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THE EFFECTS OF THE FALL ARE SUCH THAT THE NATURAL MAN CANNOT THINK
HIS WAY TO GOD BY MEANS OF NATURAL THEOLOGY AND MAN'S REASON

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Introduction

In this paper I will argue, by way of interaction with key theologians and Scripture, that, despite the contentions of many today, fallen man cannot think or reason his way to God by means of natural theology. First I will define what natural theology is, show how it is defined by its proponents, and assess objections raised against it which argue that natural theology can only be used properly in conjunction with special revelation. Next, I will delineate the effects of the fall on man's reason. Finally, I will argue that apart from divine revelation fallen man cannot think his way to God by means of natural theology, and show that the gospel, as revealed in Scripture and illumined by the Holy Spirit, is the only way to truly know God.

Defining Natural Theology

Natural theology is man's attempt to 'prove' or argue for the existence and/or attributes of God through reason and what is observable to the senses without reference to Scripture.¹ Dr. Jeffery D. Johnson states that "the branch of philosophy that treats the nature of God is called *natural theology* (i.e., philosophy of religion). Natural theology is not natural revelation. . . . [It] is limited to what can be known about God through reason and our empirical senses . . . [and] does not start with God's self disclosure."²

1. "natural theology: theology deriving its knowledge of God from the study of nature independent of special revelation" (*MERRIAM-WEBSTER.COM DICTIONARY*, s.v. "Natural Theology").

2. Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Failure of Natural Theology: A Critical Appraisal of the Philosophical Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2021), 10–11 (emphasis original).

Natural Theology's Proponents

Barney H. Corbin states that for Thomas Aquinas theology is a science “[a]nd as a science theology is not mere opinion, it is established like other sciences through observation and reason.”³ Aquinas states that “theology included in sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is part of philosophy.”⁴ Thus, Aquinas views natural theology as a “philosophical science built up by human reason.”⁵ Corbin understands Aquinas’s natural theology to be the study of “the Creator” by means of “human reason” and the “evidences of creation” such that we do not have to “merely posit the existence of God based upon a subjective basic belief.”⁶ In other words, for Aquinas one needs more than just belief or faith to know truths about God, and this is a direct denial of the sufficiency of Scripture. Aquinas, in *On Boethius' De Trinitate*, says that “we have to proceed from sensible things to those that are non-sensible.”⁷ Yet, this is backwards. Dr. Johnson states, “If we don't start with the God of divine revelation . . . we will not arrive [at] the God of divine revelation . . . [rather] our inquiry is destined to end in absurdity.”⁸ If we start with man and what he knows or reasons and try to work our way up to God we cannot arrive at the God of the Bible, other than by happenstance as a result of groping blindly in the dark. Corbin says that for Thomas faith and reason are linked such that one simply cannot believe without evidence.⁹ Yet, contrary to Aquinas, Scripture says that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1 ESV) and faith is “the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). Thus, Scripture is clear that even the unregenerate man does not need evidence or ‘proofs’ to believe because “what can be known about God is plain to them” (Rom 1:19).

3. Barney H. Corbin, “A Thomistic Reply To The Reformed Objection To Natural Theology,” *CAJ* 5.2 (2006): 91, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/caj005-2-003>.

4. Thomas Aquinas, *The “Summa Theologica” of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican province (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1920), §1a 1.1.2, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1001.htm>.

5. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, §1.1.1.

6. Corbin, “Thomistic Reply,” 94.

7. Thomas Aquinas, *On Boethius' De Trinitate*, trans. Rose E. Brennan and Armand Mauer, 1946, §q.5 art 1, <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/BoethiusDeTr.htm>.

