

*[This is a review written by Gordon H. Clark of the book General Revelation by Bruce A. Demarest. It was found among Dr. Clark's papers at the Sangre de Cristo Seminary. - DJD 23 Nov 2014]*

Sent to Reformation Press

Bruce A. Demarest, General Revelation.

Zondervan 1982, pp. 301.

Chapter one is a powerful and detailed description of the contemporary world-wide attack on Christianity. Although it makes no mention of the moral perversion prevalent in the USA, reading it would shake those who sit at ease in Zion out of their ignorant complacency. Chapters IX, I, XI document some of this in a more technical and less forceful style. The volume is accurately described in the sub-title: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues.

Chapter two therefore discusses Classical Catholic Positions, chiefly Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. To a professor of philosophy it is almost ludicrous to summarize the views of all three of these men in less than twenty pages, but most readers will not be philosophers. Fortunately too the author includes some basic views of his own. To quote: "Persuaded of the correctness of the apriori scheme of Augustine, we propose [that] ... man, made in the image of God and enabled by common grace, affably intuits ... eternal changeless principles, including the existence, character, and moral demands of God" (p. 22). This is a forthright rejection of empiricism and it delights the mind of an Augustinian. But one must wait to note whether or not the author compromises his apriorism by some inconsistent evaluation of Aquinas.

To arrive at Aquinas, the author states, "Anselm thus represents a transitional link between the faith perspective of Augustine and the rationalism ... championed by Aquinas ..." (p. 31). The reviewer thinks that this is not precisely the case because (1) Anselm's views are further removed from those of Aquinas than Augustine's are; and (2) though Anselm's views can properly be called rationalism, Aquinas was one hundred percent empirical. It is strange that the author makes Anselm such a connecting link, for on the following pages he correctly reports that Anselm tried to demonstrate the

doctrine of the Atonement without any appeal to Scripture – something Aquinas adamantly refused to do.

One must also wonder why the author says that Aristotle, without appeal to Scripture of course, defended the doctrine of God's providential care on purely natural grounds. Aristotle actually denied that God had any knowledge at all of this lower world (cf. *Metaphysics*, Book Lambda).

Nonetheless Demarest's rejection of Aristotle's and Aquinas' empiricism (pp. 38, 39) should be commended. But how fallacious syllogisms “are not entirely wanting in value” is quite insufficiently explained. No fallacy can be a reliable pointer to God or to anything else.

The third chapter discusses the Reformation, and the author forcefully describes Luther's rejection of Aristotle and empiricism in favor of Augustinianism. Would that later Lutherans had followed Luther instead of Melancthon's return to Aristotle! Would that some non-Lutheran evangelicals might do the same!

The following section on Calvin is equally good, although it seems that the author fails to note the full force of *The Institutes* first chapter in making God the first object of human knowledge. This failure, in the reviewer's opinion is a disturbingly common one. Even so, this author is better than most, for he strongly asserts the innate knowledge of man as the image of God. Let it be clear that man can know himself only after he has known God. A reader must evaluate, on his own, the last two pages of this excellent chapter.

Chapter Four presents the Puritan position, or at least a part of it. Because of the abysmal ignorance of Puritanism among today's evangelicals, any half-intelligent Christian could wish that this chapter might be widely read. These evangelicals may personally be Christians, but they have little knowledge of what Christianity is. Let them learn that the truly Biblical “Puritans knew nothing of the separation of heart and head preached in some sectors of contemporary conservative religion.” (p. 62).

Unfortunately the chapter is short and moreover dwells on Puritanism's more questionable positions. Their views of causality, essential to the cosmological argument, are faulty; and their attempt to defend the doctrine of Providence on the basis of history takes no account of Stalin and Hitler, the PLO, or even of St. Bartholomew's eve, let alone Roman slavery and the Assyrians banners of silver

and gold. Even an argument of probability must include the unfavorable cases as well as the favorable. Can a merciful Providence be defended on the basis of Mao's massacre of thirty million Chinese and some seven or eight million Tibetans? The method is wrong; the arguments are fallacious. If "camels have a large water storage capacity for survival in desert conditions" (p. 67), why were men not equally blest especially in the desert campaign against Rommel? Divest the Puritans of their absurd philosophy, and there remains an astounding excellence in theology.

Chapter Five in fifteen pages outlines the views of Descartes, the English Deists, Voltaire, Rousseau, Wolff, and Lessing. Less inadequate is chapter six with twenty-two pages on Schleiermacher, (a very fine statement for four pages), Ritschl, Herrmann, Troeltsch, and Otto. Such short characterizations, while they pain the aging scholar, are really essential for young students and non-academic adults. After such an introduction the person who has a taste for it can read James Orr's volume on The Ritschlian Theology and Brandt's larger volume on Schleiermacher, though I judge that a detailed knowledge of Ritschl is insufficiently pertinent to contemporary conditions. Schleiermacher remains influential still.

In chapter seven the author stresses Brunner's acceptance of some natural theology as opposed to Barth's violent rejection of it. But the account is disturbing because it nowhere gives a hint of Brunner's denial of inerrancy, or of his statement that faith curbs logic so that a valid inference from Scripture might be false, and even the more extreme statement that God and the medium of conceptuality are mutually exclusive. Although the author offers some slight alleviation of this omission in the case of Barth, yet it is not enough to make his classification of contemporary theologians, on pages 59 and 244, pleasing to everyone in those lists.

