

Nature And Scripture

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We have been dealing, in this book, with the doctrine of Scripture. But Scripture claims to come to sinners. And sinners are such as have, through the fall of Adam, become “wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.” Man made himself “incapable of life” by his disobedience to God’s original revelation of himself in paradise. It is in order, then, that a discussion of the doctrine of Scripture should include an investigation of God’s revelation in nature. Moreover, Scripture does not claim to speak to man, even as fallen, in any other way than in conjunction with nature. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the two forms of revelation—revelation through nature and revelation in Scripture—be set in careful relationship to one another. Do the two forms of God’s revelation to sinners cover two distinct interests or dimensions of human life? Do they speak with different degrees of authority? Just what, we are bound to ask, is the relation between them?

It is well known that Reformed theology has a distinctive doctrine of Scripture. It is our purpose in this chapter to show that for this reason it has an equally distinctive doctrine of natural revelation. To accomplish this purpose we shall limit ourselves largely to the Westminster Standards. Dividing our discussion into two main parts, we shall first set forth positively the doctrine of natural theology that is found in these standards and then contrast this natural theology, with another natural theology, the natural theology that has its origin in Greek thought.

1. The Natural Theology Of The Confession

The distinctive character of the natural theology of the Westminster Confession may be most clearly brought to view if we show how intimately it is interwoven with the

Confession's doctrine of Scripture. And this may perhaps be most easily accomplished if it is noted that, just as the Confession's doctrine of Scripture may be set forth under definite notions of its necessity, its authority, its sufficiency and its perspicuity, so the Confession's doctrine of revelation in nature may be set forth under corresponding notions of necessity, authority, sufficiency and perspicuity.

A few general remarks must therefore first be made with respect to the concepts of necessity, authority, sufficiency and perspicuity as these pertain to the Confession's doctrine of Scripture.

According to the Confession, Scripture speaks to sinners in terms of a covenant. It tells us that man was originally placed on earth under the terms of the covenant of works. It informs us further that man broke this covenant of works and that God was pleased to make a second covenant with men that they might be saved. Thus Scripture may be said to be the written expression of God's covenantal relationship with man.

The four characteristics of Scripture enumerated above may now be regarded in relation to this general covenant concept. The necessity of Scripture lies in the fact that man has broken the covenant of works. He therefore needs the grace of God. There is no speech or knowledge of grace in nature. God has accordingly condescended to reveal it in Scripture.

The revelation of grace can be seen for what it is only if it be seen in its own light. The light of grace outshines in its brilliance the light of nature as the sun outshines the moon. The kind of God that speaks in Scripture can speak only on his own authority. So the authority of Scripture is as basic as its necessity.

To this necessity and authority there must be added the sufficiency or finality of Scripture. When the sun of grace has arisen on the horizon of the sinner, the "light of nature" shines only by reflected light. Even when there are some "circumstances concerning the worship of God, the government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence," they are to be so ordered "according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed." The light of Scripture is that superior light which lightens every other light. It is also the final light. God's covenant of grace is His final covenant with man. Its terms must be once for all and finally recorded "against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world."

To the necessity, authority and sufficiency of Scripture must finally be added its perspicuity. The distribution of God's grace depends in the last analysis upon His sovereign will, but it is mediated always through fully responsible image-bearers of God. God's being is wholly clear to himself and his revelation of himself to sinners is therefore also inherently clear. Not only the learned but also the unlearned "in a due use of the ordinary means" may "attain unto a sufficient understanding" of God's covenant of grace as revealed in Scripture.

With this general view of Scripture in mind, we turn to the question of God's revelation of himself in nature. The first point that calls for reflection here is the fact that it is, according to Scripture itself, the same God who reveals himself in nature and in grace. The God who reveals himself in nature may therefore be described as "infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection, all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, every where present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness

and truth.” It is, to be sure, from Scripture rather than from nature that this description of God is drawn. Yet it is this same God, to the extent that he is revealed at all, that is revealed in nature.

Contemplation of this fact seems at once to plunge us into great difficulty. Are we not told that nature reveals nothing of the grace of God? Does not the Confession insist that men cannot be saved except through the knowledge of God, “be they ever so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature; and the law of that religion they do profess”? Saving grace is not manifest in nature; yet it is the God of saving grace who manifests himself by means of nature. How can these two be harmonized?

The answer to this problem must be found in the fact that God is “eternal, incomprehensible, most free, most absolute.” Any revelation that God gives of himself is therefore absolutely voluntary. Herein precisely lies the union of the various forms or God’s revelation with one another. God’s revelation in nature, together with God’s revelation in Scripture, form God’s one grand scheme of covenant revelation of himself to man. The two forms of revelation must therefore be seen as presupposing and supplementing one another. They are aspects of one general philosophy of history.

1. The Philosophy Of History

The philosophy of history that speaks to us from the various chapters of the Confession may be sketched with a few bold strokes. We are told that man could never have had any fruition of God through the revelation that came to him in nature as operating by itself. There was superadded to God’s revelation in nature another revelation, a supernaturally communicated positive revelation. Natural revelation, we are virtually told, was from the outset incorporated into the idea of a covenantal relationship of God with man. Thus every dimension of created existence, even the lowest, was enveloped in a form of exhaustively personal relationship between God and man. The “ateleological” no less than the “teleological,” the “mechanical” no less than the “spiritual” was covenantal in character.

Being from the outset covenantal in character, the natural revelation of God to man was meant to serve as the playground for the process of differentiation that was to take place in the course of time. The covenant made with Adam was conditional. There would be additional revelation of God in nature after the action of man with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This additional revelation would be different from that which had preceded it. And the difference would depend definitely upon a self-conscious covenant act of man with respect to the positively communicated prohibition. We know something of the nature of this new and different revelation of God in nature consequent upon the covenant-breaking act of man. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man” (Rom 1:18).

Thus God’s covenant wrath is revealed in nature after the one all-decisive act of disobedience on the part of the first covenant head. But, together with God’s wrath, his grace is also manifest. When the wrath of God made manifest in nature would destroy all men, God makes covenant with Noah that day and night, winter and summer, should continue to the end of time (Gn 9:11). The rainbow, a natural phenomenon, is but an outstanding illustration of this fact. But all this is in itself incomplete. The covenant with

Noah is but a limiting notion in relation to the covenant of saving grace. Through the new and better covenant, man will have true fruition of God. And this fact itself is to be mediated through nature. The prophets, and especially the great Prophet, foretell the future course of nature. The priests of God, and most of all the great High Priest of God, hear the answers to their prayers by means of nature. The kings under God, and most of all the great King of Israel, make nature serve the purposes of redemption. The forces of nature are always at the beck and call of the power of differentiation that works toward redemption and reprobation. It is this idea of a supernatural-natural revelation that comes to such eloquent expression in the Old Testament, and particularly in the Psalms.

