

## ABSTRACT

B. J. van der Walt: *Natural Theology with special reference to the viewpoint of Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin and the "Synopsis Purioris Theologiae"* — A philosophical investigation. D.Phil dissertation, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1974 (2 volumes, 917 pages, summaries in Afrikaans, English, German and French).

### Chapter I

Chapter I is an introduction in which the problem is stated first; attention is drawn to its actuality; the defects in the present state of research are indicated; the structure of the study is explained; the character of the investigation is determined; the method of investigation and the author's own philosophical presuppositions are briefly stated.

The study intends being an investigation into the philosophical *presupposita* of Natural Theology amongst Christian thinkers (up to  $\pm$  1800). The research to uncover the philosophical roots of this discipline will at the same time be systematic, historical and critical in character.

It intends being systematic in the sense that it aims to discover certain underlying philosophical problems closely connected with the issue of Natural or Philosophical Theology. The following basic problems, closely connected with the central issue of Natural Theology, are important: a specific view about the relation between God, law and cosmos; the acceptance of a sphere of nature and super-nature (grace); a specific idea about the relationship between God and man in which the interpretation of man as the image of God plays an important rôle as a point of contact; a certain point of view with regard to the relation between the revelation in the Word of God and in nature; some presuppositions about the relation between reason and faith and in accordance with that, between Philosophy and Theology, as well as a certain apologetic tendency.

The purpose is to trace these themes in their relation to *theologia naturalis* in the course of history, i.e. to show why and how they originated and developed.

The description of philosophical conceptions accomplished in this way according to the Consistent Problem Historic Method at the same time implies criticism. This critique is not immanent nor transcendent or transcendental, but a radical rootcriticism in the light of the Word of God.

In order to make our interpretation of the different works to be analysed in this study comprehensible, the last part of the first chapter is devoted to an exposition of the writer's own philosophical presuppositions. The second part of the last chapter (VI) offers an extensive elaboration of the cursory, preliminary treatment of

the various issues dealt with in this latter part of the first chapter.

The outline then of the whole study is the following. At the beginning (Chapter I) the own viewpoint regarding Natural Theology is briefly stated. This is followed by the history of this discipline with the intention of discovering its philosophical roots (Chapter II to V). Enriched with this systematic-historical insight into the problem, the study is concluded (in Chapter VI) when the whole issue is discussed in detail in the light of a radical biblically-obedient philosophy.

Chapter I states *why* the phenomenon of Natural Theology is a problematic one worthy of closer examination; Chapter II—V show *how* this problem appeared in the course of the history of Christian thought; Chapter VI contains a final consideration of *what* the solution of this problem might be.

## Chapter II

The roots of philosophical Theology in Greek philosophy is traced in the conceptions of the following: the Pre-Platonic thinkers ( $\pm$  600 —  $\pm$  400 B.C.), Plato (427—347 B.C.), Aristotle (384—322 B.C.) and the Stoic philosophers ( $\pm$  300 B.C. —  $\pm$  200 A.D.).

The birth of Natural Theology amongst the early Christian thinkers is discussed with reference to Philo of Alexandria ( $\pm$  25 B.C. —  $\pm$  40 A.D.), Justin the Martyr ( $\pm$  110—165 A.D.), Clement of Alexandria (died 212 A.D.), Origen (182—233 A.D.), Tertullian (345—430 A.D.) and Dionysios the Pseudo-Areopagite ( $\pm$  500 A.D.).

The further development is traced during the Middle Ages the systems of John Scotus Eriugena ( $\pm$  810 —  $\pm$  877), Anselm of Canterbury (1033—1109) and Peter Abelard (1079—1142).

In this historical survey different themes closely related to *theologia naturalis*, forming the basis of its existence, is studied.

