A THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF NATURAL THEOLOGY*

I. DEFINITIONS

THE STANDARD philosophical dictionaries by Eisler and Thormeyer simply mention the distinction between revelational or churchly theology on the one hand and rational or philosophical theology on the other. The latter is called natural theology. Lalande defines it as that theology 'which is based only on experience and reason' (*'qui ne s'appuie que sur l'experience et la raison'*). In *An Encyclopedia of Religion* (V. Ferm, ed.), William Glenn Harris seems to define natural theology in much narrower terms, as 'that knowledge of God obtained by observing the visible processes of nature', but he adds: 'The inward frame of man responds to the external conditions and circumstances of life. . . .' The article as a whole implies that he means to take account of man's subjective experience, at least his moral experience, in defining natural theology.

In Hastings's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, D. S. Adam says that the aim of natural theology 'is to set forth in a methodical, orderly way all that may be known concerning God and the world and man, and their mutual relations, from that general revelation which is given in nature, mind, and history'. This approximates to the most general uses of the phrase. Sometimes, as in Lord Gifford's provisions for the Gifford Lectures, it is made explicit that such natural theology must be developed 'without reference to or reliance upon any supposed special exceptional or so-called miraculous revelation'.

J. V. Langmead Casserley, in his useful book, *Graceful Reason*, distinguishes four different types of natural theology, and this classification is helpful in providing a more precise analysis of the term. The first type, says Casserley, is a Godward 'movement of the mind', regarded as a natural proclivity due to man's having been 'made for God'. Second, natural theology may be regarded as argument from 'naturalistic premises' to the validity of religious belief or behaviour (e.g. he mentions the cosmological argument). Third is 'a theology of nature'—that is, a theological interpretation of nature. Such an interpretation might itself be drawn from the Bible or some other source regarded as 'special' revelation. Fourth, one may designate as natural theology 'the tracing of an analogy between . . . natural and evangelical experience' (p.8).

There is a fifth conception of natural theology not included in Casserley's classification, but set forth by William Temple. This is the philosophical evaluation of doctrines believed to be revealed. Obviously, such a natural theology is closely related to the second type above. However, this fifth type includes an explicit disclaimer of its own qualifications to construct a system of theological truth. In contrast to revealed theology and to the claims of some natural theology, *this* natural theology is, in its chief function, not constitutive but regulative, not constructive but critical (see Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, especially pp.17-19, 518-20).

Of the types defined above, the third is universally accepted by Christian theologians as a proper undertaking. The fourth type, as such, may be purely illustrative and pedagogic, thus raising no basic theological issues. If more than

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illustrative, it passes over into the second or fifth type, sometimes with intimations of confidence in the first.

The argument of this paper, then, must turn on types one, two and five. All these have in common the idea that valid support for some truth about God or about man's rightful destiny can be found in considerations logically independent of the biblical revelation and of a prior commitment to Christian faith. Precisely this idea is rejected by some recent and contemporary theologians, who thus dismiss the possibility of natural theology in any of the senses with which we are here concerned.

II. SOME RECENT THEOLOGIANS WHO HAVE REJECTED NATURAL THEOLOGY AS HERE DEFINED

Søren Kierkegaard believed that the 'infinite distance' between time and eternity made quite impossible any crossing from man to God by the thought of man. Man can conjure up all kinds of human substitutes for God, but all these are mere idols. The metaphysical task is for man simply impossible, as Socrates well knew. The only knowledge of God which is either possible for man or necessary to his salvation is the acceptance by faith of the supreme Paradox, the eternal God become man in time and crucified by men. This acceptance is not an act of the intellect, but is rather a passionate decision of the will.

Karl Barth professes to be 'an avowed opponent of all natural theology' (*The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, p.6), because he is a Reformed theologian. 'Both the Reformation and the teaching of the Reformation churches', he says, 'stand in an antithesis to "Natural Theology" ' (ibid., p.8). To Barth's position our principal attention will be directed in the third section of this paper.

Emil Brunner rejects natural theology as here defined. Formerly he used the term with approval, but it led to misinterpretation of his position, at least by Barth. Hence he proposed, in his reply to Barth's *Nein!*, to call the teaching which he accepted 'the Christian doctrine of general revelation or of revelation in nature' (John Baillie, ed., *Natural Theology*, p.9; cf. pp.10 and 11; cf. also Brunner's *Revelation and Reason*, pp.60-3). Brunner wished to disavow any notion that the knowledge of God was 'natural' to man (type one in Casserley's classification) or that the 'revelation in nature' could be properly understood by a mind not cleansed and renewed by God's grace through faith in Christ.

