

NOOUMENA KATHORATAI

Romans 1:18-21, especially verse twenty, presents a most difficult exegetical and theological problem. Over the centuries every commentator has made his contribution: some of them seem satisfied with their conclusions: some of them ignore what is difficult. Here, after a translation that only disguises the formidable issues, the procedure will be to quote some of the commentators and to face the problem anew.

“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all impiety and injustice of men who hold [down] the truth in [by] injustice, because what is known of God is evident in them. For God made it clear to them. For his invisible [attributes] from the creation of the world, being understood by means of his works, are clearly seen, namely his eternal power and deity ...”

Though there may be some difference of opinion relative to how much of a commentator one should quote, and doubtless greater difference of opinion as to which commentators, the following selection, though arbitrary, should not be judged biased or unfair as a means of setting forth the difficulties and making some attempts to remove them. The reader may consult as many other commentaries as he wishes.

Charles Hodge: “It is not necessary therefore to infer that the apostle meant ... that the purpose of God to punish sin was made known by any special revelation ... Nor do the words ‘from heaven’ imply any extraordinary mode of communication ... It is however implied ... that this revelation is clear and certain ... existing in every man’s consciousness ... *Katechein* sometimes means to have in the sense of possessing ... But as *katechein* also means to detain, to repress ... the great majority of commentators are in favor of this latter interpretation ... The wicked oppose the truth because the knowledge of God is manifest among them *Gnoston* always in the Bible means what is known, not what may be known. Besides the English version seems to imply too much, for the apostle does not mean to say that everything that may be known of God was revealed to the heathen ... The knowledge of God does not mean simply a knowledge that there is a God, but ... a knowledge of his nature and attributes ... It is not of a mere external revelation of which the apostle is speaking, but of that evidence of the being and perfections of God which every man has in the constitution of his nature ... it is the manifestation of God in his works and in the constitution of our nature ... *The invisible things of him*: ... Theodoret says we are to understand creation, providence and the divine judgments; Theophylact understands them to refer to his goodness, wisdom, power, and majesty ... the latter is obviously the better suited to the context ... the invisible things are those which are manifested by his works ... The power of God is more immediately manifested in his works: but not his powers alone, but his divine excellence in general ... The *poiemata tou theou* ... are the things made by God, rather than the things done by him. The apostle says the *aorata kathoratai* ... because they are perceived by the mind; *nooumena* being understood by means of the things made.”

After continuing for about a page on matters beyond the scope of this discussion, Hodge interrupts his commentary to return and say, “The apostle ... has no hesitation in saying that the heathen knew God ... they actually possessed an intelligible revelation.”

On the word *kathoratai* Arndt and Gingrich say: “his (God’s) invisible nature is perceived by the eye of reason in the things that have been made.” In this discussion we must constantly keep in mind that *kathoratai* may mean ‘the eye of reason,’ or it may be the literal eyesight that Thomas Aquinas’ argument requires. Arndt and Gingrich agree with Hodge that the revelation is intelligible, not sensory.

Hodge's *Commentary on Romans* is plausibly the best ever written. Nevertheless others are not without merit, even on points where they disagree with Hodge. But before adding quotations from other commentators, it may be wise to explain the mode of procedure. Quotations are made in order to canvass a variety of possible interpretations. These set the problem. The present writer does not, and indeed no intelligent author can, agree with all these interpretations. Not only must some be rejected as incorrect, but usually along with acceptable statements there are contrary implications; and such confusions and ambiguities. The reader must not be too quick to decide which contrary the present writer approves. His aim is to sharpen the differences.

Then also, by way of anticipation, and regardless of whether a commentator contradicts himself or not, there are two closely related difficulties that will bother us throughout the whole discussion. The question is whether or not Paul gives his apostolic approval to some or all of the cosmological proofs of God's existence. While some commentators quickly say yes, others find the idea impossible. The second difficulty, whichever way the first is solved, is how this passage applies to vociferous atheists such as Bertrand Russell and Madeline Murray O'Hare. But vociferous atheists do not give us the greatest difficulties. One asks, Did the Australian aborigines of the tenth century clearly see and come to understand God’s eternal power and deity by looking at the sand and watching kangaroos?

Theodoret may have had a better view than Theophylact, for the former mentioned the divine judgments. And Hodge, though he favored the latter, notes that the apostle says “clearly seen” and “being understood.” “What is known of God” includes also his wrath and justice. God made this clear to them. Does this mean that the pygmies of Africa were clear thinking theologians who deduced this information from their observations in the jungle?

Worse than either the atheists or the aborigines, can a devout Christian today clearly understand deity by looking at a tree or a rock? If so, how?

Now follow quotations from other commentators. The views must be canvassed and analyzed, and the procedure becomes complicated.

Godet wrote, “*Gnoston* ... usually signifies ... what is really known ... Paul means: ‘*What can be known* of God without the help of an extraordinary revelation is clearly manifested within them.’ A light was given in their conscience and understanding ... This present fact; *is manifested*, is afterward traced to its cause, which is stated by the verb in the aorist ... God is not known like an ordinary object ... it is he who gives himself to be known ... Verse 20 explains the external means by which he wrought this revelation of himself in the conscience of men. Ver. 20. He did so by his works in nature ... In virtue of the principle of causality innate in his understanding, he forthwith sees in this immense effect the revelation of a great cause ... The infinite series of means and ends - the notion of end, not less essentially inherent in his mind ... These *invisible things*, belonging to the essence of God, have been made visible ... externally

manifested ... The complex phrase *nooumena kathoratai*, are *spiritually contemplated*, contains two intimately connected ideas: ... a viewing with the outward *sense* ... [add] an act of *intellectual* perception ... Paul does not disparage natural theology.” Just note in passing that Karl Barth was very certain that he did.

The omission of some phraseology in these quotations is not supposed to alter the sense of the commentators. If what is quoted from Godet seems to contain inconsistencies, the full text does not show how to remove them. One important point is his thoroughly anti-Christian concept of causality. Other commentaries escape inconsistency by reason of the paucity or triviality of their remarks; e.g. the one by James Philip of Holyrood Abbey.

So far as the formal cosmological argument is concerned, with all of Thomas’ syllogisms, five logical fallacies, each of which is fatal, are given in my book *Thales to Dewey*, and they do not need to be repeated here. Godet, however, depends on the innate principle of causality: and without Thomas’ intricacies, he “forthwith sees in the immense effect the revelation of a great cause.”

Although Godet's theory of an innate concept of cause is not worked out at all, it immediately reminds us of Kant’s position. Now, Kant took pains to argue that the a priori category of causality could never be used in the construction of a valid cosmological argument. How Godet escapes this, he does not say. In addition to Kant's restrictions, there is another point, not inconsistent with Kant, yet not explicitly stated. The category of causality requires that every cause be the effect of a preceding cause. But no Christian theology will allow God to be such an effect. The consequence is that Godet shows no knowledge of what he means by the word *cause*. If God is the cause of creation, he must be so in a totally different sense from that in which we identify a given event in the created world as the cause of another. The latter sense presents plenty of philosophical difficulties; the former has no application to natural phenomena. Godet is obviously confused, for his words imply that God is one term in an “infinite series of means and ends.”

Turning now to the eminent theologian W.G.T. Shedd, we read, “... there are two revelations from God to man; one the written, by which mercy is made known; the other the unwritten, by which retributive justice (*orge*) is made known.”

Breaking into the quoted material and referring back to Bertrand Russell and the Australian aborigines, we must wonder how rocks and trees can reveal the principles of retributive justice. This puzzle makes Paul’s text difficult to understand. Now, back to Shedd.

“Respecting the mode in which this revelation of retributive justice is made, several views may be held. 1) In natural reason and conscience. 2) In the day of judgment. 3) By giving many over to vice ... 4) In all modes, internal and external. The last is best ... 1) God constructed the human mind so that it should have such a form of consciousness: 2) God immediately works upon the human mind as thus constituted ... Ver. 20 ... explains how God ‘shows’ truth to man ... *nooumena*: this verb ... implies, denotes, a perception by the reason. It is rational and not sensuous perception; intuitive and not deductive.”