Here then is the picture of a well-integrated and unified philosophy of history in which revelation in nature and revelation in Scripture are mutually meaningless without one another and mutually fruitful when taken together.

To bring out the unity and therewith the meaning of this total picture more clearly, we turn now to note the necessity, the authority, the sufficiency and the perspicuity of natural revelation, as these correspond to the necessity, the authority, the sufficiency and the perspicuity of Scripture.

2. The Necessity Of Natural Revelation

Speaking first of the necessity of natural revelation we must recall that man was made a covenant personality. Scripture became necessary because of the covenant disobedience of Adam in paradise. This covenant disobedience took place in relation to the supernatural positive revelation that God had given with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God chose one tree from among many and “arbitrarily” told man not to eat of it. It is in this connection that we must speak of the necessity of natural revelation. If the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had been naturally different from other trees it could not have served its unique purpose. That the commandment might appear as purely “arbitrary” the specially chosen tree had to be naturally like other trees. For the supernatural to appear as supernatural the natural had to appear as really natural. The supernatural could not be recognized for what it was unless the natural were also recognized for what it was. There had to be regularity if there was to be a genuine exception.

A further point needs to be noted. God did not give His prohibition so that man might be obedient merely with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and that merely at one particular moment of time. He gave the prohibition so that man might learn to be self-consciously obedient in all that he did with respect to all things and throughout all time. Man was meant to glorify God in the “lower” as much as in the “higher” dimensions of life. Man’s act with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was to be but an example to himself of what he should or should not do with respect to all other trees. But for an example to be really an example it must be exceptional. And for the exceptional to be the exceptional there is required that which is regular. Thus we come again to the notion of the necessity of natural revelation as the presupposition of the process of differentiation that history was meant to be.

So far we have spoken of the necessity of natural revelation as it existed before the fall. Carrying on this idea, it follows that we may also speak of the necessity of natural

revelation after the fall. Here too the natural or regular has to appear as the presupposition of the exceptional. But the exceptional has now become redemptive. The natural must therefore appear as in need of redemption. After the fall it is not sufficient that the natural should appear as merely regular. The natural must now appear as under the curse of God. God's covenant wrath rests securely and comprehensively upon man and upon all that man has mismanaged. Before the fall the natural as being the merely regular was the presupposition of the supernatural as being pre-redemptively covenantal; after the fall the natural as under the covenant wrath of God is the presupposition of the supernatural as redemptive covenantal. Grace can be recognized as grace only in contrast with God's curse on nature.

Then too the idea of the supernatural as "example" is again in order here. Grace speaks to man of victory over sin. But the victory this time is to come through the obedience of the second Adam. The regeneration of all things must now be a gift before it can become a task. The natural must therefore by contrast reveal an unalleviated picture of folly and ruin. Nor would the Confession permit us to tone down the rigid character of the absolute contrast between the grace and the curse of God through the idea of "common grace." Common grace is subservient to special or saving grace. As such it helps to bring out the very contrast between this saving grace and the curse of God. When men dream dreams of a paradise regained by means of common grace, they only manifest the "strong delusion" that falls as punishment of God upon those that abuse his natural revelation. Thus the natural as the regular appears as all the more in need of the gift of the grace of God.

Yet the gift is in order to the task. The example is also meant to be a sample. Christ walks indeed upon a cosmic road. Far as the curse is found, so far his grace is given. The Biblical miracles of healing point to the regeneration of all things. The healed souls of men require and will eventually receive healed bodies and a healed environment. Thus there is unity of concept for those who live by the Scriptural promise of comprehensive, though not universal, redemption. While they actually expect Christ to return visibly on the clouds of heaven, they thank God for every sunny day. They even thank God for his restraining and supporting general grace by means of which the unbeliever helps to display the majesty and power of God. To the believer the natural or regular with all its complexity always appears as the playground for the process of differentiation which leads ever onward to the fullness of the glory of God.

3. The Authority Of Natural Revelation

So far we have found that the Confession's conception of the necessity of Scripture requires a corresponding conception of the necessity of revelation in nature. It is not surprising, then, that the Confession's notion of the authority of Scripture requires a corresponding notion of the authority of revelation in nature. Here too it is well that we begin by studying the situation as it obtained before the entrance of sin.

In paradise, God communicated directly and positively with man in regard to the tree of life. This revelation was authoritative. Its whole content was that of a command requiring implicit obedience. This supernatural revelation was something exceptional. To be recognized for what it was in its exceptionality, a contrast was required between it and

God's regular way of communication with man. Ordinarily man had to use his God-given powers of investigation to discover the workings of the processes of nature. Again, the voice of authority as it came to man in this exceptional manner was to be but illustrative of the fact that, in and through the things of nature, there spoke the self-same voice of God's command. Man was given permission by means of the direct voice of authority to control and subdue the powers of nature. As a hunter bears upon his back in clearly visible manner the number of his hunting license, so Adam bore indelibly upon his mind the divine right of dealing with nature. And the divine right was at the same time the divine obligation. The mark of God's ownership was from the beginning writ large upon all the facts of the universe. Man was to cultivate the garden of the Lord and gladly pay tribute to the Lord of the manor.

Man's scientific procedure was accordingly to be marked by the attitude of obedience to God. He was to realize that he would find death in nature everywhere if he manipulated it otherwise than as being the direct bearer of the behests of God. The rational creature of God must naturally live by authority in all the activities of his personality. All these activities are inherently covenantal activities either of obedience or of disobedience.

Man was created as analogue of God; his thinking, his willing and his doing is therefore properly conceived as at every point analogical to the thinking, willing and doing of God. It is only after refusing to be analogous to God that man can think of setting a contrast between the attitude of reason to one type of revelation and the attitude of faith to another type of revelation.