Karl Barth's rejection of natural theology has been more radical and more sustained than Brunner's. It is supported both by considerations shared with Brunner and by other objections. In theological circles Barth's putting of the issues is probably more influential at present than is Kierkegaard's thought on this specific subject. Hence it is to Barth that we here direct major attention.

III. EVALUATION OF KARL BARTH'S REJECTION

We are not here concerned with following the course of Barth's more recent modifications of his views concerning natural theology. We propose, rather, to evaluate his forthright rejection and arguments against natural theology in his Gifford Lectures and elsewhere, leaving aside the question whether he would himself still approve all these arguments precisely as they stand. For the examination of Barth's subsequent thought on natural law, one would need especially to study his distinction between 'laws' (*Gesetze*), which he rejects, and 'spheres and relations' (*Bereiche und Verhältnisse*) in which he says God as

Creator has placed man, to live 'dutifully or undutifully' (*gehorsam oder ungehorsam*) (*Kirchliche Dogmatik*, III.4, p.31). It would be important also to note that what God has commanded us in Christ is required of all men, and in places to observe that this doctrine may bring Barth near to a doctrine of natural law under another name and with dialectical modifications (see *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, II.2, III.4; more is promised toward the end of IV). In general, of course, Barth has continued to reject natural theology.

1. *Grounds of the Rejection*

(*a*) *Barth's Vocation as Reformed Theologian.* When, in his Gifford Lectures, Barth disclaims any intention of making a direct contribution to natural theology, he recalls that he is a Reformed theologian and 'it cannot really be the business of a Reformed theologian to raise so much as his little finger to support this undertaking in any positive way' (p.6). However, he concedes that some Reformed theologians have found no such incompatibility between their vocation and natural theology (ibid., p.5), and even Calvin and Luther made use of natural theology (ibid., p.8). The incompatibility is not, then, self-evident, but must be explained.

(*b*) *Sola Scriptura.* Barth holds that Luther and Calvin desired 'to see both the Church and human salvation founded on the Word of God *alone*, on God's *revelation in Jesus Christ*, as it is attested in the Scripture, and on faith in that Word' (ibid., pp.8-9). Natural theology would build on something other than the Scriptures and God's revelation in Jesus Christ, hence must be regarded as opposed to the basic principle of the Reformation.

(*c*) *Sola Fide; Sola Gratia.* Similarly, Barth observes that natural theology assumes that some truth about God and rightful human destiny can be known independent of prior commitment to Christian faith and of the grace which God gives in and subsequent to such commitment. Natural theology therefore contradicts the Reformation principles '*sola fide*' and '*sola gratia*'. To attempt anything without faith and humble dependence upon God's grace is to perform an act of presumptuous, sinful pride.

(*d*) *Natural Theology leads only to Idols.* The God who has made Himself known to us in Christ, Barth contends, is not the 'God' of Aristotle or of any other philosopher learning without benefit of the biblical revelation (*Doctrine of the Word of God*, p.449). Hence to worship the 'God' of natural theology is only to worship the creature of man's reason, an idol of man's own making, an idol possessing no reality beyond man's deluded imagination. The one only God is not conceived in human thought at all. Thus, in his Gifford Lectures, Barth says concerning the Scottish Confession: 'What is conceived by all other "believers" past, present and future, whatever the manner, place and date of their belief is certainly not what the Scottish Confession means by the object of its profession. The Confession does not *conceive* its object at all; it acknowledges it: "We confess and acknowledge" ' (*The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, p.13). Similarly, in *Dogmatics in Outline*, Barth writes: 'God is not only unprovable and unsearchable, but also inconceivable. No attempt is made in the Bible to define God—that is, to grasp God in our concepts' (p.38). To worship the 'God' we conceive, on the other hand, is idolatry and anthropocentric presumption.

(*e*) *Total Depravity*. Natural theology implies a denial of man's total depravity. Since man is known by the Christian to be totally depraved, able to contribute absolutely nothing to God's communication of Himself, even by some capacity or preparation to receive it, the whole notion of a natural theology is misconceived (see, e.g., *Nein!*, passim; *Dogmatics in Outline*, p.1).