To break in again, so that the difficulties will not be lost by too much rapid reading, we can understand a theory of innate knowledge. God did not create man's mind a blank. At the very least the human mind is intrinsically organized by logical forms. We can also understand that God possibly works *immediately* on such a mind. Under these conditions the knowledge is rational and not sensory, and thus it might be intuitive rather than deductive. All this is possible. But if so, why does Paul mention the things that have been made? Presumably these things are trees and rocks. But any knowledge of divine attributes or divine wrath must be deductive, if it comes by means of sensory experience. It cannot be an innate intuition. That sensory experience is intended, one may gather from Psalm 8.

Shedd acknowledges these sensory objects. He continues, "The invisible attributes are clearly perceived by the human mind, in the exercise of reason stimulated into activity by the notices of the senses. The merely sensuous vision of the earth and sky by a brute, would not result in the rational ideas of omnipotence and sovereignty, because the brute has not that rational faculty whose operation is properly designated by the verb *noein*."

There is certainly some confusion here. Shedd actually quotes Aristotle, *De Mundo*, c. 6; and Aristotle most definitely bases his knowledge of God on deduction. Yet Shedd explicitly says that the knowledge in question is "intuitive and not deductive." But if intuitive, and immediate as he also says, what role can sensuous perception play? He says the senses stimulate the exercise of reason. But if so, God does not act "immediately;" and if reason is "stimulated into activity" thereby, how is deduction avoided? Surely Shedd is confused and confusing.

H. C. G. Moule writes: "*That which is known*; that is, practically, *that which is knowable, that which may be known* ... that there is Personality behind phenomena, and that this great Personality is righteous, St. Paul here affirms to be *manifest*, disclosed, visible, *in men* ... Since the ordered world was, and since man was, as its observer and also as its integral part, there has been present to man's spirit ... adequate testimony around him, taken along with that within him, to evince the reality of a supreme and persistent Will, intending order, and thus intimating Its own correspondence to conscience." So much for Moule.

Robert Haldane writes, "*Is manifest in them*, or rather, to them. This respects the clearness of the evidence ... for it is not an obscure or ambiguous revelation; it is a manifestation which renders the thing certain ... for the Apostle is referring here only to the external object ... and not to the actual knowledge ... From the sole contemplation of the world, there are sufficient proofs of the existence of God ... Its [God's power] present exertion proves its eternal existence ... In the contemplation of the heavens and the earth, everyone must be convinced that the power which called them into existence is eternal."

Haldane avoids some of the difficulties, but falls into others. For him, the evidences, the external objects, the trees and rocks are clearly seen. And the Apostle is referring to these physical objects; he is not referring to any knowledge. The knowledge may not exist. There are sufficient proofs of the existence of God, but the pygmies in Africa and Russell in England did not work them out. Haldane himself does not work out any single one of these sufficient proofs. Therefore his final phrase must be rejected: it is not true that everyone must be convinced, for many people are not. If Haldane himself were convinced, he ought to have written out the proof, so that we

could test its validity. Yet a superficial reading of Romans gives the idea that everyone has the knowledge, even without the proofs. Yet it may just be possible that only the external trees and rocks are seen, and there are no proofs to be tested. If a man is very confused and contradicts himself often enough, it is almost certain that some of the things he says are true. Only a completely consistent thinker has any chance of being totally mistaken.

One more commentator demands recognition. Anders Nygren sees the difficulties more clearly than the others; and whereas they write a single page, Nygren fills eleven. Moreover he explains the embarrassments (unrecognized) of his predecessors by charging them with a false disjunction, so that their questions can be answered by neither yes nor no. Let us therefore summarize the eleven pages.

After a paragraph to the effect that the revelation of God's wrath in verse 18 is as much a divine revelation as that of God's righteousness in verse 17, Nygren continues: "When and how is the revelation of the wrath of God made? Does Paul think of it as taking place in time? Or does wrath in this context, as in 2:5, have an eschatological meaning? ... The problem thus posed in artificial ... It is not a case of either-or. It is both-and ... The divine wrath ... is revealed from heaven. Manifest before all who have eyes to see."

In passing one may note that Nygren indeed insists on a present revelation of divine wrath. But it does not seem accurate to say that the problem is artificial and must be answered by a both-and, and not by an either-or. Without denying that Paul elsewhere asserts an eschatological manifestation of wrath, a careful commentator must see that here Paul's argument requires a present revelation and that a future judgment does not fit the context. These verses look to the present and past, not to the future.

Next, Nygren takes the words *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness* as virtually synonymous. He rejects the idea that *asebeia* means irreligion and *adikia* immorality. In particular he rejects the idea that immorality is the cause of irreligion. If the two terms are to be distinguished, as in some contexts they might be, the relation is rather the reverse. It is "a wrong relation to God [which] is the ultimate cause of man's corruption" (p. 101). "But how can God let his wrath fall on those who do not know him? ... Is not such wrath unjustified? No ... He has not concealed the truth. Men by their unrighteousness have suppressed the truth ... What can be known of God is plain to them ... Though God is invisible, man can know him ... He has made himself known in his works.

"Romans 1:20 is one of the places in the New Testament which has been subject to the worst misunderstandings ... Men have sought to educe an entire 'natural theology' ... But Paul has also been misunderstood by those who deny that there is any natural theology ... Belief that man is able to attain to a knowledge of God grew up outside of Christianity ... The question arises as to the relation between the natural knowledge of God and the divine revelation mediated through Christ. We meet that question again and again ... in orthodoxy's distinction between *articuli mixti* and *articuli puri*, holding that some things in our knowledge of God can be attained by human reason while others rest on special divine revelation ... the Enlightenment's 'natural religion' ... But we come upon it too in the more recent effort to reject all thought of a natural

knowledge of God, denying that God reveals himself other than in Christ. For the issue is the same, even though the answer is different ...

"Men have come to the interpretation of Paul with such a preconceived formulation of the problem. Thus they ask whether or not he speaks of such a natural knowledge of God. But the result is a misunderstanding of Paul, whether the answer be yes or no. It is clear that he cannot be made an advocate for any sort of natural theology or natural religion in the accepted meaning of these terms. But on the other hand he of course does say here that ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and deity have been manifest and can be known by his works ..." (p. 103).

Two points, though not of highest importance, may be noticed here. The first is the meaning of the phrase 'natural theology.' Nygren speaks of "the accepted meaning of these terms." But there is no one accepted meaning. Thomas Aquinas had a very definite idea of natural theology, which he worked out in tedious detail. Other theologians accept something much more vague and much less vigorous. The term 'natural religion' is still less definite. It can include the French Enlightenment, English Deism, and polytheism as well. But after one has chosen a definition to suit oneself, the second point is that "whether or not [Paul] speaks of such a natural knowledge of God" is a question that ought to be answered, yes or no. There need be no "misunderstanding of Paul, whether the answer be yes or no." What is needed are clear cut definitions. If Thomas' definition of natural theology is used, the present writer would answer, No. But if a vague religious sense be meant, if natural religion were conceived as a set of rites and beliefs impressed by the customs of the tribe, or something else still more vague, the answer would be a vague yes. Paul explicitly refers to various forms of idolatry.

Perhaps Nygren means something like this and has merely expressed himself poorly, for he says, "In a case where it seems necessary to answer both yes and no, it is probably true that the problem has been stated incorrectly." Certainly this is the case. The double answer is possible only by shifting, unwittingly from one definition to another. Hence Nygren can justly accuse those who wish to answer both yes and no with a misunderstanding of Paul; but it does not follow, as Nygren desires, that this misunderstanding is based on their own concept of natural theology. If they had a definite concept, regardless of whether it was Paul's or not, they would give a single, not a double answer.

Let us take a ridiculous example. Suppose someone asked whether or not Paul in these verses teaches strict vegetarianism and prohibits the eating of meat. Since these phrases are clear cut, the answer must be a clear-cut No. Similarly, whatever concept anyone has of natural theology, whether that concept is Paul's or not, if it is a clear-cut concept, the answer must be a definite Yes, or a definite No: it cannot be both. In fact Nygren tacitly admits this when in the next few lines he says, "We are bound to misunderstand [Paul] if we treat his words as 'scriptural proof' of a *completed* [ital. added] dogmatic view (p. 104). Does this not mean that if natural theology is given Thomas' definition, the answer is strictly, No?"

