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A Reformed Evangelical Affirmation to Natural Theology

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ABSTRACT
Does Reformed theology necessarily imply vehement objections to natural theology? Do the Reformed Christians need to despise the natural theology at all? This article argues that "the book of nature" will establish the historical-theological foundation for appreciating the general revelation in the creation and affirming natural theology. In order to get the argument, it will summarize the historical overview of *liber naturae* in Christianity and the Reformed tradition. Subsequently, the Reformed Evangelical perspective is a tool of theological arguments in responding to the objections to natural theology. Following the Reformed theology and Evangelicalism, the book of nature should be read in the spectacles of the Holy Scripture. Natural theology is also affirmed as a preparatory step in the gospel proclamation.
Keywords: natural theology, the book of nature, creation, Reformed Evangelical, noetic effects of sin.

Introduction

The first sentence of the Apostle's Creed ("*I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth*") demonstrates how Christian faith relies on God as the Creator who created the cosmos and sustained its existence by his omnipotent providence.[1] Correspondingly, the triune God discloses himself in two ways, namely general and special revelation. In general revelation, God revealed himself—his existence, attributes, and moral law—in accessible-universal ways for all human beings. It is through the magnificent creation, the governance of history directed according to his unthwarted plan, and the implanted sense of divinity and testimony of conscience within every human being.[2] In other words, nature tells us something about God, who exists and writes his self-revelation through the creation as "the book of nature."

However, the divine revelation in nature—from which natural theology draws its reflection, elaboration, and advanced works—has been ignored or despised.[3] The most vehement objections against natural theology have been stigmatized to the Reformed theologians and thinkers, such as Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Karl Barth, Cornelius Van Til, Alvin Plantinga, and Nicholas Wolterstorff.[4] For example, Barth unhesitantly said "Nein!" to the general revelation for the sake of the Christocentric special revelation.[5] Alvin Plantinga even recapitulated that "the Reformed attitude has ranged from *indifference*, through *suspicion and hostility*, to *outright accusations of blasphemy*."[6] After explanations on

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1 See Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1169. Cf. the Belgic confession Articles 12–13 and the Heidelberg Catechism Question 27; Herman Bavinck, *God and Creation*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 406, 604–6 (hereafter: *RD*). Concerning the Genesis creation account, Luther explains, "When we look upon the creatures, we should think: look, there is God, for all creatures are continuously driven and maintained in their existence and actions through the word [of God]" (as cited in Kathleen Crowther, "The Lutheran Book of Nature," in *The Book of Nature and Humanity in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hawkes and Richard G. Newhauser, vol. 29 [Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013], 23). For Calvin, the creation would immediately fall into chaos without God's continual providence (see Eric Jorink, *Reading the Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age, 1575-1715*, trans. Peter Mason [Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010], 45).

2 See Ximian Xu, "Herman Bavinck's 'Yes' and Karl Barth's 'No': Constructing a Dialectic-In-Organic Approach to the Theology of General Revelation," *Modern Theology* 35, no. 2 (April 2019): 1, https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12469; John Bolt, "Getting the 'two Books' Straight: With a Little Help from Herman Bavinck and John Calvin," *Calvin Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (November 2011), 316; David VanDrunen, "'The Kingship of Christ Is Twofold': Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms in the Thought of Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 155; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 122.

3 In general, the deinition of natural theology is the project to develop and establish rational arguments for the existence and nature of God on philosophical grounds instead of on the holy Scripture (see Alvin Plantinga, "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology," in *Philosophical Knowledge*, vol. 54 [Presented at the Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Philosophy Documentation Center, 1980], 49; Michael Sudduth, "Revisiting the 'Reformed Objection' to Natural Theology," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2 [2009]: 37, https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v1i2.340; David Fergusson, *Creation*, Guides to Theology [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014], 71). Despite this well-known definition, we must reconsider whether natural theology is an independent theological work opposing the revealed theology. Regarding divine revelation, Bavinck preferred to correct the terms "natural" and "supernatural." He writes, "The distinction between a natural and a supernatural revelation has not been derived from the action of God, who expresses himself both in the one and in the other revelation, but from the manner in which that revelation occurs, viz. 'through' or 'from beyond' this natural order. *In its origin all revelation is supernatural*." See Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 307, emphasis mine.