2. *Evaluation of These Grounds*

(*a*) If Reformed theology is true, then that is reason enough for not contradicting it, regardless of the calling to be a Reformed theologian. But why suppose that all which Calvin and Luther taught is true? Presumably they were men and not God. Some of Barth's strictures against idolatry might be brought against his own appeal to 'the theology of the Reformation', as if this were for him final. Moreover, when it suits his fancy, Barth does not, in fact, hesitate to depart from Luther and Calvin—for example, when he laments the fact that both of them made use of natural theology!

(*b*) When Barth objects that natural theology is contrary to the Reformation principle *sola Scriptura*, it is quite proper to raise the question whether that Reformation principle is true. To assume that the authority of the original Reformation teachings is such that it must not be challenged would be, in fact, to contradict the principle that only the scriptures have such authority.

Actually, however, neither of Barth's quasi-biblical authorities, Luther and Calvin, taught that nothing could be known about God or about His will for men otherwise than through the Bible. It is interesting that Barth does not directly claim such doctrine to have been taught by the Reformers. He says, rather, that 'the revival of the gospel by Luther and Calvin consisted in their desire to see both the church and human salvation founded on the Word of God *alone*, on God's *revelation in Jesus Christ*, as it is attested in the Scripture, and on faith in that Word' (*The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, pp.8-9). Is such a desire inconsistent with belief in the validity of natural theology? Certainly many kinds of knowledge and authority are valid on which it is not proposed to found the Church and on which it is not supposed that human salvation is dependent.

It is obvious that Luther and Calvin were rightly concerned to deflate the presumptuous claims of the Roman Catholic Church for itself, its ever-accumulating traditions, its intricate system of doctrine and laws, and the authority of its priesthood. It is well known that the Reformers were attacking these overweening Roman claims when they erected their principle of *sola Scriptura*. They were denying that the Church had the right to demand of its members or its priests acceptance of doctrines additional to those taught or implied in the Scriptures. Both Calvin and Luther, but especially Luther, had at times sharply hostile things to say about philosophy. However, these anti-philosophical outbursts had only a historically accidental, and not logically essential, connexion with the principle that the Church should be founded solely on the Word of God, as attested in the Scriptures.

The example of both Calvin and Luther, as Barth regrets to observe, does include the positive use of natural law, and, more guardedly, they affirmed signs of God in His natural creation. Such use of natural theology did not, as Barth supposes, contradict their principle of *sola Scriptura*, for they did not

hold that through such use of natural theology they had discovered new doctrines additional to the teachings of Scripture and necessary to salvation. Rather, they found in natural theology a confirmation of the biblical teaching that God has provided all men with such a knowledge of Him and of His will for them that they are without excuse for their sin and unbelief and are rightly under His condemnation. (Note, for example, Calvin's citation of Cicero's natural theology in support of this teaching, in the *Institutes*, I.iii.1.) Likewise, Calvin found natural law, and even the laws enacted by magistrates so long as consistent with God's commands, to be binding on the Christian conscience, while he insisted that no one had a right 'to prescribe any new form for the worship of God, and impose a necessity in things that were left free and indifferent' (Calvin, *Institutes*, V.x.5; cf. IV.x.16 and IV.x.27).

It must be said further that if we were to maintain that the Christian ought to hold so exclusively to the Scripture as to deny the validity of any knowledge of God through any other channels, then we should be contradicting ourselves. For the Bible itself occasionally refers to the teachings which God has given concerning Himself through the world of nature (as in Job 37-41; Ps. 19_{1-4}; Matt. 5_{44-5}; Rom. 1_{20}) and concerning His righteous law in the natural endowment of the human heart (as in Rom. $2_{1-2,\ 12-16}$).

(*c*) The argument that it is proud and sinful to believe that any knowledge of God is possible prior to, or independent of, faith in Christ, and with the aid of the grace imparted only to those who have such faith, will require less discussion.