Slightly aside from the main issue of natural theology, Nygren makes an interesting remark about the phrases, 'so that they are without excuse.' He admits that this translation is grammatically possible; but equally grammatical, and even more so, the *eis* clause is better rendered 'in order

that they might be without excuse.’ It was the purpose, not merely the result, of God’s revelation to render them inexcusable. This is not altogether aside from the main issue, for it adds emphasis to the knowledge the heathen have, and bears on the translation of the ambiguous *katechonton*. Nygren finds support for his interpretation in Romans 3:19.

There now remain about three and a half pages of commentary on the passage. The preceding pages have contained some ideas that are not acceptable. But in what follows there seem to be irresolvable contradictions. This is disturbing. It would be disturbing in any author. But Anders Nygren was Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Lund and a Bishop of the Church of Sweden. The publishers put a highly commendatory statement in the back of the book. Even if this latter has commercial aims, one must acknowledge that Bishop Nygren was a distinguished professor. Can it be that we have misunderstood him and have produced for ourselves contradictions that are not there? That is of course a possibility. Only careful examination can decide. Then too, remember that the aim here is not so much to understand Nygren, as to understand Bertrand Russell and the aborigines of Australia.

The material (beginning at the bottom of page 105) opens with the acknowledgement that “Paul *touches* the problem of the ‘natural knowledge of God.’” But our commentator does not think “he actually get[s] into it. It is certainly not his idea that ‘the natural man’ has the ability to find his own way to God.”

One must be careful here. There is a difference between the idea of an intelligent natural man who deliberately investigates the alleged truth of theism, and the idea of a natural knowledge of God possessed by our Australian aborigines. There is also a difference between the natural man’s ‘finding his way to God’ in a soteriological sense, and his having or finding some notion of eternal power and deity. The latter seems to be Paul’s concern, for he emphasizes responsibility. Even though Nygren also emphasizes responsibility he seems to have soteriology in mind and not some natural knowledge of power and deity; for he continues, “What is the result when the man who has turned away from God would be pious and God-fearing? Paul answers that such a man searches creation and turns to the worship of idols. Paul never says that the natural man finds the marks of God in nature. That idea imposed on his words by ‘natural theology,’ is quite opposed to his meaning.”

But a superficial reading of Romans suggests the precise opposite. The text says that God’s “invisible [attributes] . . . being understood by means of his works, are clearly seen, namely his eternal power and deity.” It is not so much that a love of natural theology has forced this interpretation on some students, but that this interpretation of Paul has forced them into natural theology. Can we really accept Nygren’s assertion, “Paul never says that the natural man finds the marks of God in nature”? Were not his finding these marks the basis for holding the natural man inexcusable?

Of course, Nygren agrees that men are without excuse. He says so on this page, as previously he explained the purpose clause. He tries to harmonize all this by repudiating the alternative of natural knowledge versus revelation in Christ. “Ever since man posed the issue of a ‘natural theology’ and a ‘natural knowledge of God,’ he has thought of such alternatives. Either there is a natural knowledge of God, so that one can affirm a revelation of God apart from Christ; or if one

denies the natural man's knowledge of God, he must deny that there is any revelation of God except in Christ. Paul recognizes no such alternative" (p. 105).

One thing to be noted here is a serious ambiguity. It is the phrase "in Christ." Most Christians would use this phrase in a distinctly soteriological sense. Surely this sense is pervasive in Scripture. Nevertheless, because the creation of the world was an action of the Trinity, and certainly an action of the Logos, any natural revelation would be in or by Christ, even if not soteriological. Nygren seems to deny this, for on the next page he says, "Natural Theology assumes a deistic view." But is this true? It is manifestly false that every theologian who has accepted a form of natural theology has been a deist. Nygren replies, "Such theologians have misunderstood their own position; they may assert a revelation in Christ, but they fail to see that their arguments contradict their faith." Yet, if this be Nygren's reply, he ought to point out clearly where the contradiction lies. He does not do so.

The source of the trouble is the ambiguity in the phrase *natural theology*. Barth may very well be right in accusing the Thomistic arguments of being deistic. But this does not prove that a different definition must be deistic. Furthermore, Nygren's enthymematic argument may be circular. He had asserted, "Paul never says that the natural man finds the marks of God in nature." On what grounds does he make this assertion? Hardly by exegesis. Rather by assuming that natural theology is always deistic. But this begs the question.

Even with all the vagueness and ambiguity, perhaps the charge of outright self-contradiction may be too strong. But if so, what is the proper conclusion to draw from the following? Paul "knows that God reveals himself in all his works, in creation, in temporal blessings, in wrath and judgment, and in salvation. But just because Paul believes in God's revelation he cannot follow the way of 'natural theology' and seek God *behind* his creation leaving us to find our way to the Creator by following his tracks in that which he made" (p. 106). Now, are there marks of God, or tracks, in nature, or are there not? Does God reveal himself in his works, or does he not? If Nygren wishes to escape the charge of contradiction, he would have to reply, 'There are indeed marks and traces, but no one sees them.' But this escape runs counter to Paul's words "clearly seen, being understood by means of his works." Let it be granted that the Thomistic type of natural theology, which Nygren describes by the phrases *via causalitatis*, *via negationis*, and *via eminentiae*, is demonstrably fallacious and even deistic. If that is all Nygren means, well and good. But he seems to mean more and to have other forms of natural theology in mind also, for he applies his argument to the heathen in general, heathen who never had the ability to follow Thomas' syllogisms.

Since the point becomes of some importance as Nygren approaches his conclusion, it may be well to quote a few phrases that presuppose a non-scholarly, non-Thomistic natural theology. The reader may judge whether or not Nygren contradicts himself, but here is what he says: "Why is the wrath of God manifested? Because men in their iniquity suppress the truth. Throughout the whole history of mankind God has ever made himself known in his works" (p. 104). "The Gentiles, victims of ignorance and blindness ... are without excuse, for through his mighty works God revealed himself and appeared before him" (pp. 104-105). "In his work he reveals his eternal power and glory. As to mankind [not just Aristotle and Thomas], Paul holds that, though God ever comes to meet with him, man does not honor him as God" (p. 107). Hence, while these

passages show that Nygren is talking about all mankind, his arguments at best are valid only against scholastic philosophers.

After having mentioned *via causalitatis*, and giving the impression that natural theology is restricted to Aristotle's *Physics*, Book VIII, or the *Summae* of Thomas, Nygren continues, "It is thus easy to see why Paul can have no dealings with 'natural theology.' The reason is not that it deals with an inclusive divine revelation, while Paul limits the area of revelation, finding none except in Christ. On the contrary, as we have seen, Paul's view of God's revelation is much more inclusive than that of any natural theology ... he has no thought that God has limited his self-disclosure to a single point. The reason why there is no bond between Paul and natural theology is that they hold to entirely different concepts of God" (p. 107).

Suppose now it be admitted that both Aristotle and Thomas had a natural theology. The former may be said to have limited God's self-disclosure to a single point, as at least to the contents of *Physics* VIII and *Metaphysics*, Lambda. But this is not true of Thomas. To be sure, his natural theology may be somewhat limited, but Thomas asserts, does not deny, a more extensive self-disclosure. Nor can we understand why Nygren thinks that natural theology "deals with an inclusive divine revelation." How can he say that and in the same paragraph describe it as limited to a single point? Of course, Paul's special divine revelation is much more inclusive than any natural revelation. But Thomas also insists on this, even if Aristotle does not.

It may well be that the arguments of Thomas, as well as those of Aristotle, lead to a concept of God entirely different from the Scriptural concept of a living, speaking God. Perhaps Thomas was too optimistic in thinking he could glue revealed theology on to a base of natural revelation. There is some point to Barth's contention that an *ens realissimum* is an inanimate neuter; and that therefore any cosmological argument must be anti-Christian. But these ideas in Nygren can be only the strand of truth in a paragraph of confusion. Does not Nygren in spite of himself hold to a natural theology? Not of course to Thomas' intricate arguments. But to a natural theology nonetheless, for he writes, "In his [God's] work he reveals his eternal power and glory" (bottom of page 107).