4 See Sudduth, "Revisiting the Reformed Objection," 37; Sebastian Rehnman, "A Reformed Natural Theology?" *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4, no.1 (2012): 152, https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v4i1.312; Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, "Neo-Calvinism on General Revelation: A Dogmatic Sketch," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20, no. 4 (2018): 495n2, https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12333; Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Emory University Studies in Law and Religion; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 4, 175; J. V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 3–4.

5 Cf. Xu, "Herman Bavinck's," 13–4; Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology: Nature*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh; New York: T&T Clark, 2001), 268–70; Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 3, 47. For a summary of Barth's position to natural theology and historical-theological context, see Rodney Holder, "Karl Barth and the Legitimacy of Natural Theology," *Themelios* 26, no. 3 (2001): 23–33, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/karl-barth-and-the-legitimacy-of-natural-theology/. In the historical context of Nazi Germany, Barth's rejection of a certain kind of natural theology is understandable, but we should be cautious and considerate with its implications for contemporary apologetics and interdisciplinary dialogues (cf. Peter G. Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book of Nature in the Protestant Tradition," *Journal of Faith and Science Exchange* 4 [2000]: 231, https://hdl.handle.net/2144/3983; Fergusson, *Creation*, 76–7). For recent Barthian objections to natural theology, see Andrew Moore, "Should Christians Do Natural Theology?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63, no. 2 (May 2010), 127–45, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930610000013.

6 Plantinga, "Reformed Objection", 49, emphasis mine. Also cited in Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 4.

the viewpoint of John Calvin (1509-64), Plantinga infers, "The Christian doesn't *need* natural theology, either as the source of his confidence or to justify his belief. Furthermore, the Christian *should not* believe based on argument; if he does, his faith will likely be unstable and wavering."[7] In the same vein, Nicholas Wolterstorff adds, "One of the most salient features of contemporary philosophy of religion in the Reformed tradition of Christianity is its negative attitude toward natural theology—this negative attitude ranging all the way from indifference to hostility."[8]

These phenomena are why John Fesko calls the late twentieth-century Reformed theology "suffered a general antipathy to any form of natural theology."[9] Representatively, Fesko describes the phenomena, "Given the contemporary evangelical antipathy to natural theology and the efforts of some to extirpate it from Reformed theology, *the book of nature has been placed back on the shelf and sits unused beneath a thick layer of dust in many parts of the Reformed world*."[10] Does the Reformed theology necessarily imply such fervent objections toward natural theology? In this article, the argument is that the notion of the book of nature (especially in the Reformed tradition itself) will establish the historical-theological foundation for appreciating the general revelation in the creation and using a kind of natural theology through the lens of Scripture. It will develop the historical overview and theological arguments through this article from the Reformed Evangelical perspective. The "Reformed" means to agree with the Reformed theology that emerged since the sixteenth-century Reformation and was codified through the Reformed confessions. By "Evangelical," I refer to the identification of Evangelicalism by Alister E. McGrath and Timothy Larsen. Alister McGrath denotes six fundamental convictions of Evangelicalism, namely: the authority of Scripture upon Christian life; the glory of Jesus as the Lord and Savior, the lordship of the Holy Spirit; the necessity of personal conversion; emphasis on evangelism, both individual and the whole church; and the importance of Christian community for nourishment, fellowship, and spiritual growth.[11] Evangelicalism has a theological continuity with Reformed theology, especially on the authority of the Holy Scripture as God's chief source of knowledge in the Christian life (*sola scriptura*).[12]

Historical Overview of "The Book of Nature"

This section briefly traces the historical development account of the book of nature. It will be presented in two parts, i.e., the historical overview of this metaphor in Christianity from the patristic era through the Medieval ages to the Enlightenment era and in the

7 Plantinga, "Reformed Objection", 53, emphasis original; Cf. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 4.

8 As cited in Sudduth, "Revisiting the Reformed Objection", 39.

9 Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 12.

10 Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 4.

11 Alister E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 55–6. Timothy Larsen also suggested another similar identification. Larsen's "Pentagon of Evangelicalism" consists of orthodox Protestantism, the network of global Christians that emerged since the eighteenth century, focusing on Christ's work at the cross and the work of the Holy Spirit who converts the believers empowers us for the gospel proclamation. Timothy Larsen, "Defining and Locating Evangelicalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge Companions to Religion; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–2.