In Greek and Roman thought the distinction between a *triplex theologiae* originated. Of the three theologies, the *theologia civilis* or *politica*, *mythica* or *fabulosa* and *physica* or *naturalis*, the latter was the ancient predecessor of *theologia naturalis* amongst Christians. A second important result of research in ancient philosophy was that it became evident that certain ideas about the law was an important constituent forming the basic of allegorical exegesis and that an apologetic tendency accompanied this kind of science right from its start: the Greeks already defended themselves against atheism with the help of Philosophical Theology.

Early Christian thought is characterized by the struggle to attain a compromise between pagan Greek and Roman philosophies on the one hand and biblical revelation on the other. The different attitudes and solutions of Apologists and Church Fathers are discussed. The dilemma in which these people found themselves gave birth to the theory of nature and supernature — a most important prerequisite for the distinction later on between *theologia naturalis* and *theologia super naturalis*. Also in their conception of the law pagan philosophies penetrated with the result that the Apologists and *patres ecclesiae* could not maintain — as the Bible do — the radical distinction between God and his creation. Their ideas of the law as

*logoi spermatikoi* relativised the difference between God and creatures and paved the way for a kind of *theologia* of which the aim was to prove in a rational way from the visible world, the existence of God.

During the period of Mediaeval Thought three problems of vital importance are investigated in terms of their origin and consequences for our subject. First the problem of the relation between faith and reason. Different points of view on this problem imply different attitudes towards Natural Theology. This is illustrated in the case of different Mediaeval thinkers. Secondly it is indicated how the distinction between sacred and profane already existed in primitive Greek thought, how it was accepted by the early Christians and modified to the two-realm theory of nature and grace and what its significance is for our subject. Thirdly the complex problem of *universalia* is unravelled and the implications of the different points of view regarding this problem for Natural Theology are indicated. The various conceptions of law in so-called realism, moderate realism and nominalism make the existence of Natural Theology either possible or impossible.

In a retrospect on the results of this chapter the following were the most relevant to the problem of Natural Theology: the synthetic mind of the early Christians especially acquired by way of allegorical exegesis of the Bible; conceptions of the law which served as a "bridge" between God and creation; the nature-grace theme; the reason-faith dilemma and the relationship conceived between philosophy and theology.

### Chapter III

Chapters III, IV and V give a detailed analysis of three different works of which we tried first to ascertain the basic framework or philosophical groundwork in order to decide, in the second place, what the influence of these philosophical presuppositions were on the different authors' attitude towards Natural Theology.

In Chapter III *theologia naturalis* in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1258/1259—1263/1264) of Thomas Aquinas, the real architect of Natural Theology, is discussed. His philosophical conception in this book is described according to the Consistent Problem-Historic Method as purely cosmological, dualistic, partial universalistic without macro-micro-cosmos theory (hulemorphism). He accepts the existence of the law *ante rem* (in God's mind), *in rebus* (in the created universe) and *post rem* (in the human mind). He adheres to a dichotomistic anthropology to be qualified as a Platonizing form of the subsistence theory. These ontological and anthropological *presupposita* determine his idea of man as *image Dei*. Furthermore Aquinas is a proponent of the two-realm theory of nature and grace. In his theory of knowledge he held an inconsistent empirism: apart from knowledge of visible reality (nature) attained by reason through the senses, faith acquires knowledge of the supernatural (grace). The knowledge reason has of the cosmos is called Philosophy and the knowledge faith obtains through revelation is called Supernatural Theology. Natural Theology has a position in between Philosophy and Super-

natural Theology. It also operates through reason directed at the visible cosmos but its aim is not knowledge of the cosmos as such, but to obtain knowledge of God and prove his existence *via* his creatures. This is possible because of Aquina's idea of law: God implanted his essences also in the created beings and from these traces one can conclude back to the existence of the Creator.

Knowledge of the philosophical presuppositions of the *doctor angelicus'* *Contra Gentiles* facilitates our exposition of his attitude towards Natural Theology which is given in the second part of this chapter. Critical remarks are not withheld.

## Chapter IV

The introductory part of this Chapter is devoted to a background sketch comprising the following: the place of the Reformation in Western thought; the most important philosophical currents during this period; the motivation for concentrating on Calvin's *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, and a brief exposition of Luther's and Zwingli's points of view regarding natural knowledge of God.