What may be presumably taken as Nygren's conclusion is; "... natural theology ... is now so much a part of our own mental habit that we assume quite unreflectively that Paul was occupied with this issue. But if we let this issue set the trend of our discussion, we distort his thought, whether we take affirmative or negative position as to the possibility of natural theology" (p.108). This statement the present writer accepts as true, but only on the assumption that nothing but intricate arguments, such as those of Thomas Aquinas, are natural theology.

While those who speak confidently do not see the problems, and those who see the problems give a confused account, the prospects of progress cannot be very promising. Moreover there may be some minor matters that allow for improvement.

The first point for consideration is the wrath of God. That which is known of God, later referred to as his eternal power and deity, includes his wrath, for verse 18 says so; and Nygren is correct, I believe, in making the last clause in verse 20 a purpose clause. God revealed himself for the purpose of making men inexcusable. Power and deity therefore include wrath. This wrath is revealed from heaven, but we must ask, what form of wrath and what form of revelation? Hodge

takes the reference to mean that God revealed his intention to punish sin by death, as verse 32 indicates. If this is eternal death, the sense is eschatological. But even if it be physical death, the revelation refers to something future to the time of the revelation's reception. The revelation itself comes in or by the created universe. But how can man see in the stars and stones the proposition that he is worthy of death, or even that death is the result of sin? This is not so easily explained. But if stones do not make very good theological instructors, there is, happily, a better or at least an additional interpretation. Perhaps, though it is God's intention, as the purpose clause shows, Paul does not say that God reveals his intention to punish at a future time, either at our death or at the judgment day. Rather God reveals his wrath in actual punishments imposed now. Of course this does not preclude future punishments as elsewhere explained in the Bible. But the supposition that Paul in this passage has present penalties in mind can be supposed by verses 24-31. Verse 32, however, may weaken this interpretation, for it gives the impression that the heathen accept the theological proposition that the sins mentioned are worthy of death. But to know this normative proposition is not only different from knowing that men die; as normative, it cannot be deduced from non-normative, descriptive propositions, such as there is a stone, and men die. Hence if verse 18 is made easier, the difficulty reappears at the end of the chapter. How can all men have learned that eternal punishment is a future reality and that it is just?

But does verse 18, and therefore verse 32, say that all men have this knowledge? This is indeed the common opinion, but the text does not really say so. The phrase "who hold the truth" modifies the noun "men." The text does not say that all human beings hold, or hold down, the truth. It says that the wrath of God is revealed upon the sins of men who hold or have the truth. There may be some who do not have the truth, to whom therefore this verse does not apply.

Who might these human beings be? In any ordinary sense of the verbs, *know*, *suppress*, or *hold*, infants do not have the truth. They have not even seen stars and stones, much less the effects of sin in disease and death. There may be others than infants too. The catalogue of vices, such as the worshipping of reptiles and the sin of homosexuality, are not common to all adults. Bertrand Russell did not worship reptiles, and although he approved of adultery, he does not seem to have been a homosexual. We may say that he, or at least some scientists, have examined stones and stars without finding evidence of divine wrath in astronomy or geology. And one must note that the temporal punishments of sin, while obvious, do not convince all people that these results of debauch are divine punishments. Many regard them as merely natural consequences. At any rate, Paul's text does not explicitly refer to all human beings.

The next difficulty is the choice in translating the verb *Katecho*. It requires no extensive knowledge of Greek to look at a lexicon and see that it means either *hold fast* or *hold down*, i.e., *suppress*. Further investigation will show that the meaning *suppress* is less usual. Ordinarily *Katecho* means *hold* or *hold fast*. An example is Luke 8:15, "they are the ones who have heard the words in an honest and good heart and hold it fast." Which of these two meanings did Paul have in mind? If Paul was chiefly interested in stressing the responsibility of these men, then *hold*, *hold fast*, *possess*, fit the context better. The clearer their knowledge - and the verb *clearly seen* comes in the next verse - the more clearly they are inexcusable. Verse 28, on the other hand, indicates that they deliberately suppressed the truth they had. Nevertheless they must have had it before they could suppress it. Furthermore, verses 19-21 stress the clarity of their knowledge. It

was this that made them inexcusable. Accordingly, what is probably the majority opinion among commentators does not commend itself.

Verse 19 gives the reason why we know that God's wrath is revealed from heaven, not in any special revelation as Hodge acknowledges, but in sickness, misery, and physical death. The reason is that what they know of God is clearly evident in their minds. Unless the word *evident* is stressed, the phrase is somewhat tautological, for what is known must be known. It would not have been tautological if it had said, What may be known was known. Commentators, however, with the exception of what might have been a slip of the pen by Godet, quoted above, "What can be known," reject this interpretation, both on the ground of Greek translation and on the ground of sense. It is incongruous to suppose that any group of men, or any man, knows all that may be known of God. What is known seems here to be restricted to wrath, omnipotence and deity.

Now, if the wrath of God is revealed *because* it is known - its being known is the proof of its having been revealed - what is known is evident *because* God made it evident to them. And how do we know that God made it evident? The reason is that God's invisible attributes, eternal power and deity, are clearly seen and understood by man's observation [?] of created objects, in order that men may be held inexcusable.

The text does not explicitly attribute this knowledge to all mankind. At the minimum infants are excluded. What would be the maximum permitted by the text? Could it be that all who have not heard the gospel are excluded? Do Paul's words apply only to those who have heard the proclamation? In verse 17 the righteousness of God is said to be revealed in the gospel. Of course it does not follow by the strict laws of validity that God's righteousness is not revealed elsewhere also. The reign of Pericles is revealed in Grote's *History of Greece* but this does not prevent Bury from mentioning it also. Cannot righteousness be revealed both in the gospel and in nature? Nevertheless the Bible as a whole teaches that the righteousness here envisaged is revealed only in the gospel. Hence no one ignorant of the gospel - and the "gospel" includes the book of Habakkuk - can have learned about this righteousness. If now this is true of righteousness, it may also be true of wrath. That is to say, Paul is addressing the Roman Christians, who had already heard the gospel. Other Romans had heard the gospel, had received the revelation, from the mouth of Peter or other disciples, and had clearly understood the preaching, for God made it clear to them; but they refused to believe and so continued in the sins described in the remainder of the chapter. This would successfully exclude all notions of natural theology from this passage, for on this view Paul has in mind only people who have heard the gospel. Let it be clearly admitted that this interpretation is not a necessary conclusion from the text. But is its falsity a necessary conclusion? Is it not a possibility to be considered?

One must compare interpretation with interpretation. There are numerous verses and passages whose exact meaning is difficult to determine. Before rejecting, the above out of hand, let us examine a more widely held view. It is that all men - we shall not press the case of infants - by observing stars and stones have a clear understanding of God's wrath, omnipotence, and deity. There is a modification of this view that better survives analysis, but one may take this form first. This first form means that an observation of stones gives us knowledge of divine omnipotence, and an observation of the lamentable results of drug addiction gives us a knowledge of God's

wrath. But no one has ever shown how this could be possible. 'Stones are heavy, therefore God will punish sin' is already an invalid inference.

The second form of appeal to the 'things that are made' makes a normative conclusion more plausible. The expressions mostly used up to this point have designated visible objects, stones, and stars, as examples of the things that are made. Many commentaries take this for granted. But Godet, and with greater clarity Shedd, mention an internal as well as an external revelation. That is to say, the human mind is one of the things that God made; and while Godet and Shedd do not quite say so, this mind may turn out to be of such greater importance that stars and stones can be disregarded. Godet mentions man's "conscience and understanding," even though he puts the emphasis on physical nature; and Shedd speaks of "conscience ... consciousness ... rational not sensuous perception, intuitive and not deductive." Perhaps if we submerge the empirical elements these commentators retain, their more or less defective apriorism may lead to a better understanding of Paul's meaning.

In other words, we discover the divine attributes by introspection of the constitution of the mind. The a priori forms of logic presuppose the power, wrath, and deity of their maker. Augustine rejected stones and trees because, even if such an argument be possible, it must pass through the mind; therefore he believed that one might as well save himself the trouble and start with the mind right off. Calvin, however, did not agree. He opens his *Institutes* by asking whether the first object known is God or ourselves. In spite of the plausibility of starting with ourselves, he nonetheless concludes that we cannot know ourselves without knowing God first. Our stubborn aborigine certainly does not know himself, and if we are honest we will admit it of ourselves also.

