was properly basic. For example, says Martin, even if reformed epistemologists would not have to accept voodoo belief as rational, still the voodoo followers would be able to claim that their beliefs are properly basic and rational.<sup>46</sup>

Plantinga structures Martin’s argument this way:

“(1) If Reformed epistemologists can legitimately claim that belief in God is rationally acceptable in the basic way, then for any other belief accepted in some community, the epistemologists of that community could legitimately claim that *it* was properly basic, no matter how bizarre the belief.

But

(2) The consequence of this conditional is false.

So

(3) The Reformed epistemologist can't legitimately claim that belief in God is rationally acceptable in the basic way.”<sup>47</sup>

According to Plantinga, Martin must provide some definitions, what he means by ‘rational’, deontological justification, internal rationality, rationality in terms of warrant? And what he means by ‘legitimately’, that the voodooists could legitimately claim that are justified, no matter what.

So according to Martin, if the Reformed epistemologists can legitimately claim that Christian beliefs are properly basic with respect to rationality, then other communities with different beliefs can legitimately claim the same. But according to Plantinga, they could not make such claim, because the usage of terms like

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<sup>44</sup> Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*, Temple University Press, 1992, p. 276.

<sup>45</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 344.

<sup>46</sup> Martin, *Atheism*, p. 272.

<sup>47</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 345.

“legitimately’ and “rationality” are very ambiguous, as both are referring to the same concept of warrant. According to Plantinga the argument construed in this way is annoying and is making false promises. The “Son of Great Pumpkin does no better than the Great Pumpkin.”<sup>48</sup>

The last objection is regarding circularity. Plantinga identifies this objection in Paul Noble's writing. Noble is writing about Jonathan Edward's theistic defense. According to Noble, Edward's is appealing to some epistemic circularity in vindicating the truth of theism. Here Plantinga is asking “Isn't it true that my own proposal has warrant for me (or anyone who accepts it) only if theistic belief is, in fact, true and, indeed, warranted?”<sup>49</sup>

This objection is false because Plantinga says that his extended A/C Model is a way in which Christian belief can have warrant, not that he is warranted in proposing this model.

## Conclusion

Paul Ricoeur thinks that to understand religious concepts we must distinguish between two models “the hermeneutics of recollection” and “the hermeneutics of suspicion.”<sup>50</sup> According to Ricoeur, the hermeneutics of recollection is used by religion because the Christian believer thinks that it is in some connection with something real and it is his duty to retrieve or “recollect” a message. The hermeneutics of suspicion denies that there is a divine reality in religion, according to Freud and another religion is just the product of illusion or wish fulfillment or something like that.

In the first part of this article, we tried to show that the Christian believer is justified in holding the belief that God exists. According to Alvin Plantinga and his A/C Model, the belief that God exists can be considered basic and does not need arguments or evidence. This belief is like perceptual, memory and some *a priori* belief. More than that, the belief in God, according to Plantinga's model is to be considered immediate knowledge.

In examining this model, we saw that the roots of Plantinga's thought are in the writings of Jean Calvin and Thomas d'Aquino. Both writing about a *sensus divinitatis* that we have implanted in our mind from birth. *Sensus divinitatis* that is affected by sin and our fallen condition, and that we need to be restored to our previous condition,

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<sup>48</sup> Plantinga, p. 349.

<sup>49</sup> Plantinga, p. 351.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970, p. 28–36.

by the life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by the work of the Holy Spirit. Only in this way the *sensus divinitatis* it will function properly working according to the design plan and aiming at the production of true beliefs. On this model, or something similar, Plantinga, concludes that belief in God is justified, rational (internal and external), and warranted.

The extended A/C Model covers the main doctrines of Christian belief. The two models are similar, and the principles from the first one applies as well to the second. Here, we have presented faith and how faith works, the role of the Scripture, and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, in production beliefs that are justified, rational (internal and external), and warranted. According to this model, the instigation of the Holy Spirit is working in accordance with the Scripture, and that is a cognitive process or belief-production mechanism that produces in us beliefs that constitutes faith alongside other beliefs.

Finally, these models are not free of objections. The main objections are targeting religious experience. Like religious experience cannot provide warrant, religious experience is useless if the existence of God cannot be proven, and religious experience is not a cognitive process. Plantinga analyzes and rejects other objections as well, like the “Son of Great Pumpkin” in which if a belief is considered basic no matter how bizarre it is, then it is accepted and not subject to any argument or objection. And circularity objection, and surely there are many other objections regarding the A/C Models proposed by Plantinga.

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