Chapter eight begins with an all too brief but excellent account of Abraham Kuyper. Two sentences, in particular the second, give the basic idea: "It is absurd to suggest that the natural knowledge of God without enrichment by the special, could ever effect a satisfying result. ... The crucial point in Kuyper's theology is that fallen man can perceive God's general revelation only through the superadded light of special revelation." (p. 137). The reviewer commends the author for his very accurate resume of Kuyper's main position, but deplores his rejection of it. I acknowledge the author's strictures on "persuasive definitions," but his argument that Kuyper cannot explain human guilt can, I believe, be satisfactorily answered. Also the author does not seem to realize that while man sees the stars of heaven with perfect clarity, he cannot deduce the proposition that God created them. Only after

a man has some knowledge of God can he interpret the nightly display as a work of a supernatural creator.

The author next continues with Berkhouwer, but neglects to inform his readers that Berkhouwer rejects the inerrancy of Scripture. Since then he does not restrict himself, under the title of Reformed Approaches, to Bible-believing Christians, and since he next discusses Cornelius Van Til, one wonders why he omitted Dooyeweerd of whom Van Til claimed to be a disciple.

Going on then to Van Til the author repeatedly appeals to Romans 1:20 as an unanswerable objection to all presuppositionalism. But though he says that men get some understanding of God from viewing the stars quite apart from Scripture, he never shows how this can occur. The best attempt was that of the Aristotelian Aquinas. Most modern non-Lutheran Protestants refuse to make the attempt. And if any does, he is not likely to improve on Thomas.

If anyone wishes to object to Van Til, it would be better to show, not that he allows the unregenerate no knowledge at all, but rather to show that he denies the regenerate mind any knowledge at all. Van Til's words are, "the knowledge God has and the knowledge possible to man do not coincide at any single point." Hence since God knows all truth, man knows nothing.

After discussing Toynbee, Vatican I and II, and indigenous African Theology, the author draws his own conclusions in Chapter XII. On his first page he uses Gen. 1:31 to defend a natural knowledge of God which man is supposed to have obtained by viewing the stars. But the verse asserts nothing of the sort. Granted, he immediately appeals to the verbal revelation of Gen. 2-3, but this in no way helps his argument.

Under the following subhead, Intuition Knowledge of God (p. 228), where he seems to use some of the "persuasive" language he defined on p. 140, the author in his clear reference to the Logos, and in his explicit rejection of empiricism (p. 229) seems to this reviewer to remove all reason for his high evaluation of sensory experience and any invalid inference based upon it. Taken by themselves which better could be said than "the mind's intuitive consciousness of God logically precedes and ground all reasoning about God from the observable world. For unless the term God is invested with meaning through the religious apriori, all God-talk is not only meaningless, but impossible." (p. 229)

And in spite of his previous misuse of causation (as I interpret him) he adds “unless man acknowledges God in and of Himself [capital H] in his [lower case] mind, all predication about God on the basis of causation or order lacks significations.” Perhaps he and I differ as to the meaning of the terms “religious apriori” and “effable intuition,” but the quotations just given and their context seem to me to suppose the presuppositionalism he elsewhere rejects.

But then he returns to the invalid cosmological theme. “no person of sound mind can behold the size, energy, heat, and luminosity of the sun without being reminded of the great Creator-God” (p. 236). But, first, here we have the “persuasive” words sound mind. If we point to someone whom astronomy does not remind of God, the author can reply, 'but he is not of sound mind.' It was not the sun but Halley's comet that I saw in 1912. I remember distinctly what I thought: Haley's comet will return in 1984 – I'll have to live to age 82 to see it again. Now, Victor Hugo when “J'étais seul près des flots, par une nuit d'étoiles. Pas un nuage aux cieux, sur les mers pas de voiles” thought of le Seigneur Dieu. But not many people are Victor Hugo. If the author means that every man thinks of God when he sees the heat, the energy, and the luminosity of the sun, a single atheistic astronomer refutes his assertion. Do all who study the sun on Kitt Peak believe in God?

The author's attempt (p. 239) to distinguish between two kinds of Theotes, and between essence and qualities, indicates the need of an alternate exegesis and a more precise theology. The challenge is thus: If “by reflecting on the visible data of the cosmos man rationally infers further feature of God's character” (p. 240), then this rational inference should be written out in a series of valid syllogisms. Aquinas tried it and failed. Even the author in the very next paragraph admits that there is no “strictly ... logical deduction,” and adds that “the existence of God needs no proof.” Then he returns to his previous idea that “the arguments for God's existence ... undoubtedly are useful apologetic tools by which a rationaly significant case for Biblical theism can be advanced.”

The author stresses such empirical knowledge by repeating, several times, “What may be known of God is manifest in them.” But obviously men may know that God justifies his elect by means of faith. Yes the Romans and many of today's scientists do not know it. The author tries to evade this rebuttal by adopting Godet's alteration of Paul's text: “What can be known of God without the help of extraordinary revelation.” But this is Godet, not Paul.

No wonder that the author lists me (p. 244) with Kuyper and Van Til, but I judge that the other

two, as well as I, are not particularly happy to be listed with others who do not believe the Bible. Or, more accurately, we do not care to have them listed with us.