Even if we adopt the possible though suspicious suggestion that Paul is not speaking of all men, but only of those heathen who have heard the gospel in Rome, the verbal symbols used in preaching require an a priori intellectual equipment for their understanding as much as physical objects do. Strictly speaking, the alleged vibrations in the air, by which we supposedly hear, are as physical as stones and stars. The impulses on the ear drums and whatever reactions there may be in the nerves are all physiochemical processes, in which nothing intellectual, intelligible, or meaningful is present. Not only Paul's argument, but the whole Bible assumes a mental or spiritual reality. In fact, while Paul is undoubtedly concerned with men, the same things could be said of incorporeal angels and demons.

The mention of Calvin, two paragraphs ago, reminds us that if Hodge, Godet, and others deserve quoting, Calvin deserves it more. It must be noted, however, that Calvin did not have in mind, when he wrote his Commentary, the precise form of the problem as here formulated. One reason for this is Calvin's position in history. If not the first, he was one of the first to reject allegorical interpretation. With Luther he initiated what may be called the grammatical method. Then too, for all his genius, he was not a philosopher and therefore assumed an Augustinian view, excellent in itself, without probing into the details of epistemology. Hence we today wish he had been more explicit. The Commentary overlaps our problem, but much of it is irrelevant. We shall quote more than necessary, rather than less; and anyone can check on the omissions in the nearest theological library.

“The truth of God means the true knowledge of God, and to *hold down* the truth is to suppress or obscure it ...

“19. *Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them.* Paul thus designates what is right or expedient for us to know of God, and he means all that refers to the showing forth of the glory of the Lord ... This means that we cannot fully comprehend God in His greatness, but that there are certain limits within which men ought to confine themselves, even as God accommodates to our limited capacity (*ad modulum nostrum attemperat*) every declaration which he makes of Himself. Only fools, therefore, seek to know the essence of God ... he seems in this instance to have intended to indicate a manifestation of God’s character which is too forceful to allow men to escape from it, since undoubtedly every one of us feels it engraved on his own heart. By saying God *manifested it* he means that man was formed to be a spectator of the created world, and that he was endowed with eyes for the purpose of his being led to God himself, the Author of the world, by contemplating so magnificent an image.

“20. *For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen.* God is invisible in Himself, but since His majesty shines forth in all His works and in all His creatures, men ought to have acknowledged Him in these, for they clearly demonstrate their Creator. For this reason the apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews calls the world a mirror or representation (*specula seu spectacula*) of invisible things (Heb. 11:3). He does not recount in detail all the attributes which may be held to belong to God, but he tells us how to come to the knowledge of His eternal power and divinity. He who is the Author of all things must necessarily be without beginning and self-created. When we have made this discovery about God, His divinity now reveals itself, and this divinity can exist only when accompanied by all the attributes of God, since they are all included in that divinity.

“... the manifestation of God by which He makes His glory known among his creatures is sufficiently clear as far as its own light is concerned. It is, however, inadequate on account of our blindness. But we are not so blind that we can plead ignorance without being convicted of perversity. We form a conception of divinity, and then we conclude that we are under the necessity of worshipping such a being whatever His character may be. Our judgment, however, fails here before it discovers the nature or character of God. Hence the apostle in Heb. 11:3 ascribes to faith the light by which a man can gain real knowledge from the work of creation. He does so with good reason, for we are prevented by our blindness from reaching our goal. And yet we see just enough to keep us from making excuse. Both of these truths are well demonstrated by Paul in Acts 14:17, when he says that the Lord in times past left the nations in their ignorance, yet He did not leave them without witness, *amarturos*, since he gave them rain and fruitful seasons from heaven. This knowledge of God, therefore, which avails only to prevent men from making excuses, differs greatly from the knowledge which brings salvation. This latter is mentioned by Christ, and Jeremiah teaches us to glory in it (John 17:3; Jer. 9:24).

“21. *Because that, knowing God.* He clearly declares here that God has put into the minds of all men the knowledge of Himself. In other words, He has so demonstrated His existence by His works as to make men see what they do not seek to know of their own accord, viz. that there is a God. The world does not exist by chance, nor has it proceeded from itself. We must always,

however, note the degree of knowledge which they have continued to hold, as we see from what follows.

“*They glorified him not as God.* No conception of God can be formed without including His eternity, power, wisdom, goodness, truth, righteousness, and mercy. His eternity is evidenced by the fact that He holds all things in His hand and makes all things to consist in Himself. His wisdom is seen, because He has arranged all things in perfect order. His goodness, because there is no other cause for His creation of all things, nor can any other reason than His goodness itself induce him to preserve them. His justice is evident in His governing of the world, because He punishes the guilty and defends the innocent; His mercy, because He bears the perversity of men with so much patience: and His truth, because He is unchangeable. Those therefore, who have formed a conception of God ought to give him the praise due to His eternity, wisdom, goodness, and justice. Since men have not recognized these attributes in God, but have conjured up an imaginary picture of Him as though He were an insubstantial phantom, they are justly said to have wickedly robbed Him of His glory ... *Their senseless heart* being thus *darkened* could understand nothing correctly, but in every way was borne headlong into error and falsehood. This was their unrighteousness, that the seed of true knowledge was immediately choked by their wickedness before it grew to maturity.

“22. *Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.* It is commonly inferred from this passage that Paul is here alluding to the philosophers who lay particular claim to a reputation for wisdom ... Interpreters who take this view do not seem to me to have been influenced by sufficiently conclusive reasoning, for it was not peculiar to philosophers to imagine that they were wise in the knowledge of God, but it was equally common to all nations and classes of men. All men have sought to form some conception of the majesty of God, and to make Him such a God as their reason could conceive Him to be. This presumptuous attitude to God is not, I maintain, learned in the philosophical schools, but is innate, and accompanies us, so to speak, from the womb ... The error of forming an image of God ... did not originate with the philosophers, but was received from others, and also stamped by their own approval.”

In the second sentence quoted, the first remark on verse 19, “the truth of God,” or “the true knowledge of God,” so designated in the previous sentence includes “all that refers to the showing forth of the glory of the Lord.” These phrases give the impression of a very extensive knowledge, even though “we cannot fully comprehend God in his greatness” and “there are certain limits within which men ought to confine themselves.” Beyond these limits is “the essence of God,” which “only fools seek to know.” If the word *essence* means the *definition* of God, Calvin is saying that we cannot know *what* God is, but perhaps know only *that* God is. Yet Calvin and Paul both indicate a more extensive knowledge than a mere *that*.

Extensive or not, this knowledge is “engraved on his own heart.” This knowledge, Calvin says later, accompanied by an ungodly presumptuous attitude, is not “learned in the philosophical schools, but is innate, and accompanies us, so to speak, from the womb.” But if this knowledge as well as the depravity is innate, it is learned neither in the schools nor in sensory experience. What is engraved on the heart from the womb is not the result of empirical observation. Yet the Thomists make a very plausible case for sensation. And so does Calvin; for immediately after mentioning the engraving he says that “man was formed to be a spectator of the created world ...

endowed with eyes for the purpose of being led to God himself ... by contemplating so magnificent an image.” Yet, we ask, how can the knowledge of God be innate and at the same time the results of a spectator’s observation of nature? This observational knowledge is again immediately emphasized in the comment on verse twenty: “since his majesty shines forth in all his works ... men ought to have acknowledged him in these [stones and stars] for they clearly demonstrate their Creator.”

Presumably the word *demonstrate* here does not mean Thomistic or logical demonstration. If it does, and a number of contemporary apologetes want to rehabilitate the cosmological argument, that demonstration should be written out complete so that anyone can look at it and test the validity of each of its syllogisms. These contemporary evidentialists uniformly ignore this challenge. If, on the other hand, the word *demonstrate* does not mean valid syllogisms, we should be informed how one passes from the leaf of a plant to a knowledge of eternal deity.