By the idea of revelation, then, we are to mean not merely what comes to man through the facts surrounding him in his environment, but also that which comes to him by means of his own constitution as a covenant personality. The revelation that comes to man by way of his own rational and moral nature is no less objective to him than that which comes to him through the voice of trees and animals. Man's own psychological activity is no less revelational than the laws of physics about him. All created reality is inherently revelational of the nature and will of God. Even man's ethical reaction to God's revelation is still revelational. And as revelational of God, it is authoritative. The meaning of the Confession's doctrine of the authority of Scripture does not become clear to us till we see it against the background of the original and basically authoritative character of God's revelation in nature. Scripture speaks authoritatively to such as must naturally live by authority. God speaks with authority wherever and whenever he speaks. At this point a word may be said about the revelation of God through conscience and its relation to Scripture. Conscience is man's consciousness speaking on matters of directly moral import. Every act of man's consciousness is moral in the most comprehensive sense of that term. Yet there is a difference between questions of right and wrong in a restricted sense and general questions of interpretation. Now if man's whole consciousness was originally created perfect, and as such authoritatively expressive of the will of God, that same consciousness is still revelational and authoritative after the entrance of sin to the extent that its voice is still the voice of God. The sinner's efforts, so far as they are done self-consciously from his point of view, seek to destroy or bury the voice of God that comes to him through nature, which includes his own consciousness. But this effort cannot be wholly successful at any point in history. The most depraved of men cannot wholly escape the voice of God. Their greatest wickedness is meaninglessness

except upon the assumption that they have sinned against the authority of God. Thoughts and deeds of utmost perversity are themselves revelational, revelational, that is, in their very abnormality. The natural man accuses or else excuses himself only because his own utterly depraved consciousness continues to point back to the original natural state of affairs. The prodigal son can never forget the father's voice. It is the albatross forever about his neck.

4. The Sufficiency Of Natural Revelation

Proceeding now to speak of the sufficiency of natural revelation as corresponding to the sufficiency of Scripture, we recall that revelation in nature was never meant to function by itself. It was from the beginning insufficient without its supernatural concomitant. It was inherently a limiting notion. It was but the presupposition of historical action on the part of man as covenant personality with respect to supernaturally conveyed communication. But for that specific purpose it was wholly sufficient. It was historically sufficient.

After the fall of man natural revelation is still historically sufficient. It is sufficient for such as have in Adam brought the curse of God upon nature. It is sufficient to render them without excuse. Those who are in prison and cannot clearly see the light of the sun receive their due inasmuch as they have first abused that light. If nature groans in pain and travail because of man's abuse of it, this very fact—that is, the very curse of God on nature—should be instrumental anew in making men accuse or excuse themselves. Nature as it were yearns to be released from its imprisonment in order once more to be united to her Lord in fruitful union. When nature is abused by man it cries out to her creator for vengeance and through it for redemption.

It was in the mother promise that God gave the answer to nature's cry (Gn 3:15). In this promise there was a two-fold aspect. There was first the aspect of vengeance. He that should come was to bruise the head of the serpent, the one that led man in setting up nature as independent of the supernatural revelation of God. Thus nature was once more to be given the opportunity of serving as the proper field of exercise for the direct supernatural communication of God to man. But this time this service came at a more advanced point in history. Nature was now the bearer of God's curse as well as of his general mercy. The "good," that is, the believers, are, generally, hedged about by God. Yet they must not expect that always and in every respect this will be the case. They must learn to say with Job, be it after much trial, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Jb 13:15). The "evil," that is, the unbelievers, will generally be rewarded with the natural consequences of their deeds. But this too is not always and without qualification the case. The wicked sometimes prosper. Nature only shows tendencies. And tendencies point forward to the time when tendencies shall have become the rules without exception. The tendency itself is meaningless without the certainty of the climax. The present regularity of nature is therefore once again to be looked upon as a limiting notion. At every stage in history God's revelation in nature is sufficient for the purpose it was meant to serve, that of being the playground for the process of differentiation between those who would and those who would not serve God.

5. The Perspicuity Of Natural Revelation

Finally we turn to the perspicuity of nature which corresponds to the perspicuity of Scripture. We have stressed the fact that God's revelation in nature was from the outset of history meant to be taken conjointly with God's supernatural communication. This might seem to indicate that natural revelation is not inherently perspicuous. Then too it has been pointed out that back of both kinds of revelation is the incomprehensible God. And this fact again might, on first glance, seem to militate strongly against the claim that nature clearly reveals God. Yet these very facts themselves are the best guarantee of the genuine perspicuity of natural revelation. The perspicuity of God's revelation in nature depends for its very meaning upon the fact that it is an aspect of the total and totally voluntary revelation of a God who is self-contained. God's incomprehensibility to man is due to the fact that he is exhaustively comprehensible to himself. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. As such he cannot deny himself. This God naturally has an all-comprehensive plan for the created universe. He has planned all the relationships between all the aspects of created being. He has planned the end from the beginning. All created reality therefore actually displays this plan. It is, in consequence, inherently rational.

It is quite true, of course, that created man is unable to penetrate to the very bottom of this inherently clear revelation. But this does not mean that on this account the revelation of God is not clear, even for him. Created man may see clearly what is revealed clearly even if he cannot see exhaustively. Man does not need to know exhaustively in order to know truly and certainly. When on the created level of existence man thinks God's thoughts after him, that is, when man thinks in self-conscious submission to the voluntary revelation of the self-sufficient God, he has therewith the only possible ground of certainty for his knowledge. When man thinks thus he thinks as a covenant creature should wish to think. That is to say, man normally thinks in analogical fashion. He realizes that God's thoughts are self-contained. He knows that his own interpretation of nature must therefore be a reinterpretation of what is already fully interpreted by God.

The concept of analogical thinking is of especial significance here. Soon we shall meet with a notion of analogy that is based upon the very denial of the concept of the incomprehensible God. It is therefore of the utmost import that the Confession's concept of analogical thinking be seen to be the direct implication of its doctrine of God.

One further point must here be noted. We have seen that since the fall of man God's curse rests upon nature. This has brought great complexity into the picture. All this, however, in no wise detracts from the historical and objective perspicuity of nature. Nature can and does reveal nothing but the one comprehensive plan of God. The psalmist does not say that the heavens possibly or probably declare the glory of God. Nor does the apostle assert that the wrath of God is probably revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Scripture takes the clarity of God's revelation for granted at every stage of human history. Even when man, as it were, takes out his own eyes, this act itself turns revelational in his wicked hands, testifying to him that his sin is a sin against the light that lighteth every man coming into the world. Even to the very bottom of the most complex historical situations, involving sin and all its consequences, God's revelation shines with unmistakable clarity. "If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there" (Ps 139:8). Creatures have no private chambers.