Certainly this objection is not supported by Calvin's teaching. Calvin writes: 'We lay it down as a position not to be controverted, that the human mind, even by natural instinct, possesses some sense of a Deity' (*Institutes*, I.iii.1). Even men's sin does not eradicate this knowledge of God, Calvin contends, though it does make it inoperative in the control of their passions. Thus he writes:

> Yet this is a further proof of what I now contend for, that an idea of God is naturally engraved on the hearts of men, since necessity extorts a confession of it, even from reprobates themselves. In the moment of tranquillity, they facetiously mock the Divine Being, and with loquacious impertinence derogate from His power. But if any despair oppress them, it stimulates them to seek him, and dictates concise prayers, which prove that they are not altogether ignorant of God, but that what ought to have appeared before had been suppressed by obstinacy (*Institutes*, I.iv.4).

It is not proud and sinful to believe what is clearly the truth—a truth in this instance affirmed by Calvin and the Bible, as well as by a great quantity of human experience. Calvin cited an exaggeration of this truth when he wrote: 'Cicero observes, there is no nation so barbarous, no race so savage, as not to be firmly persuaded of the being of a God' (*Institutes*, I.iii.1). But that many peoples have possessed some ideas of God and strong beliefs in His existence without having so much as heard of Christ or the Bible is a truth incontrovertible by anyone open to persuasion by facts.

Actually, if we examine the natural theology of such men as Cicero, Seneca, and Plotinus, to say nothing of Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, we find a spirit much less proud and presumptuous than is displayed

in the unsupported affirmations and denunciations of Karl Barth, which his sincere religious motivation does not excuse. The critical methods of philosophical study are employed, by the exponents of natural theology named, in the determination to escape substituting their own ideas for reality. This is an expression of humility, not of pride. It is not even pride in any proper special theological sense, for all the men named assumed a complete dependence upon God for all knowledge. Augustine and Thomas even acknowledged human depravity and constructed their natural theology with some deference to this human disability.

(*d*) One of the most serious examples of epistemological confusion in recent theology occurs in the argument that the 'God' known to natural theology is only an idol having no ontological connexion with the true God who has revealed Himself to us in Christ. To support this charge two arguments are brought forth.

First, it is pointed out that the descriptions of Him arrived at through natural theology are not identical with our knowledge of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is quite true, just as Barth's writing about God is not identical—nor consistent, in some details—with Augustine's or Luther's, or even with other writing of his own. Does this mean that Augustine, Luther, and Barth have written about different deities altogether, or that Barth has called us to the worship of as many idols as would correspond to his differing utterances about God less one? Not at all It means that Augustine, Luther, and Barth have held differing conceptions of God, none of which was identical with His very being, but all of which were by intention referring to Him, whether accurately or erroneously. Ordinarily such distinctions are well understood. When some people speak of the President of the First National Bank in Centerville, others of Mr William A. Smith, and yet others of Daniel Smith's father, we do not insist that they are talking about different persons if we know that in fact Mr William A. Smith *is* Daniel Smith's father and also President of the bank. Even if their characterizations vary greatly, we do not so insist. No more do differing accounts of the supreme Author and Ruler of the world imply various referents or one divine referent and a number of idols.

On the other hand, two accounts must have *something* in common if they are to be regarded as having the same objective referent. You and I may hear a noise at the door. I say it is only the wind, while you say there is a person knocking. A person and the wind are certainly not the same object; yet we are both speaking of the one object, cause-of-noise-at-the-door, which we interpret very differently, at least one of us being in radical error. When is the referent the same, then, and when is it not?

Barth may insist that when, as Christian theologian, he speaks of God, he is speaking of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since natural theology does not use that point of departure, its referent is not the same. Hence, despite the common use of the name 'God', natural theology and churchly theology are actually speaking of objects which are not to be ontologically identified. However, although using different points of departure and different ways of knowing, natural theology must often be speaking of the same God who is the Father known through Jesus Christ, as is evidenced by other signs of identification. Such signs are that He is the Author of the world, our own

Maker and Judge, and the Source of all good. When Barth and the natural theologian are agreed that there is only One such Being, then it is plain that both are speaking of that one same Being. The further fact that the two accounts also differ in certain respects does not disprove this identity, for, as pointed out earlier, our accounts of the same human person often differ sharply. In other words, there is much error mingled with our knowledge. This is entirely true of our churchly theology as well as of natural theology, as the conflicts and inconsistencies of churchly theologians bear witness. It would hardly be either commendable or safe to say that everyone with any mistaken idea about God was an idolater! Who would be first to cast that stone?

