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The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology, Michael Sudduth (Ashgate 2009) xi + 238 pp, ISBN 978-0754661757, £55 hbk

This book's title does not prepare the reader for its correct and devastating conclusion: that the alleged 'Reformed objection to natural theology' is a mere fabrication of twentieth-century philosophy of religion. Sudduth shows how Reformed natural theology has emerged partly from Scripture, especially the Pauline understanding of divine power and nature being viewed via their effects (Rom. 1.19-20). This text was important for Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, Melancthon, Bullinger and Calvin. Other key sources include Job 5, 9 and 12, Psalms 19, 104 and 135, and Acts 14 and 17. Also employed was Cicero's now largely forgotten treatise *The Nature of the Gods*.

The difficulty in situating natural theology within Reformed theology is due partly to misunderstandings of its function. Far from delivering 'proofs' in the word's modern sense of self-grounding rational arguments, natural theology was viewed typically as testing faith and making possible a reasoned account of it, as suggested by the Latin *probare*. It did not generate knowledge *about* God but articulated knowledge *of* God. Moreover, different types of argument—cosmological, design, teleological, ontological—were regarded as making their impact cumulatively. For example, a design argument might show God to be the maker of the universe, but a cosmological argument would be required to demonstrate that God created the universe out of nothing, perhaps even followed by an ontological account to exclude polytheism.

Key to Sudduth's discussion is the distinction between an innate knowledge of God implanted naturally and a knowledge of God acquired by argument or observation. Reflecting on Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*, Sudduth shows how sin's noetic effects might be presumed to destroy any possibility of the latter. In fact, he demonstrates that even supposing a strong doctrine of human depravity, a 'natural theology of the regenerate' is present in Calvin, being 'made efficacious by the work of the Holy Spirit' (pp. 140–7). Sin does not render our epistemic faculties permanently impotent. On the contrary, inferential reasoning may augment, refine or confirm an immediate natural knowledge of God, thereby insulating such knowledge from attacks launched by persons whose reason is unregenerate.

That natural theology has crucial and inalienable functions in impelling and preserving faith is even allowed, Sudduth argues, by John Baillie as well as more explicitly in the later work of Alvin Plantinga. From where has the misleading notion that the Reformed tradition is necessarily hostile to natural theology therefore come? Primarily, it seems, from attacks by earlier twentieth-century Dutch 'Calvinists' (in the modern, equivocal sense of that term) against the straw men conveniently provided by contemporary Neo-Thomism. Sadly, such distortions continue to diminish faith and mission in many churches. This excellent, historically attentive study, which is about the Reformed *endorsement* of natural theology, corrects a widespread myth and should be read by anyone concerned that appreciation of the role of reason in bringing people to faith and maintaining them in faith be revived.

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