Both the perspicuity of Scripture and the perspicuity of natural revelation, then, may be said to have their foundation in the doctrine of the God who “hideth himself,” whose thoughts are higher than man’s thoughts and whose ways are higher than man’s ways. There is no discrepancy between the idea of mystery and that of perspicuity with respect either to revelation in Scripture or to revelation in nature. On the contrary the two ideas are involved in one another. The central unifying concept of the entire Confession is the doctrine of God and his one unified comprehensive plan for the world. The contention consequently is that at no point is there any excuse for man’s not seeing all things as happening according to this plan.

In considering man’s acceptance of natural revelation, we again take our clue from the Confession and what it says about the acceptance of Scripture. Its teaching on man’s acceptance of Scriptural revelation is in accord with its teaching on the necessity, authority, sufficiency and perspicuity of Scripture. The Scriptures as the finished product of God’s supernatural and saving revelation to man have their own evidence in themselves. The God who speaks in Scripture cannot refer to anything that is not already authoritatively revelational of himself for the evidence of his own existence. There is no thing that does not exist by his creation.

All things take their meaning from him. Every witness to him is a “prejudiced” witness. For any fact to be a fact at all, it must be a revelational fact.

It is accordingly no easier for sinners to accept God’s revelation in nature than to accept God’s revelation in Scripture. They are no more ready of themselves to do the one than to do the other. From the point of view of the sinner, theism is as objectionable as is Christianity. Theism that is worthy of the name is Christian theism. Christ said that no man can come to the Father but by him. No one can become a theist unless he becomes a Christian. Any God that is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not God but an idol.

It is therefore the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts that alone effects the required Copernican revolution and makes us both Christians and theists. Before the fall, man also needed the witness of the Holy Spirit: Even then the third person of the Holy Trinity was operative in and through the naturally revelational consciousness of man so that it might react fittingly and properly to the works of God’s creation. But then that operation was so natural that man himself needed not at all or scarcely to be aware of its existence. When man fell, he denied the naturally revelatory character of every fact including that of his own consciousness. He assumed that he was autonomous; he assumed that his consciousness was not revelational of God but only of himself. He assumed himself to be non-created. He assumed that the work of interpretation, as by the force of his natural powers he was engaged in it, was an original instead of a derivative procedure. He would not think God’s thoughts after him; he would instead think only his own original thoughts.

Now if anything is obvious from Scripture it is that man is not regarded as properly a judge of God’s revelation to him. Man is said or assumed from the first page to the last to be a creature of God. God’s consciousness is therefore taken to be naturally original as man’s is naturally derivative. Man’s natural attitude in all self-conscious activities was therefore meant to be that of obedience. It is to this deeper depth, deeper than the sinner’s consciousness can ever reach by itself, that Scripture appeals when it says: “Come let us reason together.” It appeals to covenant-breakers and argues with them about the unreasonableness of covenant-breaking. And it is only when the Holy Spirit gives man a

new heart that he will accept the evidence of Scripture about itself and about nature for what it really is. The Holy Spirit's regenerating power enables man to place all things in true perspective.

Man the sinner, as Calvin puts it, through the testimony of the Spirit receives a new power of sight by which he can appreciate the new light that has been given in Scripture. The new light and the new power of sight imply one another. The one is fruitless for salvation without the other. It is by grace, then, by the gift of the Holy Spirit alone, that sinners are able to observe the fact that all nature, including even their own negative attitude toward God, is revelational of God, the God of Scripture. The wrath of God is revealed, Paul says, on all those who keep down the truth. Man's sinful nature has become his second nature. This sinful nature of man must now be included in nature as a whole. And through it God is revealed. He is revealed as the just one, as the one who hates iniquity and punishes it. Yet he must also be seen as the one who does not yet punish to the full degree of their ill desert the wicked deeds of sinful men. All this is simply to say that one must be a believing Christian to study nature in the proper frame of mind and with proper procedure. It is only the Christian consciousness that is ready and willing to regard all nature, including man's own interpretative reactions, as revelational of God. But this very fact requires that the Christian consciousness make a sharp distinction between what is revelational in this broad and basic sense and what is revelational in the restricted sense. When man had not sinned, he was naturally anxious constantly to seek contact with the supernatural positive revelation of God. But it is quite a different matter when we think of the redeemed sinner. He is restored to the right relationship. But he is restored in principle only. There is a drag upon him. His "old man" wants him to interpret nature apart from the supernatural revelation in which he operates. The only safeguard he has against this historical drag is to test his interpretations constantly by the principles of the written Word. And if theology succeeds in bringing forth ever more clearly the depth of the riches of the Biblical revelation of God in Scripture, the Christian philosopher or scientist will be glad to make use of this clearer and fuller interpretation in order that his own interpretation of nature may be all the fuller and clearer too, and thus more truly revelational of God. No subordination of philosophy or science to theology is intended here. The theologian is simply a specialist in the field of Biblical interpretation taken in the more restricted sense. The philosopher is directly subject to the Bible and must in the last analysis rest upon his own interpretation of the Word. But he may accept the help of those who are more constantly and more exclusively engaged in Biblical study than he himself can be.

2. The Natural Theology Of Greek Origin

With these main features of the idea of a natural revelation that is consistent with the concept of Biblical revelation as set forth in the Confession before us, we must look by way of contrast at another view of natural theology. This other view is characterized by the fact that it allows no place for analogical reasoning in the sense that we have described it. Instead of boldly offering the idea of the self-contained God as the

presupposition of the intelligent interpretation of nature, it starts with the idea of the self-contained character of nature and then argues to a god who must at best be finite in character. Instead of starting with the wholly revelational character of the created universe, including the mind of man, this natural theology starts with the non-revelational character of the universe and ends with making it revelational of the mind of would-be autonomous man.

This sort of natural theology has had its origin in Greek speculation, and more particularly in the systems of Plato and Aristotle. With no lack of appreciation for the genius of these great Greek thinkers it must yet be maintained that they, with all men, inherited the sinfulness of Adam and, accordingly, had their reasons for not wishing to hear the voice of God. With all men they assume that nature is self-sufficient and has its principles of interpretation within itself.

The pre-Socratics make a common monistic assumption to the effect that all things are at bottom one. They allow for no basic distinction between divine being and human being. With Heraclitus this assumption works itself out into the idea that all is flux. With Parmenides this same tendency works itself out into the idea that all is changeless. In both cases God is nature and nature is God.

The natural theologies of Plato and Aristotle are best viewed against this background. Neither of these men forsook the monistic assumption of their predecessors.