Are there, then, no idols? We may properly call idols those objects of supreme human regard which are actually of man's own making, not of his discovery through evidences which he has found. Wealth or fame may be such an idol, as also a carved object to which a man does obeisance—if, indeed the obeisance is done to the artifact and not to God, of whom the artifact may be a symbol. When pagan peoples infer from natural phenomena or other evidence that there exist such numerous and unworthy deities as Christians believe not to exist, these may better be referred to, as they sometimes are in the Bible and in the early Fathers, as false gods, rather than as idols. Although figments of human imagination and in that sense man's creatures, their worshippers do not regard them as of their own making—as men do regard such idols as wealth. Moreover, some beliefs about some deities of the polytheists are of such character as to suggest that those who conceive and worship them must have been touched by the spirit of the one true God, and that these largely imaginary deities represent their earnest gropings after a true understanding and worship of Him whom we know through Christ. To call all deities conceived by non-Christians or discussed in natural theology 'idols' is to lack the degree of discrimination which befits both the man of understanding and the humble man of God. Such rough and indiscriminate designation serves to express ill-concealed pride and to arouse attitudes of hostility, rather than to illuminate and clarify the distinctive character of the Christian knowledge of God.

Consider Brunner's statement:

> He who believes that every revelation of God must say the same thing is preventing himself from understanding the Bible. It is the Triune God, it is true, who reveals Himself in His works in the Creation and in the Law; but He does not yet reveal Himself there *as* the Triune God. All Church theologians, from the earliest days down to the present time, are agreed on this point. 'For there are two different ways of working of the Son of God; the one, which becomes visible in the architecture of the world and in the natural order; the other, by means of which ruined nature is renewed and restored' (Calvin, *Works*, 47.7) (*Revelation and Reason*, p.62n.)

As a second argument, it is declared by Barth that every object of human conception is an idol (*The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, pp.13 and 10), for of the true God no conception is possible. Thus Barth writes:

> God is not only unprovable and unsearchable, but also *inconceivable.* (*Gott ist nicht nur unbeweisbar sondern Gott ist auch unbegreiflich.*) No attempt is made in the Bible to grasp God in our concepts (*Begriffen*). In the Bible God's name is named, not as

philosophers do it, as the name of a timeless Being, surpassing the world, alien and supreme, but as the name of the living, acting, working Subject who makes Himself known (*Dogmatics in Outline*, p.38).

In the latter part of this excerpt, Barth's argument again dwells on *differences* of conception, some of which, incidentally, misrepresent many of the philosophers. In the earlier part he is claiming that the Bible makes no attempt to present definitions or conceptions of God. This is patently false, as the examination of Isaiah 40_{18-29} will show. He seems also to suggest that we ought not to try to define what we mean by 'God' or to represent Him by concepts (*Begriffen*). Yet within four pages (see p.42) he is defending the propriety of the concept (*Begriff*) 'person', when properly understood, to represent each of God's '*three ways of being*', and by p.44 he is pitying 'the poor folk of the Eastern Church' who, he says, 'have never quite understood the "*Spiritus, qui procedit a Patre Filioque*" '. Of course, Barth can no more write about God without employing concepts than can any other author, Christian or pagan.

The proper objective is not to *avoid* concepts, but to seek *accurate* concepts to represent faithfully the referent intended. When we are speaking of God we need to acknowledge humbly that the best of our concepts are bound to be extremely inadequate. Indeed, our best concepts are seriously inadequate to represent any concrete reality. Yet use concepts we must whenever we would speak concerning any object, even when the object is a personal subject, and even when the object is the Subject who is the Author of our being. The alternative to using concepts is an end of speaking (and writing) and likewise an end of discursive thought.

How much wiser was Calvin than Barth in this matter! When he writes about that knowledge of God claimed by Cicero for all nations and observable at times even in the most corrupt and blasphemous men, Calvin emphatically regards their knowledge as inadequate, as contradicted by their sinful actions, and as requiring special revelation by the merciful God to be made effectual in governing their lives. But he grants that it is, nevertheless, knowledge of 'God', the same God who judges them and who comes to us in Christ (see *Institutes*, I.iii.1-3).