8. Johnson, *The Failure of Natural Theology*, 29.

9. Corbin, “Thomistic Reply,” 94–95.

Natural Theology's Objectors

Abraham Kuyper, in *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, states that Aquinas “too closely identified” theology and philosophy and that he “takes too little account of the world of unregenerate humanity . . . [and] thus finally reason sat in judgment” of Christian doctrine; therefore he concluded that “security could be regained only when return was made to the Holy Scripture.”¹⁰ In fact, he states that “sinful man” is the one “toward whom Revelation directs it self” since he cannot properly understand what is revealed to him otherwise.¹¹

John Owen, in *Biblical Theology*, states that “the contemplation of nature [was] only a true theology in man's primary state, and thus all study of them, without the aid of revelation, is simply vanity now.”¹² Owen goes on to say that “the Apostle Paul himself would struggle in vain to grasp or understand” the “unnatural partnership of philosophy with theology” that is “dished up as Christian theology” by many “unless, that is, he was given the clue by Aristotelian learning!”¹³ Owen says that the scholastics “replaced the norm and faith of evangelical theology with a barbarous and philosophical pseudo-scientific ‘learning’” and the “boilings-down of Aristotelian metaphysics applied to the discussion of supernatural affairs.”¹⁴ Thus, he was clear that one who has been “washed in reformation waters” has no need to “again roll himself in sophistic, philosophical mud,” which is such a “great harm [to] the Church,” when they have the true and pure light of Scripture to guide them.¹⁵

John Gill, making a play on Aquinas's own words, states that although “philosophy may be useful as an handmaid; it is not to be a mistress in theological things” because “the

10. Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1898), 657–58, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Encyclopedia_of_Sacred_Theology/Q91ZAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

11. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 609.

12. John Owen, *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ or The Nature, Origin, Development, and Study of Theological Truth, in Six Books* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2009), quoted in Johnson, *The Failure of Natural Theology*, 220.

13. Owen, *Biblical Theology*, quoted in Johnson, *The Failure of Natural Theology*, 222–23.

14. Owen, *Biblical Theology*, quoted in Johnson, *The Failure of Natural Theology*, 227.

15. Owen, *Biblical Theology*, quoted in Johnson, *The Failure of Natural Theology*, 229; cf. “[S]ince the beginning of the Reformation . . . A philosophical method of teaching spiritual matters is alien to the gospel!” (Johnson, *The Failure of Natural Theology*, 230).

natural man . . . neither knows nor receives the things of the Spirit of God” and only Scripture can inform man “of a trinity” and “the sonship of Christ.” He states that “in a word, the apostle here condemns . . . introduc[ing] natural philosophy into the worship and service of God,” and that “philosophy is not to be mixed with the pure Gospel of Christ . . . as it has always been fatal to it.”¹⁶

Richard Muller shows that for Herman Bavinck there is “an acceptable natural theology grounded in revelation and unacceptable natural theology” that is the product of rationalism and Thomism.¹⁷ Bavinck clearly states that a “distinct natural theology, obtained apart from any revelation, merely through observation and study of the universe in which man lives, does not exist.”¹⁸ Thus, natural theology that is based on both natural and special revelation is the only kind that can be valid, and as we will see later, it’s only use for the unregenerate man is as a means of condemnation, as it provides no salvific knowledge of God.¹⁹ Bavinck is clear that one cannot rightly understand general revelation apart from special revelation.²⁰ Elsewhere he states that “there is no such thing as a separate natural theology that could be obtained apart from any revelation solely on the basis of a reflective consideration of the universe.”²¹ Bavinck

16. John Gill and Abercromby Lockhart Gordon, *An Exposition of the Old Testament (of the New Testament) ... By John Gill, D.D.* (G. Keith: London, 1763), v. Colossians 2:8, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/>.

17. Richard A Muller, “Kuyper and Bavinck on Natural Theology,” *The Bavinck Review* 10 (2019): 25, <https://bavinckinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/BR10.pdf>.

18. Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. William Hendriksen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1951), 78; Cf. “Scripture does not reason in the abstract. It does not make God the conclusion of a syllogism, leaving it to us whether we think the argument holds or not. But it speaks with authority.” (Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, 78).

19. Note that here that I am using Bavinck’s terminology. I prefer not to use the term natural theology to refer to what is revealed in nature, as this, properly, is natural revelation, which is something that is immediately and innately known by all.

20. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:304.

21. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 2:74.

repudiates the idea, proposed by some, that natural theology is “cognate and preparatory” to revealed theology.²²

Blaise Pascal claims that all natural theologies lead to the sin of pride and thus are taboo, but Douglas R. Groothuis rejects this premise and says that natural theologies may be helpful when supplemented by divine revelation.²³ Pascal argues that it is “worthy of attention” that “no canonical writer has ever made use of nature to prove God” and surely they were more learned (not to mention inspired) than those that came after them, thus he sees no warrant for natural theology.²⁴ Groothuis, when analyzing Pascal’s argument, seems to take for granted that the theistic arguments of Aquinas and others lead to proof for the God of the Bible (rather than a generic god of one’s own understanding who is really no God at all), but he fails to provide any support for this claim.²⁵ Pascal goes on to say that in the Bible “there is sufficient evidence to condemn, and insufficient to convince” so it appears “that it is grace, and not reason” that causes one to believe and that “in those who shun it, that it is lust, not reason, which makes them shun it.”²⁶

Cornelius Van Til aptly states, “There is a natural theology that is legitimate. It is such a theology as, standing upon the basis of faith and enlightened by Scripture, finds God in nature. But Rome’s natural theology . . . is illegitimate. Its natural theology is attained by the natural

22. Herman Bavinck, “Recent Dogmatic Thought in the Netherlands,” trans. Geerhardus Vos, *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 10 (1892): 213, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/590be125ff7c502a07752a5b/t/60049ec5f3041742d8bbff06/1610915526932/Vos%2C+Geerhardus%2C+Recent+Dogmatic+Thought+in+the+Netherlands.pdf>.

23. “The knowledge of God without that of man’s misery causes pride.” (Blaise Pascal, *Pascal’s Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter [New York: E.P. Dutton, 1958], 143, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18269/18269-h/18269-h.htm>); Douglas R. Groothuis, “Proofs, Pride, And Incarnation: Is Natural Theology Theologically Taboo?,” *JETS* 38.1 (1995): 95, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/jets038-1-008>.

24. Pascal, *Pascal’s Pensées*, 72; Groothuis summarizes Pascal’s argument by stating that “if God had sanctioned theistic arguments from nature, he would have inspired a biblical writer to present one or more such arguments. . . . [T]herefore, we can conclude that God does not sanction theistic arguments.” (Douglas R. Groothuis, “Pascal’s Biblical Omission Argument Against Natural Theology,” *The Asbury Journal* 52.3 [1997]: 18, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1349&context=asburyjournal>).

25. “The idea that the Bible is the ultimate and final witness to or revelation of God’s existence need not necessarily eliminate the idea that there are independent reasons that could convince skeptics that God exists.” (Groothuis, “Pascal’s Biblical Omission Argument,” 24).

26. Pascal, *Pascal’s Pensées*, 156.

reason without reference to Scripture.”²⁷ This leads us to consider how man’s reason has been affected by the fall.

The Effects Of The Fall On Man’s Reason

Dr. Owen Strachan, in *Reenchanting Humanity*, states that mankind’s “whole person suffers the effects of the fall,” and that, while they remain spiritual beings who are the image of God, they “cannot know the Lord in spiritual terms” because as sinners they are “separated from God by an infinite distance” which is “uncloseable by human means.”²⁸ The result is that “[t]he Lord looks down from heaven . . . to see if there are any who . . . seek after God” (Ps 14:2) “but the pursuit comes up empty,” states Dr. Strachan.²⁹

Barry G. Waugh states that “[m]an could reason truly in Eden, but the comprehensive nature of the fall corrupted his reason as well as his other faculties.”³⁰ He goes on to say that “the catastrophe of the fall affected all aspects of man including his ability to reason.”³¹ As a result “[t]he understanding of the lost and the redeemed differs due to antithetical pre-suppositional foundations for wisdom, knowledge, and reason. What fallen man knows apart from regeneration is ‘smoke,’ but the redeemed are enabled to know and reason properly even into the mysteries of God,” concludes Waugh.³² Here Waugh clearly delineates between what the natural man can know by reason and what the regenerate man, born again and illuminated by the power of Holy

27. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1947), 44, quoted in Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing, 1998), 613.

28. Owen Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind* (Fearn, Ross-Shire: Mentor, 2019), 80.

29. Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity*, 86.

30. Barry G. Waugh, “Reason Within The Limits Of Revelation Alone: John Calvin’s Understanding Of Human Reason,” *WTJ* 72.1 (2010): 4, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/wtj072-1-001>.