1. The Natural Theology Of Plato

As for Plato this may be observed first from the hard and fast distinction that he makes between the world of being that is wholly known and the world of non-being that is wholly unknown. For Plato any being that is really to exist must be eternal and changeless. Similarly any knowledge that really can be called knowledge must be changeless, comprehensive knowledge. It is in terms of these principles that Plato would explain the world of phenomena. This world is intermediate between the world of pure being that is wholly known and the world of pure non-being that is wholly unknown. The being that we see constitutes a sort of tension between pure being and pure non-being. So also the learning process constitutes a sort of tension between pure omniscience and pure ignorance.

Plato's view of the relation of sensation and conceptual thought corresponds to this basic division between the worlds of pure being and pure non-being. The senses are said to deceive us. It is only by means of the intellect as inherently divine that man can know true being. The real philosopher bewails his contact with the world of non-being. He knows he has fallen from his heavenly home. He knows that he is real only to the extent that he is divine. He seeks to draw away from all contact with non-being. He seeks for identification with the "wholly other" which, for the moment, he can speak of only in negative terms. When Socrates speaks of the Good he can only say what it is not.

The Ideal Table is never seen on land or sea. Piety must be defined as beyond anything that gods or men may say about it. True definition needs for its criterion an all-inclusive, supra-divine as well as supra-human, principle of continuity. Ultimate rationality is as much above God as above man.

The result is that for Plato, too, nature is revelational. But it is revelational as much of man as of God. To the extent that either of them is real, and known as real, he is wholly identical with the rational principle that is above both. On the other hand, as real and known in the rational principle, both are face to face with the world of non-being. And this world of non-being is as ultimate as the world of pure being. So God and man are wholly unknown to themselves. Thus both God and man are both wholly known and wholly unknown to themselves. Reality as known to man is a cross between abstract timeless formal logic and equally abstract chance. Yet in it all the ideal pure rationality as pure being dominates the scene.

It requires no argument to prove that on a Platonic basis there can be neither natural nor supernatural revelation such as the Confession holds before us. Natural revelation would be nothing more than man's own rational efforts to impose abstract rational unity upon the world of non-being. Supernatural revelation would be nothing more than that same task to the extent that it has not yet been finished or to the extent that it can never be finished. Those who undertake to defend Platonism as a fit foundation for Christianity are engaged in a futile and worse than futile enterprise.

2. The Natural Theology Of Aristotle

As over against Plato, Aristotle contends that we must not look for rationality as a principle wholly beyond the things we see. Universals are to be found within particulars. All our troubles come from looking for the one apart from the other. We must, to be sure, think of pure form at the one end and of pure matter at the other end of our experience. But whatever we actually know consists of pure form and pure matter in correlativity with one another. Whenever we would speak of Socrates, we must not look for some exhaustive description of him by means of reference to an Idea that is "wholly beyond." Socrates is numerically distinct from Callias because of pure potentiality or matter. Rational explanation must be satisfied with classification. The definition of Socrates is fully expressed in terms of the lowest species. Socrates as a numerical individual is but an instance of a class. Socrates may weigh two hundred pounds and Callias may weigh one hundred pounds. When I meet Socrates downtown he may knock me down; when I meet Callias there I may knock him down. But all this is "accidental." None of the perceptual characteristics of Socrates, not even his snub-nosedness, belong to the Socrates that I define. By means of the primacy of my intellect I know Socrates as he is, forever the same, no matter what may "accidentally" happen to him. And what is true of Socrates is true of all other things.

Aristotle's philosophy, then, as over against that of Plato, stresses the correlativity of abstract rationality and pure Chance. Aristotle takes Plato's worlds of pure being and pure non-being and insists that they shall recognize a need of one another. Neither Plato nor Aristotle speaks of limiting concepts in the sense that modern philosophers use this term. Yet both Plato and Aristotle in effect use such limiting concepts and Aristotle more so than Plato. That is to say, the notion of God as transcendent is ever more clearly seen to be inconsistent with the accepted principle of interpretation.

It follows that the God of Aristotle is very difficult to handle. If he exists as a numerical unit, he exists as such because he is utterly potential or non-rational. For all

individuation is by means of pure potentiality. Hence, if God exists, he exists or may exist in indefinite numbers. As Gilson says, Aristotle never escaped from simple polytheism. On the other hand, Aristotle's God is the very opposite of pure potentiality or pure materiality. He must have none of the limitations that spring from pure potentiality. He must therefore not be a numerical individual. He must be the highest genus. And as such he must be utterly devoid of content. He is to be described in wholly negative terms. He is not this and he is not that. When we speak of him in positive terms, we know that we speak metaphorically. God did not really create the world. He does not really control the world. He does not even really know the world.

What then of God's revelation to man? The answer is plain. If he exists as a numerical individual, he must be revealed to himself by means of a principle beyond himself. He cannot reveal himself without utterly losing his individuality. But if he so reveals himself, if he is identified with abstract rationality, he needs once more to hide himself in pure existential particularity. If he does not so hide himself, he is revealed to no one, not even to himself. Such is the fruit of Aristotle's potential identification of the human intellect with the divine. Aristotle's natural theology is but the precursor of modern phenomenism. And the polytheism of post-Kantian anti-intellectualism is but the great-grandchild of the polytheism of Aristotle's intellectualism.

3. The Natural Theology Of Thomas Aquinas

It appears then that the natural theology of Aristotle is, if possible, still more hostile to the natural theology of the Confession than the natural theology of Plato could be. Yet the Roman Catholic Church has undertaken the task of harmonizing Aristotle's philosophic method with the Christian notion of God. Rome has sought to do so by means of its doctrine of analogy of being (*analogia entis*). Thomas Aquinas thinks it is possible to show that the mysteries of the Christian faith are not out of accord with the proper conclusions of reason. And by reason he means the form-matter scheme of Aristotle as we have spoken of it. These mysteries, he contends, may be above but cannot be said to be against reason.

Reasoning, according to Thomas, must be neither wholly univocal nor wholly equivocal; it must be analogical. If with Aristotle he warns us against the definition-mongers, with Aristotle he also warns us against those who are no better than a plant.

First then, as over against those who reason univocally, Thomas insists that when we speak of God's essence our principal method must be that of "remotion," that is, of negation. "For the divine essence by its immensity surpasses every form to which our intellect reaches; and thus we cannot apprehend it by knowing what it is." Form without the idea of pure potentiality is empty. For all positive knowledge we require the idea of pure contingency. Nature requires that there be luck or chance. Nature includes the wholly non-rational as well as the wholly rational. If it were not for pure contingency we should be driven with Parmenides to define being in such a way as to make it virtually identical with non-being. We should be going 'round in circles of pure analysis.