Climbing up an eminence in Capitol Reef National Monument, I saw, through a microscope, the amazingly intricate geometry of the filaments on the underside of a leaf no bigger than my thumbnail. With my acceptance of Scripture I could take this as God’s handiwork, and even infer that God knew a good bit about geometry. The (supposedly) atheistic ranger, though he could see the geometry as well as I, would never recognize it as a display of divine wisdom. But Paul wants to emphasize, not a knowledge of geometry or botany, but of God. Does Paul teach that the ranger actually understood God? By looking through a microscope? Yet Calvin intimates by his work “that divinity can only exist when accompanied by all the attributes of God, since they are all included in that divinity,” not only an extensive knowledge, but even one so extensive that it is the knowledge of God’s essence. Do we not know the “essence” of an object when we know all its characteristics?

Yet again a phrase seems to suggest that an unbeliever, no matter how strong his microscope, cannot attain a knowledge of God; “The apostle in Heb. 11:3 ascribes to faith the light by which a man can gain real knowledge of God from the work of creation.” Hence a faithless ranger or aborigine can have no real knowledge, really no knowledge, at all.

It is obvious that Calvin wishes to make a sharp distinction between whatever knowledge the reprobate have and the knowledge that brings salvation. These two should indeed be distinguished. But Calvin’s concentration on this point leads him to neglect a clear exposition of the reprobate’s knowledge. This alternate focus occurs in contemporary debate. Some apologetes stress the alleged distinction between the Greek concept of knowledge and the Hebrew concept. They point out that in Hebrew the word includes obedience to the commandments, and is not limited to ‘mere speculation.’ The Bible, so they say, emphasizes, ‘doing’ the truth. They also remark that in Hebrew the verb *know* can mean sexual intercourse, as when Adam knew his wife. They seem totally ignorant of the fact that this is a Greek usage too. Then, more fundamentally, knowledge in the Old Testament includes a knowledge of the dukes of Edom, a knowledge of a list of king, kings of Israel and kings of Judah, a knowledge of battles and how one king was accidentally shot between the joints in his armor, as well as details of geography and the social or legal custom of taking off a shoe to seal a contract. All this is Scriptural knowledge too. And if there is knowledge of God, non-soteric, obtainable by sensory observation, a contemptuous dismissal of the ‘Greek concept’ of knowledge is a meretricious subterfuge.

Without in the least minimizing the supreme importance of saving knowledge, the present discussion focuses on the knowledge of God which a reprobate or an elect person not yet regenerate may have. The question is, Do the unregenerate have any knowledge at all? Do they believe any true propositions about God? If they do so believe, are these beliefs well founded or are they thoughtlessly adopted from common opinion? Do these people, can they, discover the divine attributes in a leaf or a grain of sand? If they can, someone ought to explain how.

We have been talking about the Australian aborigines, the African savages, the contemporary American reprobates. This is a mere literary device to attract attention to the problem. But the problem is really worse. Instead of some primitive savages, can a devout and intelligent Christian obtain a knowledge of God from observed objects? Thomas tried his best to show how; but his arguments are all fallacies. Is there someone else who can produce a better argument? Put down at the top of a piece of paper, "I see filaments on this leaf." At the bottom of the paper write, "God is omnipotent," plus a few other attributes. Then fill in the missing intermediate lines. Unfortunately Calvin did not do so. Most unfortunately Calvin asserted some theses which are far from being obviously true. His comments on verse twenty-one, second paragraph, include the words "His justice is evident in his government of the world because he punishes the guilty and defends the innocent." Now, Calvin did not live to witness the massacre of the Huguenots in 1572, but he had seen earlier persecutions. As for ourselves, even if Hitler had to commit suicide, Stalin, who massacred many more than Hitler ever did, lived out his days unpunished. Mao murdered thirty or forty million Chinese and exterminated the Tibetans. Can we honestly say that God's justice is "*evident*"?

If these remarks have done any injustice to Calvin, and an injustice to Calvin is something the present writer would very definitely resent, what could better redress it but B.B. Warfield's *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (Calvin and Calvinism, Oxford University Press, 1931)*, and the following article *Calvin's Doctrine of God*, over 150 pages total, not all of which we can consider here. Calvin himself, being human, may have retained some unfortunate medievalisms, and Warfield, for the same reason, may possibly have misunderstood Calvin on this or that point, but it would be hard to find any theologian better than these two.

Warfield begins his first article by summarizing Calvin's position, to the effect that; the elements of Calvin's thought are an innate knowledge of God, developed by a manifestation of God in nature, which nevertheless fails of its proper effect because of sin, thus making necessary both a special written revelation and a subjective regeneration by the Holy Spirit. In a little more detail Warfield says that "The Knowledge of God is given in the very same act by which we know self" (p. 31). This is really misleading. True enough, Warfield notes that a knowledge of self requires as an ingredient a knowledge of our imperfection, and therefore a knowledge of superhuman perfection. This idea was more fully expressed by Descartes in his *Third Meditation*. But Warfield hesitates to say that the knowledge of God precedes the knowledge of self. Calvin says this more clearly. Warfield may have hesitated because he was more empirical and less favorable to a priori knowledge.

However, no doubt following Calvin, Warfield asserts that sin has "dulled" man's innate knowledge. How innate knowledge can be "dulled" (p. 32) is somewhat of a mystery. If it means that sin prevents one from deducing the correct conclusions from axioms, or causes us to make

mistakes in arithmetic, at least Warfield does not explain. Rather he immediately proceeds to the testimony of the Holy Ghost which convinces the sinner of the truth of the Bible. Hence the actual knowledge that sinners have, presumably derived from the created universe, without any soteric regeneration, remains unexplained.

Since, however, these two pages have been only a short summary, the next page renews our hope by the subtitle, "Natural Revelation." Warfield notes that Calvin in the *Institutes* (I. i. 3) makes the knowledge of God innate. Calvin calls it a "sense of Deity." Of course, Calvin does not mean a sensation. There are five senses, and seven if touch is really three. Calvin must have meant a concept or notion. Yet a vague concept of some sort of deity or other fits neither Calvin's other remarks nor Paul's phraseology in Romans. It must be a concept of eternal power, or a proposition that omnipotence controls the universe, plus an extensive set of propositions on all the attributes of God, including the idea of justice. As quoted above, Calvin had said that all the attributes are included in that divinity. This is surely more than a vague *sensus deitatis*. And if this "indelible" as Warfield and Calvin say, it must remain in men in their fallen estate.

Warfield adds a very interesting footnote: "That the knowledge of God is innate was the common property of the Reformed teachers . . . It was thrown into great prominence in the Socinian debate, as the Socinians contended that the human mind is natively a *tabula rasa* and all knowledge is acquired. But in defending the innate knowledge of God, the Reformed doctors were very careful that it should not be exaggerated [and Warfield quotes Riissen] 'Some recent writers explain the natural sense of deity (*numinis*) as an *idea of God* impressed on our minds. If this idea is understood as an innate *faculty* for knowing God after some fashion, it should not be denied; but if it expresses an *actual and adequate representation of God from our birth*, it is to be entirely rejected'" (pp. 34-35).

But perhaps it is Riissen's view that should be rejected. First, the words "after some fashion" give us that vacuity which neither Calvin nor Paul approves. Second, though it is not a point to be stressed, the term *representation* (Greek, *phantasia*) usually means a memory image. This is the meaning found in Aristotle, the Stoics, the later Middle Ages, and in Book II, chapter one, of Locke's *New Essays on human Understanding*. Hence, if this is the meaning, Riissen has misunderstood the view he opposes by making it an impossible psychological idolatry. For a memory image of God is impossible, and if it were possible, it would violate the second commandment. On the other hand, if he does not mean *image*, but means concept, he falls back into the previous vacuity. Third, Riissen seems to require a 'faculty psychology' for his objection. But even Kant did not call his a priori forms knowledge. Geometry itself was not knowledge. Hence if the Scripture speaks of knowledge, proof would be needed to show that it means empty forms. *Nooumena kathoratai* does not obviously suggest such empty forms or faculties for knowing God "after some fashion." This sort of language just leaves too many loose ends.

Then Warfield enters upon what I must consider a misinterpretation of chapter one of the *Institutes*. He asserts that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of oneself are the same act of knowledge and "are so interrelated that it is impossible to assign priority to either" (p. 35).

This is not what Calvin says. He does indeed say that the two are intimately connected, but he does not say they are one and the same act or that it is impossible to assign the priority to the one rather than to the other.

