

Summary

Alvin Plantinga's concept of warranted Christian belief – as explained in his Aquinas/Calvin model – has been investigated in this thesis from a theological perspective. This involved a study of his published work on this topic together with the main theological responses which have appeared until recently. The aim of this research has been to identify and develop further insights for Christian apologetics.

In Part I, I have summarised Plantinga's model of warranted Christian belief. Plantinga addresses the question whether there is a serious *de jure* objection against the Christian faith. In other words: would it be irrational to hold Christian belief? His answer is 'no,' and the reason for his answer is that Christian belief, if true, is warranted, or has warrant. According to Plantinga warrant is a property – or better, quantity – enough of which is what makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief. Warrant is intimately connected to proper function of cognitive powers: A belief has warrant if it is produced by cognitive faculties or processes that are functioning properly, in a congenial cognitive environment, according to a design plan that is successfully aimed at the production of true belief.

Plantinga explains why and how Christian faith can have warrant in what he calls the Aquinas/Calvin (A/C) model. This model consists of two main elements:

First, the basic A/C model deals with theistic belief in general. Theistic belief can have warrant as it is based on the *sensus divinitatis* as a knowledge-producing cognitive faculty which gives a natural knowledge of God. Plantinga derives this approach from the work of Aquinas and Calvin, hence the name 'Aquinas/Calvin model.'

Second, the presence and effect of sin, however, damages the result of the operation of the *sensus divinitatis*. The extended A/C model addresses the question of how the noetic effects of sin can be remedied. This question is answered in the specifically Christian belief and the message of the gospel focussed on the person and work of Jesus Christ. This belief derives its warrant from the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit and the Bible work together to bring about faith in the believer. This operates also as a knowledge producing process meeting the conditions for warrant. Plantinga shows that this means that Christian belief, if true, can have warrant.

The result can be stated in different ways: Christian belief can be called properly basic and hence does not require evidence or arguments on the basis of other beliefs. This also means that a person can be justified and rational in accepting the Christian faith.

This approach depends, however, on the truth question of the Christian faith as being true is one of the conditions for warrant. In other words, we cannot separate the *de jure* question from the *de facto* question.

In Part II, I have described and analysed the various theological responses. I have also given my preliminary response to the points raised by the individual authors. Next, I have studied the collective responses, which summarise as follows:

*The main concern appears to be the need perceived to address **the truth question** of the Christian faith, given that Plantinga used this question only as a condition and assumption in his model. This leads critics to question Plantinga's treatment of **the role of arguments** based on evidence and testimony, and in many cases to a call to give such arguments a more prominent place. This approach, however, inevitably questions **the properly basic nature of theistic and Christian belief** and the way it can have warrant. This in turn raises the question whether the formation and maintenance of these beliefs is described adequately by **the basic and extended A/C model**. This also involves issues concerning **the role of the believer and of the church**, and the question regarding **the strength or assurance of faith**.*

My own conclusion is that most of the objections raised against Plantinga's basic and extended A/C model can be answered such that the model itself remains valid although there is clear scope to strengthen the model and to build on it. My criticism of most responses is that lacunae (in some cases rightly) perceived in Plantinga's model are often turned into a critique of Plantinga's model itself, rather than into suggesting ways to address what is missed. In my opinion these points represent important and useful opportunities to strengthen and complement the model in several ways.

In part III, I have presented my suggestions on how to address these issues. My goal in addressing these topics has been to develop and expand the model with some further theological content, and to develop insights and applications to positive Christian apologetics: a field to which Plantinga's contribution, for good reasons, has been more limited. The results and my conclusions can be summarised as follows:

The truth of the Christian faith is a condition for warrant and is assumed in the model. The truth of the Christian faith finds its origin in God who revealed himself in his Son, Jesus Christ. Plantinga's approach to describe how the Christian faith, if true, can have warrant is important and necessary, but so is the approach addressing the truth question. Both lines of thinking are used in the New Testament. Scripture also indicates how arguments for the truth *and* the rationality or warrant of the Christian faith are used. I have pointed to Acts 26:25 as an example where Paul exclaims regarding the gospel: "I am speaking true *and* rational words."