Then as over against those who would reason equivocally, Thomas argues that, though we need the idea of pure contingency, we never meet it in actual experience. Generation, corruption and change must be kept within rational control. Our irrationalism

must not go so deep as to endanger our rationalism. "For it is clear that primary matter is not subject to generation and corruption, as Aristotle proves." The matter that we meet is not pure matter; it is "proper matter" that adjusts itself quite readily to reasonable ends. Potentiality and actuality belong to the same genus. The soul is not destroyed by the action of a contrary, "for nothing is contrary thereto, since by the possible intellect it is cognizant and receptive of all contraries." Determinate predication presupposes the idea of a principle of continuity that is as extensive as potentiality itself. If we do not hold to this we have, Aristotle would say, given up rational inquiry itself; we are then no better than a plant.

In the system of Thomas, then, true knowledge demands that we hold pure univocation and pure equivocation in perfect balance with one another. Rationality must never be permitted to go off by itself and contingency must never be permitted to go off by itself. The result is a sort of pre-Kantian phenomenalism. "Now being is not becoming to form alone, nor to matter alone, but to the composite: for matter is merely in potentiality, while form is whereby a thing is, since it is act. Hence, it follows that the composite, properly speaking, is."

Thus the very notion of being is virtually reduced to that which is known to us. Thomas presents us with a sort of pre-Kantian deduction of the categories. There is to be no awareness of awareness without the idea of pure potentiality. On the other hand, the possibility of reaching reality at all requires a validity that is objective at least for us. The harmony is found in the idea of act. "The intellect in act and the intelligible in act are one, just as the sense in act and the sensible in act." Erich Przywara contends that by the *analogia entis* concept Rome is in the fortunate position of standing with one foot in, and with one foot outside, the tangle of problems that confronts the natural reason of man. Our reply will be that the Thomistic procedure has but prepared the way for the modern forms of pure inhumanities. Thomas is not able to escape the dilemma that faced Aristotle. His God too exists and is unknown, or is known but does not exist. Thomas accords existence to God by means of pure potentiality, and inability by abstract rationality. The result is that God is virtually identified with nature as phenomenal reality to man.

The sharp distinction Thomas makes between the truths of reason and the mysteries of the faith may, at first sight, seem to militate against this conclusion. The two acts of believing and reasoning are said to be diverse. In consequence the objects to which these acts are directed are also said to be diverse. Reason deals with universals that appear in the particulars of sense; faith deals with the wholly unconditioned above sense. Only that which is exhaustively conceptualized is really known and only that which is wholly unknown can be the object of faith. It might seem that the two could never meet. But the Aristotelian form-matter scheme is made for just such emergencies. Harmony is effected by a sort of pre-Kantian limiting concept. In the hereafter, by the "light of glory," we shall see the essence of God. If in this life we are the most miserable of men because faith and reason stand in contradiction to one another, in the hereafter potentiality will be actuality. We posit the idea of an intellect that is comprehensive enough to describe all particulars and a will controlling enough to make all facts fit the requirements of such an intellect. Thus all becoming will have become being; luck and chance themselves will be subject unto us. But then thunder breaks forth in heaven. Lest we should be swallowed up of God, lest the definition-mongers should have their way after all, Thomas once more

brings in pure contingency. The light or the vision of God, he says, must still be distinguished from conceptual knowledge. The vision of God must be a sort of global insight, a sort of representative *Wesensschau*, by which we see intuitively the first principles of demonstration. If these first principles were themselves demonstrable, we should after all be going 'round in circles with Plato. Thus though the numerical infinite remains wholly unknowable; the infinite of global vision is wholly known.

It is by means of these principles, all summed up in the one idea of analogy as a cross between pure univocation and pure equivocation, that Thomas makes reasonable to the natural reason such mysteries of the faith as the trinity, the incarnation, the church and the sacraments. The living voice of the church is required inasmuch as all revelation of God to man is subject to historical relativity and psychological subjectivity. The necessity, the authority, the sufficiency and the perspicuity of both the revelation of God in nature and the revelation of God in Scripture are subordinate to this living voice, the voice of Aristotle speaking through the Pope. Herein lies the guarantee of certainty for the faithful. But lest these faithful should be compelled to go around in circles of pure analysis, this certainty is always counterbalanced by pure contingency. The certainties of the church, such as the sacraments, have an ideal operational efficiency on their own account. Yet all differentiation has its source in pure potentiality. The gifts of God are ideally efficient. The grace of God is irresistible. All men, inclusive of Esau, may therefore be saved. Yet all men may fall from grace. Thus univocity and equivocality always maintain their balance.

4. The Natural Theology of Pre-Kantian Modern Philosophy

The two types of natural theology, with their utterly diverse concepts of analogy, the one represented by the Confession and the other represented by Thomas Aquinas, now stand before us. In modern times there has been a fearful conflict between these two. Only a few words can now be said about this modern war.

It has been suggested that the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas, conceived after the form-matter scheme of Aristotle, was but the forerunner of modern phenomenism. The basic differentiation of Romanism is abstract impersonal form or logic and abstract or ultimate potentiality kept in correlativity with one another. The same may be said for modern phenomenism. It is this modern phenomenism that must now briefly engage our attention.

Only a brief remark can be allowed for the period preceding Kant. In this period there is, first, the line of rationalism coming to its climax in Leibniz and there is, second, the line of empiricism coming to a head in Hume.

The period as a whole may be said to be one of transition. It is the period when men begin to realize that their immanentistic principle of interpretation should lead them to deny the unconditioned altogether, while yet they are not fully prepared to do so. Their reasoning is to all intents and purposes anti-metaphysical in the post-Kantian sense of the

term, while yet they bring God as somehow self-existent into the picture all the time. Men were beginning to feel that it was time for an open declaration of independence from God while yet they dared not quite accept the consequence of such a step. It was not till Kant that modern philosophy became self-consciously anti-metaphysical.

The rationalistic view, exhibited at its highest and best by Leibniz, represents the idea of univocal reasoning in its first modern garb. By means of refined mathematical technique, Leibniz hopes to reach that for which the ancients strove in vain, namely, individuation by complete description. God stands for the idea of pure mathematics by means of which all reality may be described as seen at a glance. All historical facts are essentially reducible to the timeless equations of mathematical formulae. Such is the nature and consequence of his ontological proof for the existence of God. There could be no revelation of God to man on such a basis. How could God tell man anything that he was not able eventually to discover by means of the differential calculus? God becomes wholly revealed to man, but with the result that he is no longer God.