Calvin opens his *Institutes* with the Augustinian thesis that wisdom consists principally of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves. He calls these, not one, but two parts of wisdom or two branches of knowledge. He acknowledges that it is difficult to discover which is prior to the other. But he does not say that it is impossible. The difficulty of assigning priority lies in the fact that “our very existence is nothing but a subsistence in God alone.” He then quickly speaks of God’s blessings to mankind, but more at length of human sinfulness. With a reference to Adam’s fall, a sense of depravity and corruption, both made clearer by a contrast with the “divine array” of which he has been despoiled, the paragraph seems to describe a man who has been impressed with some proclamation of the Scripture, rather than one who has never heard of Adam and original righteousness. Yet Calvin indeed says that because of this knowledge, everyone, not merely those who have heard the gospel, must arrive at some knowledge of God.

Calvin, however, continues: “On the other hand, it is plain that no man can arrive at the true knowledge of himself without having *first* [ital. added] contemplated the divine character and *then* [ital. added] descended to the consideration of his own.” He indicates quite clearly that we cannot judge ourselves depraved unless we have a prior criterion of judgment. And he uses up half a page to show man’s falsely optimistic view of himself when he does not use such a criterion. Hence I conclude that Calvin definitely assigned priority to our knowledge of God.

In the third section of chapter one Calvin relapses into the soteric sphere, speaking of the judges and prophets, of Job and Abraham, of Elias and Isaiah. This shifting back and forth between natural and soteric knowledge makes it difficult for us to frame a precise statement on the former. In chapter two also the knowledge concerns, not merely “a notion that there is such a being but also an acquaintance with *whatever* [ital. added] we ought to know concerning him conducing to his glory and our benefit.” This phrase is broad enough to cover all of Scripture, plus the implications with which Warfield, and Hodge before him, filled their remarkable volumes. Yet Calvin rescinds this ample assertion by excluding knowledge of Christ the Redeemer and retaining only the knowledge Adam had before the fall. This latter may perhaps be the so-called natural knowledge; but we must remember that Adam before the fall also received special revelation, concerning tending the garden and not eating the fruit of one tree. Calvin’s intense interest in soteriology was not only commendable in his Reformation struggle, but is always of supreme importance. His shifting back and forth, however, makes it difficult, one must repeat, for an interpreter to find his precise view on so-called natural theology.

That Calvin had a natural theology is a point Warfield insists upon: “Calvin is exceedingly emphatic as to the clearness, universality, and convincingness of this natural revelation of God” (p. 40). “He even turns aside (I. v. 9) to express his special confidence in it, in contrast to *a priori* reasoning, as the ‘right way and best method of seeking God.’” Yet though Warfield obviously thinks that he is strengthening his point of view by stressing Calvin’s religious motivation as distinct from considerations of systematic theology, this “special interest in ... the vital knowledge of God” really obscures the argument from nature.

Warfield as a careful scholar and as an honest man quotes opposing views, if only to reject them. Of particular interest is the footnote on page 41. To enable the reader of the present study better to follow its line of thought, it may be stated here that this writer thinks those whom Warfield quotes have the best of the argument. Some justification of this assertion will follow the quotation.

“It is this distribution of Calvin’s interest which leads to the impression that he lays little stress on ‘the theistic proofs.’ On the contrary, he asserts their validity most strenuously: only he does not believe that any proofs can work true faith apart from ‘The testimony of the Spirit,’ and he is more interested in their value for developing the knowledge of God than for merely establishing his existence. Hence P. J. Muller is wrong when he denies the one to affirm the other, as, e.g., in his ‘De Godoleer van Zwingli en Calvin,’ 1883, p. 11: “Neither by Zwingli nor by Calvin are proofs offered for the existence of God, although some passages in their writings seem to contain suggestions of them. The proposition, ‘God exists,’ needed no proof either for themselves, or for their coreligionists, or even against Rome. The so-called cosmological argument has no doubt been found by some in Zwingli (Zeller, *Das theology. Syst. Zwingli’s* extracted from the *Theol. Jahrbucher*, Tubingen, 1853, p. 33; [or p. 126 in the *Th. Jahrb.*]), and the physico-theological in Calvin (Lipsius, *Lehrbuch der ev. prot. Dogmatik*, ed. 2, 1879, p. 213): but it would not be difficult to show that we have to do in neither case with a philosophical deduction, but only with a means for attaining the complete knowledge of God.” Though Calvin (also Zwingli) makes use of the theistic proofs to develop the knowledge of God, it does not follow that he (or Zwingli) did not value them as proofs of the existence of God. And we do not think Muller is successful (pp. 12 sq.) in explaining away the implication of the latter in Zwingli’s use of these theistic arguments, or in Calvin’s (p. 16). Schweizer, “Glaubenslehre der ev.-ref. Kirche,” 1844, i. p. 250, finds in Calvin’s citation of Cicero’s declaration that there is no nation so barbarous, no tribe so degraded, that it is not persuaded that a God exists, an appeal to the so-called *historical* argument for the divine existence (cf. the use of it by Zwingli, “Opera,” Schuler and Schultess ed., 1832, iii. p. 156); but Calvin’s real attitude to the theistic argument is rather to be sought in the implications of the notably eloquent ch. v.

The reader can judge for himself between Warfield and Muller only by reading for himself Book One, chapter five of the *Institutes* in full. Any condensation permits an initial charge of having omitted a crucial sentence; but there is space here only for a condensation. It is supposed to be a faithful summary of the pertinent sections.

I, v, 1. God hath not only sown in the minds of men the seed of religion, already mentioned, but hath manifested himself in the formation of every part of the world, and daily presents himself to public view, in such a manner, that they cannot open their eyes without being constrained to behold him. His majesty is not to be perceived by the human senses, but on all his works he hath inscribed his glory in characters so clear that the most stupid cannot exculpate themselves by the plea of ignorance. Withersoever you turn your eyes, there is not an atom in which you cannot behold some brilliant sparks, at least, of his glory. And here Calvin quotes Romans 1:20.

So far there has been no argument at all; and hence no valid argument as Warfield insisted upon. The several statements may be taken as conclusions, but there are no premises. Let us proceed.

I, v, 2. Of his wonderful wisdom, both heaven and earth contain innumerable proofs. Adepts are enabled to proceed much further in investigating the secrets of divine wisdom. Yet ignorance of those sciences prevents no man from such a survey of God's workmanship as is more than sufficient to excite his admiration of the divine Architect. Thus it belongs to a man of ingenuity to examine the human body with the critical exactness of Galen.

I, v, 3. But if, to attain some ideas of God, it be unnecessary for us to go beyond ourselves, what an unpardonable indolence is it in those who will not descend into themselves that they may find him. The human race is a clear mirror of the works of God.

Here it seems that Calvin had turned from astronomy and physiology to introspection. Can he construct a valid argument on this basis, if not on the other?

I, v, 4. With vile ingratitude men, who ought to be praising God for his wonderful skill, are only inflated with pride. They are constrained to know, willingly or not, that these works are proofs of God's divinity, yet they suppress this knowledge. They substitute nature in the place of God. But nature cannot explain how food and drink becomes flesh, hair, and bones.

In the twentieth century, this argument, if it is an argument, has been derided by scientists, and by devout Christians has been eschewed as making God 'The God of the gaps.' Many natural processes that could not be scientifically explained in Calvin's day have now been explained - at least as well as science can explain anything. In honor to Calvin, we would like to say that this is not intended as a valid argument. Rather these four sections enumerate *evidences* or *instances* of God's work and we would like to understand his word *proofs* in this sense. If the word *proof* be understood as a valid argument, according to Warfield, then the force of the argument diminishes with every scientific advance. Calvin surely did not think that the force of whatever-you-call-it could diminish.

There is no good reason to summarize all fifteen sections of chapter five; but because of Warfield's emphasis on it, we shall add section five and stop.

I, v, 5. Calvin begins by denouncing Aristotle's definition of the soul as the form of the organic body on the ground that this definition is behavioristic and precludes immortality. So little is Calvin behavioristic that he refuses to admit corporeal cooperation in the soul's study of astronomy. The nature of the soul thus becomes the basis for acknowledging its Creator. Experience abundantly teaches that all we have is variously distributed to us by some superior Being. I confess indeed, Calvin says, that the expression 'nature is God' may be used in a pious sense: but as it is inconsistent with strict propriety, nature being rather an order prescribed by God, it is dangerous to confound Deity with the inferior course of his works.