Plantinga's point that arguments are not necessary for the warrant of Christian faith implies that all kinds of people can have warrant for their faith independent of their understanding of such arguments. The Holy Spirit in giving faith can, however, use arguments to overcome the sinful resistance in human beings.

The truth claim of the Christian faith is supported in two ways: it is based on the testimony to the historical events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and these events are the climactic fulfilment of God's revelation of his redemptive purposes. Both ways are found in Scripture as the testimony used by the Holy Spirit to generate faith. This is why Plantinga rightly calls his extended A/C model a testimonial model.

The fact that Plantinga speaks about a cognitive *process* rather than a cognitive *faculty* in his extended A/C model is because this part of the model describes the work of the Holy Spirit. As this work involves human faculties, it is more complicated, and is

therefore better described as a process. This does not affect the reason why the Christian faith can have warrant.

Plantinga's description of the warrant of theistic belief appears to be in agreement with the text of Romans 1:18-21. My examination of this text, together with other biblical evidence, indicates that it is biblically and theologically legitimate to recognise theistic belief in sinful people in a limited sense. The awareness that a powerful divine being exists is a manifestation of this theistic belief, even though people form completely wrong and misguided ideas about who this being is. Such belief is true and may have warrant, even though people suppress this belief and/or misuse it by replacing it with some form of idolatry.

I have proposed that the basic A/C model needs to be complemented with a basic model for warranted moral beliefs. Such beliefs are present in all human beings, but because of the effect of sin, they are also severely damaged and suppressed in a similar way as in the case of theistic belief. The extended A/C model includes a description of how the effects of sin affecting both theistic and moral beliefs are repaired by the gift of Christian faith.

I have argued that the following points should be added to support the extended A/C model: Describing the work of the Holy Spirit in terms of being united to Christ as its primary element, together with all that follows from it, helps to connect the cognitive and affective elements of the model. These elements together describe the whole person transformation brought about by the Holy Spirit giving us a new relationship with God. This shows why faith is more than belief in a set of propositions, but is belief and trust in the Person of Christ.

Accepting the notions of both divine sovereignty and human responsibility offers the most satisfactory way to address the question how the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit as described in the extended A/C model relates to the role of the human believer.

The approach pointing to God's revelation and the redemption secured for us in the history of Jesus Christ and in his death and resurrection as the ground of our assurance, is the best way to address the variability of belief problem.

Recognising and defining the role of the church also adds to and strengthens Plantinga's model. Both individual believers and the church as a whole in turn testify to the truth of the Christian faith.

All of this helps Christian believers to think about their Christian faith, and it also leads to a number of applications for Christian apologetics:

First, the case for the possibility for the warrant of Christian faith can be articulated, explained and defended and this can clear the way for a discussion of the truth of the Christian faith using arguments and testimony in the way indicated in Scripture as described above. Scripture clearly shows why arguments for the truth of Christian faith, and reasons why this faith can have warrant, both have a legitimate place and are indispensable to proclaim the gospel.

Second, the case for warranted theistic belief and warranted moral belief serves as the background for introducing the specifically Christian belief. Plantinga's model has to

be seen as one integrated model for warranted Christian belief, as this addresses how the Christian faith shows a unique message of salvation.

Third, the message of the Christian faith involves both cognitive and affective renewal which together are presented as the means for the transformation of our whole life in the power of the Holy Spirit. And this extends much further: to a new humanity destined for new heavens and a new earth in which true righteousness will dwell.

Fourth, we are in our epistemic right to call on people everywhere to repent and to believe this gospel that is freely offered to all. The truth of God's revelation in Jesus Christ is communicated through God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit employing the ongoing ministry of the church in the proclamation of this gospel to produce Christian faith. This Christian faith comprises warranted true belief and right affections.