In opposition to the position of Leibniz, the rationalist, stands that of Hume, the skeptic. Concepts, he argued, are but faint replicas of sensations, and the laws of association by which we relate these concepts are psychological rather than logical in character. As Leibniz sought to be wholly univocal, so Hume sought to be wholly equivocal in his reasoning. As in the philosophy of Leibniz God lost his individuality in order to become wholly known, so in the philosophy of Hume God maintained his individuality but remained wholly unknown.

To be sure, neither Leibniz nor Hume was able to carry his position to its logical conclusion. Leibniz paid tribute to brute fact as Hume paid tribute to abstract logic. Leibniz maintained the necessity of finite facts and therefore of evil, lest his universal should be reduced to the blank identity of Parmenides, lest he should have all knowledge of a being that is interchangeable with non-being. Hume, on his part, virtually makes universal negative propositions covering all objective possibility. To make sure that no God such as is found in the Confession, a God who controls all things by the counsel of his will, would speak to him, Hume had virtually to assert that such a God cannot possibly exist and that there cannot at any point in the past or future be any evidence of the existence of such a God. So Leibniz, the rationalist, was an irrationalist and Hume, the irrationalist, was a rationalist. It is impossible to be the one without also being the other.

5. The Natural Theology of Pre-Kantian Apologists

It was Kant who told the world this fact in unmistakable terms. Before examining his phenomenology it is well that a word be said here as to what Christian apologists were doing during the period of rationalism and empiricism. The answer is that by and large Protestant apologists followed closely after the pattern set by Thomas Aquinas. With

Thomas they walked the *via media* between abstract univocal and abstract equivocal reasoning.

Two outstanding instances may be mentioned in substantiation of this claim. Bishop Butler's *Analogy* is plainly patterned after the *analogia entis* concept already analyzed. And Paley in his *Natural Theology* follows in the footsteps of Butler. Both Butler and Paley depend for their positive argument upon pure univocism and for their negative argument upon pure equivocism. For both, God is known to man to the extent that with man he is subject to a specific unity and God is above man to the extent that he is wholly unknown.

By a "reasonable use of reason," that is, by a carefully balanced mixture of univocism and equivocism, Butler contends, it may be shown that Christianity is both like and unlike the "course and constitution of nature." The atonement of Christ is like that which we daily see, namely, the innocent suffering for the guilty. Yet the atonement is also wholly other than anything that appears in nature.

According to Paley God's providence is fully patent in the world, patent even in spite of poisonous reptiles and fleas. This is a happy world after all. Yet the God whose providence is so plain cannot be known except by way of negation. " 'Eternity' is a negative idea, clothed with a positive name... 'Self-existence' is another negative idea, namely, the negation of a preceding cause, as a progenitor, a maker, an author, a creator."

In view of what has been said it is not surprising that the supernatural theology of both Butler and Paley has basic similarities to that of Aquinas. Butler and Paley hold to an abstract Armenian sort of theology which, like the theology of Rome, deals with abstract possibilities and classes rather than with individuals. For Butler and for Paley, as for Thomas Aquinas, the objective atonement is an abstract form that is somehow present in and yet meaningless without the initiative taken by utterly independent individuals. Whatever there is of true Christianity in Rome, or in such positions as those of Butler and Paley, is there in spite of rather than because of the Aristotelian form-matter scheme that controls the formation of their natural theologies. A true Biblical or covenant theology could not be based upon such foundations as Butler and Paley laid.

6. The Natural Theology Of Kant

The field has now been narrowed down considerably. The natural theology of the Confession, derived as it was largely from the theology of Calvin, stands over against the natural theology as it has come from Aristotle through Rome into much of Protestant, even orthodox Protestant, thought. These two types of natural theology are striving for the mastery in our day.

The Aristotelian form of natural theology has, moreover, been greatly strengthened in our times by the critical philosophy of Kant. Indeed it may be asserted that the typical form of that natural theology which we have found to be inconsistent with the Confession is identical with some form of critical phenomenalism. The main concepts of this phenomenalism must therefore be analyzed.

Kant's great contribution to philosophy consisted in stressing the activity of the experiencing subject. It is this point to which the idea of a Copernican revolution is usually applied. Kant argued that since it is the thinking subject that itself contributes the categories of universality and necessity, we must not think of these as covering any reality that exists or may exist wholly independent of the human mind. By using the law of non-contradiction we may and must indeed determine what is possible, but the possibility that we thus determine is subjective rather than objective. It is a possibility for us. To save rationality, Kant argues, we must shorten the battle-line and reduce its claims even in its own domain. Hereafter reason must claim to legislate only in that area that can always be checked by experience and even in this area it must ever be ready to receive the wholly new. The validity of universals is to be taken as frankly due to a motion and a vote; it is conventional and nothing more. Thus the invocation of Leibniz is to be saved by casting it into the sea of equivocation stirred up by Hume.

Again stressing the original activity of the thinking subject, Kant argued that it is impossible ever to find the entirely single thing of Hume. Like a sausage-grinder, the mind of man forms things into molds as it receives them. We never see either pork or beef; we see only sausages that, according to the butcher's word, contain both. Thus we always make facts as much as we find them. The only facts we know are instances of laws.

Kant's argument against the rationalists was like the argument of Aristotle against the "definition mongers" who wanted to know all things. His argument against Hume was like Aristotle's arguments against Protagoras, the skeptic, who went on speaking even when his principle allowed him to say nothing determinate. Science, Kant argued, does not need and could not exist with such objective universality as Leibniz desired, but it does need and actually has the subjective validity that the autonomous man supplies in the very act of interpretation. Kant argues, as it were, that Aristotle was right in seeking for universals in the particulars rather than above them, but that he did not have the courage of his convictions and did not go far enough. Science requires us to have done once and for all with all antecedent being, with all metaphysics except that which is immanentistic. Hereafter the notions of being, cause and purpose must stand for orderings we ourselves have made; they must never stand for anything that exists beyond the reach of our experience. Any God who wants to make himself known, it is now more clear than ever before, will have to do so by identifying himself exhaustively with his revelation. And any God who is so revealed, it is now more clear than ever before, will then have to be wholly hidden in pure possibility. Neither Plato nor Aristotle were entitled, by the methods of reasoning they employed, to reach the Unconditioned. The Unconditioned cannot be rationally related to man.