31. Waugh, “Reason Within The Limits Of Revelation Alone,” 13.

32. Waugh, “Reason Within The Limits Of Revelation Alone,” 16.

Spirit, can know about God. He goes so far as to say that “natural reason . . . cannot comprehend the gospel . . . because only redeemed reason illumines the common and salvific.”³³

Commenting on Genesis 3:6, John Calvin states that as a result of the fall mankind has “los[t] reason and judgment,” “become the slaves of Satan,” had “their very senses bound,” and been “despoiled of the excellent gifts of the Holy Spirit, of the light of reason, of justice, and of rectitude”³⁴ Calvin, in no uncertain terms, shows that fallen man’s reason is no longer capable of properly interpreting what God has revealed of himself in nature.

Kuyper states that “the effort to obtain Divine knowledge from natural theology, without the help of special revelation, was bound, after the fall, to effect the entire deterioration of the knowledge of God.”³⁵ Kuyper is adamant that if sin is properly defined “there is no longer any question of the darkening of our knowledge of God by sin” and that “natural theology is not sufficient for the sinner” as a result of the fall.³⁶ Thus, since mans powers of reasoning are detrimentally impacted by the fall he can never get to the God of the Bible through natural theology alone.

Cornelius Van Til affirms, along with Calvin, that there is common ground between the believer and the unbeliever as creatures made in the image of God who cannot help but know that God exists, as described by Paul in Romans 1 and 2, but he states, “I have always *denied* that fallen man's *interpretation of this revelation* of God to him is *identical* with the revelation itself. *Natural revelation must not be identified with natural theology.*”³⁷ This is a vital distinction that is often overlooked, or perhaps ignored, in many of the recent attempts to defend Thomism.

33. Waugh, “Reason Within The Limits Of Revelation Alone,” 19.

34. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 1:154–55, <https://calvin.edu/centers-institutes/meeter-center/files/john-calvins-works-in-english/Commentary%20001%20-%20Genesis%20Vol.%201.pdf>.

35. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 319.

36. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 349; cf. “[Y]ou cannot depend upon natural theology as it works in fallen man” (Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 373).

37. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 301 (emphasis original), quoted in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 185.

John Beversluis states that fallen man lacks the “capacity to achieve” the knowledge of God that he had when “originally created” therefore “the revelation of God in Scripture is a necessary condition for perceiving the revelation of God in Nature.”³⁸ He goes on to say, “The trouble with natural theology is . . . that the knowledge of God which it yields is purely theoretical—highly abstract, grievously incomplete, emotionally sterile, and behaviorally inefficacious. Such knowledge cannot touch the heart. Nor can it elicit repentance and love.”³⁹ This leads us to examine the reason why man, in his fallen state, cannot think his way to God.

Man Cannot Think His Way To God In His Fallen State

Based on what has been learned about the nature of natural theology, as described by its proponents, and how the fall has affected man’s capacity to reason, it is left to consider whether fallen man can think his way to God.

Scriptural Considerations

Commenting on Rom 1:21 Calvin states, “We conceive that there is a Deity; and then we conclude, that whoever he may be, he ought to be worshipped: but our reason here fails, because it cannot ascertain who or what sort of being God is.”⁴⁰ Commenting on 1 Cor 1:20 he states that while Paul does not expressly condemn “man's natural perspicacity” for learning he does declare that it “is of no avail for acquiring spiritual wisdom” and that “without Christ sciences in every department are vain.” He then concludes that “whatever knowledge a man may come to have without the illumination of the Holy Spirit” is folly and vanity because “if it is not grounded in

38. John Beversluis, “Reforming the ‘Reformed’ Objection to Natural Theology,” *Faith and Philosophy* 12.2 (1995): 193, 196, https://www.pdcnet.org/collection/fshow?id=faithphil_1995_0012_0002_0189_0206&pdfname=faithphil_1995_0012_0002_0027_0044.pdf&file_type=pdf.

39. Beversluis, “Reforming the ‘Reformed’ Objection to Natural Theology,” 199.

40. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 71, <https://calvin.edu/centers-institutes/meeter-center/files/john-calvins-works-in-english/Commentary%2038%20-%20Romans.pdf>.

true wisdom . . . it is in no degree better fitted for the apprehension of spiritual doctrine than the eye of a blind man is for discriminating colours.”⁴¹ It is clear, at least in Calvin’s estimation (with which I concur), that man is unable to think his way to God in his fallen state. He is only capable of doing this when, through the power of the Holy Spirit, he is regenerated and becomes a new man (Eph 4:22-24; 2 Cor 5:17). As Paul says, the gospel is “veiled to those who are perishing” because the “god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (1 Cor 4:3-4).