(*e*) Finally, the doctrine that man is totally depraved, in such fashion that he offers no capacity, need, or 'point of contact' which can serve as a clue for natural theology, or even as object to which God addresses His revealing Word, is a gratuitous assumption. Even Calvin's doctrine of total depravity, extreme as it is, is a model of moderation and good sense by comparison. Barth purports to have drawn his doctrines from Paul's letter to the Romans and from Reformed teaching. But the classical statement of Reformed doctrine on the specific issue at hand is given by Calvin, with explicit reference to Romans 1_{20}, in the First Book of the *Institutes* (iii.1) as follows:

We lay it down as a position not to be controverted, that the human mind, even by natural instinct, possesses some sense of a Deity. For that no man might shelter himself under the pretext of ignorance, God hath given to all some apprehension of his existence, the memory of which he frequently and insensibly renews; so that, as men universally know that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, they must be

condemned by their own testimony, for not having worshipped him and consecrated their lives to his service.

This statement by Calvin does not throw light on that other problem of what is the status of religious pagans who *do* worship God and *do* consecrate their lives to His service. St Paul does at least suggest an answer when he writes in his Letter to the Romans:

> When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus (2_{14-16}).

Yet, while Calvin may hesitate to go all the way with Paul, he nevertheless is clear as to man's capacity (or 'natural instinct') to know that God is his Maker.

There is here no question regarding the powers of man alone. 'Man alone' is a fiction especially absurd in the discussions of theologians who believe that man exists by the grace of God and is always in His presence. Of course 'man alone' cannot construct a natural theology, since 'man alone' cannot even exist. On the other hand, man as he is empowered by the grace of God and surrounded by evidence of 'his eternal power and deity' (Rom. 1_{20}), plainly can and does construct natural theologies true as far as they go. To say that this is impossible is an unwarranted assumption, opposed by the facts of human history, the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, and the testimony of that very Reformed tradition to which Barth professes commitment.

IV. POSITIVE USEFULNESS OF NATURAL THEOLOGY TO THE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIAN

In defending his right to give the Gifford Lectures, despite his rejection of all natural theology, Barth makes the claim that natural theology soon becomes 'arid and listless' when it is not in 'conflict' with its 'adversary' which stands in 'clear antithesis' to it—namely, 'the teaching of the Reformation' (*The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, pp. 6-7, 9). He says this dependence of natural theology on opposition by a revealed theology which absolutely rejects it is 'notorious' (ibid., p.7), but he does not cite a shred of evidence. Actually, the natural theology of the Stoics was ably constructed without such opposition and still retains sufficient vitality to exert considerable influence on law and international affairs, as well as on philosophical and theological theory, especially through its concept of natural law. The natural theology of Thomas Aquinas and of many writers in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries flourished with the encouragement, rather than opposition, of most theologians with whom these writers were much concerned.

That natural theology is radically inadequate soil for the nurture of a living, redemptive faith would be cheerfully admitted, or rather emphatically asserted, by most of its Christian participants. But it is quite another thing to say that natural theology owes its vitality to opposition by theologians who attack it. This is not only unsupported by the evidence but is disproved by the history of natural theology.

On the other hand, Christian theology needs the services of natural theology for several purposes. These can be given here only in brief.

(1) A part of the total task of Christian theology is to determine the kind of relations which subsist between Christian doctrines and all else that we know. The fulfilment of this purpose requires inevitably that questions of natural theology be raised, such as these: What evidences of God's existence and of His nature are to be found in the world? In what ways does man's need of God appear in human nature? A Christian theology which does not include the confronting of such questions has not yet taken seriously the effort to attain the wholeness of view required by the commandment to Love God with all the mind. Barth, too, takes such questions seriously, but he argues that the answer to them would be wholly negative. The point is that such questions must be earnestly confronted, and if some positive lines of evidence are found to lead from man and the world to God, it is an obligation of the Christian theologian to explore these connexions with care. To do so is to study natural theology in the fifth (Temple's) sense at least, and probably in the first and second also.