There is no doubt but that Kant was right in this claim. Plato and Aristotle no less than Kant assumed the autonomy of man. On such a basis man may reason univocally and reach a God who is virtually an extension of himself or he may reason equivocally and reach a God who has no contact with him at all. Nor will adding two zeros produce more than zero. The addition of pure pantheism to pure deism will not bring forth theism. It was Kant's great service to the Christian church to teach us this. No theistic proof, either of the *a priori* or of the *a posteriori* sort, based on Platonic Aristotelian assumptions could do anything but disprove the God of the Confession.

But if Kant has done so great a service, his service has of course been wholly negative. Orthodox apologists have all too often overlooked this fact. Did not Kant make room for faith? Did he not challenge the pride of the rationalist in its denial of a God whose thoughts are higher than man's thoughts? Is not the scientist who today works on the basis of his principles a very humble sort of person, satisfied with the single dimension of the phenomenal, leaving the whole realm of the noumenal to the ministers of religion? And does not Scripture itself ascribe to reason the power and right to interpret at least an area of reality, restricted though it be, in its own right? Surely the God of Scripture does not mean to dictate to the man who merely describes the facts as he sees them in the laboratory.

In all this there is profound confusion. Nor is this to be blamed primarily on Kant. Kant knew well enough what sort of Christianity is involved in the natural theology of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. His own statement of it is unmistakable and frank. To him the only Christianity that accords with the principles of his thought is a Christianity that is reduced from its historic uniqueness to a universal religion of reason. And modernist theologians working with his principles today make similar reductions of historic Christianity. We can but admire their consistency. The very idea of Kant's Copernican revolution was that the autonomous mind itself must assume the responsibility for making all factual differentiation and logical validation. To such a mind the God of Christianity cannot speak. Such a mind will hear no voice but its own. It is itself the light that lighteth every man that comes into the world. It is itself the sun; how can it receive light from without? If Plato and Aristotle virtually identified the mind of man with that of God, Kant virtually identified the mind of God with that of man. Such a mind describes all facts as it sees them, but it sees them invariably through colored lenses. The miracles of Scripture are always reduced to instances of laws and laws themselves are reduced to conventional and purely contingent regularities. Prophetic prediction that has come true is always reduced to pure coincidence in a world of chance. Conventional law and brute fact are the stock in trade of the Kantian philosopher and scientist. His phenomenal world is built up of these.

7. The Natural Theology Of Post-Kantian Phenomenalism

Working out the consequences of the Kantian position, Heinrich Rickert has stressed the fact that modern science has virtually abolished the distinction between the description and the explanation of facts. The facts which the scientist thinks he merely describes are such as have already been explained by his philosophical *confrères*.

Philosophers have so thoroughly canvassed the field of possibility that the scientist will never meet any facts that will not inevitably turn out to be instances of conventional, wholly man-made laws.

Modern phenomenism then, it must be stressed, is comprehensive in its sweep. It is a philosophy covering the whole of reality. It may be anti-metaphysical, but this is only

to say that it is against such metaphysics of transcendence as the Confession presents. Modern phenomenism cannot by its principle admit of any of the facts and doctrines of historic Christian theism.

Dialectical theology has, to be sure, made the attempt to combine the main *Critique* of Kant and the *Institutes* of Calvin. But the magnitude of its undertaking is itself the best instance in proof that such a thing cannot logically be done. Barth and Brunner have satisfied the requirements of Kant's criticism, but in so doing they have at the same time denied the God of Calvin.

Largely influenced by the phenomenism or existentialism of such men as Kierkegaard and Heidegger, Barth and Brunner have been consistently anti-metaphysical in the Kantian sense of the term. That is to say, they have insisted that God is wholly unknown as a numerical individual and that he is wholly identical with his revelation as a specific unity. In other words, the God of the Confession is for Barth and Brunner nothing but an idol. The God of the Confession claims to have revealed himself directly in nature and in Scripture. And all direct revelation, Barth and Brunner continually reassert, is paganism. Barth and Brunner are as certain as was Kant that the Unconditional cannot make himself known as such in the phenomenal world. They could not maintain such a position except upon the assumption of the idea of the autonomous man which legislates, at least negatively, for the whole field of possibility.

Dialectical theology then fits in well with the natural theology of the Aristotle-Thomas Aquinas-Kant tradition. In fact, it may be said to be nothing more than a natural theology cut after this pattern. It is as hostile to the natural as to the special revelation concepts of the Confession. And the same must also be said with respect to such modified forms of dialecticism as are offered by Reinhold Niebuhr, Richard Kroner, Paul Tillich, Nels Ferré and John Mackay.

Certain lines have now been drawn in the modern chaos. The modern chaos is not so chaotic as it may at first sight appear. There are at bottom only two positions. There is the position of the Confession. This position consists of a natural theology that serves as the proper foundation for the full theology of grace that is found in the Reformed Confessions alone. It consists of a natural theology whose fundamental meaning and significance is found in the very fact of its being the field of exercise for the historical differentiation of which the Reformed theology of grace is but the narrative. There is, on the other hand, the position of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Kant. It consists of a natural theology that must, according to the force of its interpretative principle, reduce the historic process of differentiation, as told in the Confessions, to dialectical movements of a reason that is sufficient to itself.

Between these two there is and can be no peace. And the natural theology of the Confession, though unpopular now both within and beyond the church, cannot but be victorious at last. For all its vaunted defense of reason, the natural theology of Aristotle and his modern followers destroys reason. The autonomous man cannot forever flee back and forth between the arid mountains of timeless logic and the shoreless ocean of pure potentiality. He must at last be brought to bay. He cannot forever be permitted to speak of nothing that reveals itself exhaustively into nothing and yet pretend to convey meaning in his speech. The autonomous man has denied the existence of a rationality higher than itself that has legislated for all reality. In so doing it has itself legislated for all reality. Yet it also allows for pure potentiality that is beyond all rational power. It has undertaken

to do, or rather claims already to have done, what it also says is inherently impossible of accomplishment. On the other hand, the natural theology of the Confession, with its rejection of autonomous reason, has restored reason to its rightful place and validated its rightful claims. In recognizing the Sovereign God of grace, the God who is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, goodness, justice and truth, as its chief and ultimate principle of interpretation, the natural theology of the Confession has saved rationality itself. Without the self-contained God of the Confession, there would be no order in nature and no employment for reason.