Theological Observations

It is worth quoting Kuyper at length here as he presents a solid argument for why the natural man cannot reason his way to God:

Natural Theology can exhibit itself as a regnant power only when human nature receives the beams of its light in their purity and reflects them equally completely. At present, however, the glass has been impaired by a hundred cracks, and the receiving and reflecting have become unequal, and the image that was to reflect itself is hindered in its clear reflection and thereby rendered untrue . And for this reason you cannot depend upon natural theology as it works in fallen man; and its imperfect lines and forms bring you, through the broken image, in touch with the reality of the infinite, only when an *accidens* enables you to recover this defective ideal for yourself, and natural theology receives this *accidens* only in special revelation. . . . It is, therefore, of the greatest importance, to see clearly, that special theology may not be considered a moment without natural theology, and that on the other hand natural theology of itself is unable to supply any pure knowledge of God.⁴²

Thus, Kuyper says, as a result of the fall and the “consequence of sin” man has lost his “competency to judge” what nature reveals to him and special revelation is required for true knowledge of God.⁴³

41. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (Edinburg: s.n., 1848), 82–83, <https://calvin.edu/centers-institutes/meeter-center/files/john-calvins-works-in-english/Commentary%20039%20-%20Epistles%20of%20Paul%20the%20Apostle%20to%20the%20Corinthians%20Vol.%201.pdf>.

42. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 307, 373 (emphasis original).

43. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, 381.

Greg L. Bahnsen, in *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*, brilliantly summarizes why fallen man cannot think his way to God when he states:

[T]here is no 'right reason' available to the natural man in his total depravity, and for that reason he is unable to find elementary religious truth that might lead him to accept the Scriptures as the crowning point of his reflections. Sinners must receive the Scriptures as God's word, correcting their distorted perception of nature and history."⁴⁴

In the end, faith, which is a gift of God through the Holy Spirit, must be involved in order to come to a saving knowledge of God. Mere fallen reason alone will not lead one to accurate knowledge of God.

Calvin states that though the "workmanship of the universe . . . show[s] forth the glory of its Author" it can in "no way lead us into the right path" since the fall.⁴⁵ Indeed, he says that "it is needful that another and better help [the Scriptures] be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe."⁴⁶ He makes the analogy that just as when a man with poor eyesight puts on glasses he can see better, so it is that "Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God."⁴⁷ However, Calvin does not hesitate to make it clear that "although we lack the natural ability to mount up unto the pure and clear knowledge of God, all excuse is cut off because the fault of dullness is within us" as a result of the corrupt nature we inherited from our first parent, Adam.⁴⁸

Dr. Johnson is right when he states that without divine revelation man is left to "grope around aimlessly in the darkness . . . because natural theology, no matter what direction it takes, leads to inherent contradictions."⁴⁹ Likewise, Waugh states that "when man seeks to obtain

44. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 598.

45. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John Thomas McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), §I.V.14, [http://mis.kp.ac.rw/admin/admin_panel/kp_lms/files/digital/SelectiveBooks/Theology/Calvin%20-%20Institutes%20of%20the%20Christian%20Religion.%20Volume%201%20\(Library%20of%20Christian%20Classics\).pdf](http://mis.kp.ac.rw/admin/admin_panel/kp_lms/files/digital/SelectiveBooks/Theology/Calvin%20-%20Institutes%20of%20the%20Christian%20Religion.%20Volume%201%20(Library%20of%20Christian%20Classics).pdf).

46. Calvin, *Institutes*, §I.VI.1.

47. Calvin, *Institutes*, §I.VI.1.

48. Calvin, *Institutes*, §I.V.15.

49. Johnson, *The Failure of Natural Theology*, 168.

knowledge that is proper to God alone” he denies “the sufficiency of God’s revelation while butting his head against the wall of an epistemological dead-end.”⁵⁰ This is an important fact that is overlooked by many that are ardent to defend Thomism today. They, in reality, are denying the sufficiency of Scripture, yet, to the contrary, those who truly stand in the reformed tradition of *sola Scriptura* must acknowledge that God has revealed to us in Scripture all that we need. In natural revelation God makes Himself immediately and efficaciously known such that no one is without excuse, yet they choose to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Natural revelation is enough to condemn man because no one is truly an atheist (Ps 14:1). All men know God exists, but special revelation is required in order to come to a knowledge of God as Savior.