(2) Natural theology serves to correct some of the errors produced by an exclusively biblical or by a biblical and traditional theology. For example, Calvin was assisted by the natural theology of Cicero and others toward giving due emphasis to the first two chapters of Romans and putting in proper perspective St Paul's other teachings stressing our dependence in revelation and divine grace. On the other hand, Barth's own theology has in other ways obviously gained considerably over Calvin's by more recent developments based on presuppositions of natural theology. For example, Barth is not bound by any such rigid doctrine of biblical inerrancy as restricted Calvin. This, of course, is due to the advances of textual and historical criticism. Barth takes these critical studies into account only spasmodically, yet they have given his use of the Bible much more flexibility than Calvin knew. But textual and historical criticism grew out of altogether secular literary and historical scholarship, and are based on the assumption that there is continuity between the biblical revelation and the rest of human history. Every time we use historical criticism in our study of the Bible, we are learning something about God's Word to man from historical knowledge gained from sources independent of the biblical revelation. Biblical theology which makes use of historical criticism, then, implies the positive usefulness of natural theology, particularly in the fifth (Temple's) sense.

To use another example, we may point out that the thought of the Church has been stimulated, challenged, and modified for good, in recent times, by secular movements of thought. Reinhold Niebuhr, John C. Bennett, Walter G. Muelder, and other students of Christian social ethics, have often pointed out examples of such contributions from non-Christian and even anti-Christian thought. To recognize such contributions is to imply acknowledgement of indebtedness to natural theology. For it is the gaining of 'truth about God or about man's rightful destiny' from 'considerations logically independent of the biblical revelation and of a prior commitment to the Christian faith'. (Cf. last paragraph under 'I. Definitions', above. The *kinds* of natural theology most relevant here are those specified by definitions two and five.)

(3) Natural theology provides a bridge for communication and intellectual co-operation of Christian theology with the natural and social sciences. Where Christian theology is taught as part of a university curriculum, it can scarcely

participate in the common intellectual life of the university without accepting the services of natural theology. A department of Christian theology in which natural theology is opposed can issue pronouncements and its members can as individuals participate in scientific activities; but can it participate in co-operative truth-seeking efforts with the sciences? Universities and our whole culture are already suffering badly from the disunity of intellectual fragmentation. Christian theology can be of important assistance in healing this condition, but only when it approaches other disciplines with a willingness to learn from them concerning its own subject matter, as well as to teach them important insights concerning their subject matter. To engage in this kind of co-operative intellectual task, with psychology, sociology, history, medical science, economics, political science, biology and the physical sciences is to accept the services of natural theology. All the five types of natural theology are useful in this task.

(4) In some aspects of human life, if the practical as well as the intellectual purposes of Christian theology are to be achieved, its participants must engage in certain common tasks with persons who stand outside the Christian faith. A common platform for such co-operation, e.g. in the United Nations and its affiliated agencies, is to be found in that division of natural theology (definitions two and five) concerned with natural law. The work of such men as Dr Frederick Nolde suggests what can be done by men with Christian faith clarified by theological study and with willingness to enter wholeheartedly into discussion of current international issues on the basis of humanly discoverable natural law. A Christian theology which includes the conviction that all natural theology must be rejected is cut off from effective participation in such important Christian ministries of conciliation and understanding.

(5) In the communication of Christian faith—and Christian theology—to unbelievers, natural theology (all five types) is so valuable as to be well nigh indispensable. While studying and otherwise assisting theological education in Central and East Africa in 1955-6, the writer asked many articulate first-generation Christians what had motivated their turning from paganism to Christian faith. Invariably, an important part of the answer implied the truth of natural theology. These young Christians told me that the Christian message showed them clearly what they had long dimly understood—the kind of life they ought to live, with faith in one supreme God. The Christian faith declared to them the God already dimly sensed but yet not well known, and enabled them to live a life in fulfilment of moral needs long felt but inarticulate and ineffectual. In evangelistic approach to Communists here in the United States, I have found a similar necessity to meet the unbeliever on a common ground of secular thought and universal and human need. Philosophical criticism of Marxism and a positive arguing of natural theology must be used until the unbeliever is persuaded that it is reasonable to look for a solution of his most perplexing theoretical and practical problems in a theistic faith. Until he is so persuaded, all citations of Biblical and churchly authority only confirm him in his assurance that the Christian faith is an outmoded, pre-scientific superstition. Natural theology is no less valuable for the evangelistic Christian world mission today than when Justin Martyr wrote his apology or when Augustine was led through Platonism to Christ.

So valuable an ally deserves a better reputation with Christian theologians than Barth and some others would give it, unless better reasons can be adduced against it than have thus far come to light.

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