In the first action dealing with Calvin the philosophical presuppositions of his thought in the *Institutes* are distilled from their more or less theological context with the following result. Calvin's biblical insight of the absolute sovereignty of God was a really start. Also the fact that he did not think purely cosmologically opened the way to begin directly with knowledge about God. It was not necessary for him to introduce God through the back-door with the help of some or other kind of Natural Theology.

These biblical insights are, however, darkened because of his dualistic ontology; his dichotomistic (spiritualistic, semi-materialistic) anthropology; his acceptance of a partial universalism with a modified type of macro-micro-cosmos theory; his application (though not consistently) of the two-realm theory and his conception about the law. Especially his idea of *lex naturalis* betrays the definite influence of both Stoicism and Neo-Platonism. Furthermore Calvin, to a certain extent, still operates with the Augustinian *credo ut intelligam* and the traces of a Platonic theory of knowledge is clearly detectable.

In spite of the evidence of all these non-biblical affects on his thought which could open the way toward a Natural Theology, the conclusion of the second part of this chapter is that Calvin's *cognitio Dei Creatoris* does not imply a Natural Theology. Why Calvin was withheld from a *theologia naturalis* in the Thomistic sense is explained.

## Chapter V

This Chapter deals with Natural Theology in the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (1624) written by J. Polyander, A. Rivetus, A. Walaeus and A. Thysius, professors at the University of Leyden. The introductory section of this chapter provides firstly some information about P. Melancthon and T. Beza, transitory figures between Refor-

mation and Post-Reformation and secondly it gives a brief characterization of Protestant Orthodoxy during the seventeenth century.

As in the case of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Institutio Christianae Religionis* the philosophical basis of the *Synopsis* is traced first, followed by an exposition of its attitude towards Natural Theology.

The philosophical position of the *Synopsis* can be summarized as follows: purely cosmological, dualistic, partial universalistic without macro-micro-cosmos theory (hulemorphism). The law exists *ante*, *in* and *post rem* resulting in similarity in essence as well as in being (*analogia entis*) between God and creatures providing in this way a philosophical basis to Natural Theology. The anthropology of the *Synopsis* is dichotomistic, its theory of knowledge closely resembles that of Aquinas but also reveals kinship to that of the *Institutes*.

Regarding its attitude towards Natural Theology there is a greater congeniality between the *Synopsis* and the *Contra Gentiles* than between the *Synopsis* and the *Institutes*.

## Chapter VI

The final Chapter first gives a recapitulation by way of comparison of the philosophical presuppositions of the *Contra Gentiles*, *Institutes* and *Synopsis*. Attention is drawn to both similarities and differences revealing a remarkable affinity between the *Contra Gentiles* and the *Synopsis*. In spite of some striking points of agreement the *Institutes* reveals a different philosophical approach.

The second part of this chapter contains a final critical confrontation with the different ontological, anthropological and gnoseological problems which, when solved incorrectly, may necessitate a Natural Theology. This concluding perspective comprises an effort towards a more radical biblical philosophy. The following problems are dealt with: the relationship between God, law and cosmos; man as the image of God; Theory of Knowledge; Philosophy of Science with special attention to the relationship between Philosophy and Theology. In each of these instances the own point of view is contrasted with that of the *Contra Gentiles*, *Institutes* and *Synopsis*. It becomes evident that consistent radical biblical philosophizing is not only capable of solving many age-old problems, but it also offers illuminating new perspectives.

The conclusion regarding Natural Theology is that it was the result of a synthetic mind and consequently unbiblical Ontology, Anthropology, Theory of Knowledge and Philosophy of Science amongst Christians. Apart from the fact that the history of Western thought already proved its failure, such a discipline is not required or welcome in a truly scripturally directed scientific endeavour. Natural Theology is not only haunted with many dilemmas but it can be a very dangerous enterprise to the biblically-obedient Christian.