Then after further description of human depravity, Calvin in chapter six continues with the knowledge of God obtained from the Scriptures.

At the risk of prolixity and repetition, but in the interest of fairness and some completeness, one may refer briefly to Warfield's second article, *Calvin's Doctrine of God* (*ibid.* 133-185).

Warfield begins by pointing out, and on this he surely made no mistake, that "Calvin is not writing out of an abstract scientific impulse, but with the needs of souls ... his method is literary

rather than scholastic” (p. 133). Nevertheless “under the form of pointing out the complete harmony with the revelation of God in nature of the revelation of God in the Scriptures ... he reminds his readers of all that he had formerly said of the nature and attributes of God on the basis of natural revelation.”

Hence we may expect Calvin and Warfield to talk about a knowledge of God present in men who are totally ignorant of the Scriptures.

These two quotations from the same page unfortunately initiate a confusion. Warfield repeatedly stresses the great practicality of Calvin’s interest and method. He wishes to refute “an impression abroad that Calvin’s nature was at bottom cold and hard and dry, and his life-manifestation but a piece of incarnated logic ... ‘In that oratorical work which he called *The Institutes*’ M. Bruntiere says ‘if there is any movement ... it is not one which comes from the heart’ ... and ... the insensibility of Calvin is equaled only by the rigor of his reasoning” (pp. 135-136).

To refute this wide-spread view expressed here by M. Bruntiere, Warfield asserts that Calvin’s faith “is a matter not of the understanding but of the heart and he reproaches the Romish conception of faith precisely because it magnifies the intellectual side to the neglect of the fiducial.” And he quotes Calvin, “Faith is not a naked knowledge which floats in the brain ... For if the Word of God floats in the head only, it has not yet been received by faith; it has its true reception only when it has taken root in the depths of the heart. (p. 138).

Calvin uses this phraseology several times. In the *Institutes* III ii 8 he says, “The assent we give to God ... is rather of the heart than of the brain.”

Now, this surely refutes Bruntiere and much common opinion. But it may be that Calvin’s ‘literary’ rather than ‘scientific’ method has led him or us into difficulty.

In the first place the quoted material misrepresents the Roman Catholic position. It simply is not true that Romanism ignores the ‘fiducial’ aspect of faith. The Roman Catholic Encyclopedia states explicitly that faith is “fiducial assent.”

But there is a worse error in Calvin’s language, if not in his thought. First, his reference to knowledge floating in the brain, taken at face value, would make Calvin a behavioristic disciple of Aristotle if not B. F. Skinner. Now, no one suspects Calvin of behaviorism. Hence some metaphorical meaning must be attached to his words. Though still behavioristic it is less explicit when the *head*, rather than the *brain*, is contrasted with the *heart*.

This is a most unfortunate mistake, no matter who makes it. It is a mistake because it directly contradicts Scripture. Assuming that *head* means *intellect*, and that *heart* means something different (for what else could the contrast be), the theologian comes into conflict with both the Old Testament and the New Testament. For example, Mark 2: 6, 7, 8; Luke 3: 15 and 5: 22 have the phrase *dialogizomenoi en tais kardias*. *Dialogizomai* means to argue, to debate, to reason. Reasoning is an intellectual exercise. But it is the *heart* that does the reasoning. Heart and intellect are not contrasted but are indistinguishable. In the Old Testament there is a frequent contrast between heart and lips; but none between heart and mind. Psalm 49:3 says, “My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding.” Meditation surely is thinking: wisdom and understanding are certainly intellectual; and this is asserted to be

the activity of the heart. Not all thinking is wise or correct thinking. “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.” Incorrect as this is, it is still thinking; and it is the heart that thinks. I Samuel 2:35 identifies heart and mind. These few verses are not the best known verses in the Bible; but perhaps that gives them added force. There are many others better known.¹

For this reason any argument that fails to equate the heart and the mind or intellect and makes the heart the emotions or something else unspecified is a misinterpretation of Scripture. Such articles or volumes may contain many truths, but taken in their entirety they are a confusion.

There is now another difficulty in the idea; the completely true idea, that Calvin wrote with the needs of souls in mind rather than from any abstract scientific impulse. The difficulty is this: Warfield and presumably Calvin wish to point out the “complete harmony” between “the revelation of God in nature” and the Scriptural revelation. Calvin “reminds his readers of all he had formerly said about the nature and attributes of God on the basis of natural revelation.” This suggests that there is an extensive revelation in nature, and that Calvin, however ‘practical’ in his ultimate aims, nevertheless engaged in some abstract scientific speculation. We must therefore ask, What are the details of this extra-biblical or natural theology, and how are they derived from an observation of plants and planets?

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1. Cf. Religion, Reason, and Revelation, G.H. Clark, pp. 92, 93, and the subsequent discussion.

Unfortunately it is doubtful that Warfield or Calvin ever answered these two questions. The many passages that Warfield adduces to show Calvin’s overriding religious interest - though perhaps *religious* is not the most appropriate adjective to use here - enforce this doubt. In addition to the footnote on P. J. Muller’s contrast between Calvin and Zwingli, the latter being more “coherent” and less “religious,” Warfield for himself quotes Calvin as insisting that “the knowledge of nature and attributes of God [are] more a matter of the heart than of the understanding; and such a knowledge ... must also awake in us the hope of a future life” (I. v. 10).

This separation of the heart from the understanding is, as we have seen, unbiblical. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the argument is based on a false disjunction. But what first concerns us is Calvin’s lack of clarity - in one who is regularly extremely clear - in distinguishing what can be learned from nature alone and the more inclusive Scriptural revelation. How can one say that the two harmonize unless the data from the first source are distinctly enumerated?

Warfield, approving of “the throbbing of his [Calvin’s] heart,” notes that “Calvin was able to leave the great topic of the existence, the nature, and the attributes of God, without detailed discussion in his *Institutes*” (p. 142). Not that Calvin is silent on these subjects, but his treatment

of them is unsystematic. We do not read far into the *Institutes* before we find Calvin presenting proof of the existence of God” (p. 143). And here Warfield again adds a footnote on P. J. Muller. Now, after reading Calvin, and comparing him with Anselm on the one side and Thomas on the other, one must concede that Muller is correct. Even Warfield immediately admits that “this book [the *Institutes*], being written by a Christian for Christians, rather *assumes* [ital. added] the divine existence than undertakes to prove it.”

Thus, though the judgment sounds harsh, one must conclude that Warfield is inconsistent and confused.

Everyone is free to draw his own conclusions relative to Warfield, Calvin, and the verse in Romans. But presumably a study like this one is obliged to draw conclusions. The conclusion on Warfield has been given: the conclusion on Calvin is that because of his figurative language and his immediate religious motivation, it is difficult to know his precise view, except that he gives no valid proof of either the existence or the attributes of God.

As for Romans, the verb *kathoratai* does not have to mean “clearly seen.” According to Liddell and Scott this is a rather rare meaning. Arndt and Gingrich do not even mention this meaning. Therefore, it is better taken as ordinary perception, even superficial perception. Similarly *nooumena* can mean *consider* or *take note of*, instead of a thorough understanding.

These weaker meanings make better sense than an exegesis that requires a valid cosmological argument.

In conformity with this, one may note that nobody can recognize a flower as God’s handiwork, unless he has a prior knowledge of God. As Calvin said, the knowledge of God is the first knowledge a person has. It is innate; not derived from experience.

Hence the passage in Romans should be taken as similar to those phrases in the Psalms, such as, the heavens declare the glory of God. There is no valid argument. Only his works are visible.

Ludwig Richter was an artist who produced some excellent nostalgic woodcuts of an earlier Germany. Most of them have a few lines of poetry to express the idea. After the printed title page there is a picture of a child, a dog, some cherubs, some birds, and a vine. Under which we read

In allen Blümlein wird verspürt
Dessen Schönheit der sie ziert.

Translation spoils poetry, but it would have to go something like this

In every flowerlet he adorns
His beauty shines e’en in their thorns.