Beverluis reminds us that “so far as fallen human beings are concerned, knowledge of God is the result of the internal illumination of the Holy Spirit and hence a gift of God to the elect.”⁵¹ This leads me to concur with Groothuis when he suggests that while the biblical omission of theistic proofs alone may not be enough to invalidate natural theology “the limitations of human reason, the noetic effects of sin, and the nature of God as infinite . . . render such proofs illegitimate.”⁵² Thus we see that without special revelation fallen man is not capable of thinking his way to God or coming to right conclusions about Him from what He has revealed of Himself by way of natural revelation.

Objections Answered

Terrance D. Cuneo holds that “natural theology” can show that we have “good reason to suppose the object of religious experience indeed exists.”⁵³ He asks “why should we think” that “having faith involves having immediate religious perceptual grounds in the form of experiential

50. Waugh, “Reason Within The Limits Of Revelation Alone,” 12.

51. Beverluis, “Reforming the ‘Reformed’ Objection to Natural Theology,” 200.

52. Groothuis, “Pascal’s Biblical Omission Argument,” 23–24.

53. Terence D. Cuneo, “Combating the Noetic Effects of Sin: Pascal’s Strategy for Natural Theology,” *Faith and Philosophy* 11.4 (1994): 654–55, https://www.pdcnet.org/pdc/bvdb.nsf/purchase?openform&fp=faithphil&id=faithphil_1994_0011_0004_0645_0669.

awareness or immediate beliefs” as Pascal believed.⁵⁴ Paul tells us that we should think this because all men are “without excuse” because the divine nature has been clearly perceived since the creation of the world (Rom 1:20), which is an example of immediate and experiential awareness of God. Paul is clear in Romans 1 that we do not need arguments or proofs to know that God exists. In the end Cuneo's interpretation is that natural theology only leads to volitional knowledge and not immediate religious perception, yet, contrary to Scripture, he does not believe that faith requires immediate religious perception. His view of ‘faith’ is something intellectual rather than a “gift of God,” (Eph 2:8) as the Bible indicates.

Conclusion

Calvin says that “those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning.”⁵⁵ God has revealed Himself in a way that is immediate and He is known to all in a way that requires no logical deduction to know that He exists. Yet, as Calvin shows, without the Holy Spirit we can no longer properly interpret either natural or special revelation. Calvin states that by the power of Scripture “we are drawn and inflamed, knowingly and willingly, to obey him, yet also more vitally and more effectively than by mere human willing or knowing!”⁵⁶ “[A] sense of divinity is by nature engraven on [the] human heart,” says Calvin, which forces “the reprobate themselves [to] confess . . . it.” They are not “utterly ignorant of God” yet they have “held back by stubbornness.”⁵⁷ As Paul says, they have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18) and refuse to acknowledge what God has made plain to them. Waugh states that “the grace of redemptive reason” allows the Christian to plumb the depths of the knowledge of God

54. Cuneo, “Combating the Noetic Effects of Sin,” 661.

55. Calvin, *Institutes*, §I.VII.5; cf. “We seek no proofs, no marks of genuineness upon which our judgment may lean; but we subject our judgment and wit to it as to a thing far beyond any guesswork!” (Calvin, *Institutes*, §I.VII.5).

56. Calvin, *Institutes*, §I.VII.5.

57. Calvin, *Institutes*, §I.IV.4.

and such wisdom must be “established on the foundation of faith and exercised within the bounds of God’s scriptural revelation if it is to be right reason.”⁵⁸ Only special revelation can reveal the God of Scripture and only those who have been given a new heart and indwelt by the Holy Spirit can interpret that knowledge and come to saving faith in Christ.

Thus, fallen man, try as he may, cannot think his way to God by means of natural theology and his own reason. True knowledge of God can only be obtained through special revelation. God has revealed Himself to us in a book, the Bible, and we must start and end there if we are to know Him rightly.

58. Waugh, “Reason Within The Limits Of Revelation Alone,” 21.

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