12 Alister E. McGrath, "Evangelical Theological Method: The State of the Art," in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 28–29.

Reformed tradition itself.

"The Book of Nature" in Christianity

Since the patristic period, the notion of "Two Books" (the book of Scripture and the book of nature) has already been expressed and thought by the creation account in New Testament (Acts 17:24; Romans 1:19, 20; Hebrews 11:3).[13] Origen of Alexandria (184–253 AD) talked about the contemplation of two books of nature and Scripture which God authored through Logos.[14] The contemplative interpretation of the Holy Scripture encompassed Origen and Clement, the contemplation of physical and metaphysical reality.[15] Anthony the Abbot (third century) declared, "My book is the created nature, always at my disposal whenever I want to read God's word."[16] St. Basil of Caesarea (329–79), one of the Greek church fathers, wrote:

> We were made in the image and likeness of our Creator, endowed with intellect and reason, so that our nature was complete and we could know God. In this way, continuously contemplating *the beauty of creatures*, through them *as if they were letters and words*, we could read *God's wisdom and providence over all things*.[17]

Accordingly, this church father correlates the idea of *imago Dei* with the idea of the "letters and words [of God]". The former idea points to the intellectual capacity of humans, which is given by God the Creator. The latter idea points to the beautiful creation that describes the divine wisdom and providence by these "letters and words."

St. Augustine (354-430) exhaustively wrote about the book of nature compared to the Holy Scripture. When encountering Faustus, his Manichaean opponent, he said, "*you should first look at the whole of creation as if you were reading a large book of the nature of reality (quasi legens magnum quendam librum naturae rerum)*" [*Contra Faustum* XXXII, 20].[18] Here are two examples of Augustine's writings in approaching the cosmos as a book:

> It is the divine page that you must listen to; it is the book of the universe that you must observe. The pages of Scripture can only be read by those who know how to read and write, while everyone, even the illiterate, can read the book of the universe. (*Enarrationes in Psalmos* 45, 7)[19]

> Some people—we read in one of his Sermons—in order to discover God, read a book. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above and below, note, read. God whom you want to discover, did not make the letters with ink; he put in front of your eyes the very things that he made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that? (*Sermones* 68, 6)[20]

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13 See Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 224.

14 Paul M. Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 318–9.

15 Blowers, *Drama of the Divine Economy*, 317.

16 As cited in Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books Prior to the Scientific Revolution", *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 57, no. 3 (2005): 237.

17 As cited in Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 237, emphasis mine.

18 As cited in Blowers, *Divine Economy*, 322.

19 As cited in Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 237; cf. Jorink, *Reading the Book*, 27.

20 As cited in Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 237.

In other words, if the universe is the book, then the Author is the triune God.

The similar metaphor used by Basil of Caesarea is also developed later by referring to the theology of Jesus as Logos. Maximus the Confessor (580–662), a monk and theologian from Constantinople, expounded it as follows:

> The natural law, as if it were a book, holds and sustains the harmony of the whole of the universe. Material bodies are like the book's characters and syllables; they are like the first basic elements nearer to us, but allow only a partial knowledge. Yet such a book has also more general and universal words, more distant from us, whose knowledge is more subtle and difficult to reach. The same divine Logos who wrote these words with wisdom, is like embodied in them in an ineffable and inexpressible way. He reveals himself completely through these words; but after their careful reading, we can only reach the knowledge that he is, because he is none of those particular things. It is gathering with reverence all these different manifestations of his, that we are led toward a unique and coherent representation of the truth, and he makes himself known to us as Creator, by analogy from the visible, created world.[21]

In another translation, it is said, "This 'bible' has, as its 'letters' and 'syllables,' the things that are primary, immediate, and particular to us, and the bodies that become dense through the conjunction of numerous qualities; its 'words' are the more universal of these things, which are distant and less dense."[22] Since the early period of Christianity, these church fathers availed the metaphor of the book of nature to refer to the cosmos created by God, the Holy Trinity.

For representing the Medieval era, I will take two theologians-scholars who greatly influenced the analogy of the book of nature, namely St. Bonaventure (1221-74) and Raymond of Sabunde (1385-1436). St. Bonaventure expressed the metaphor for nature or the world in terms such as *liber naturae*, *liber mundi*, or *liber creaturae*.[23] He also discussed this metaphor with the problem of sin and the usage of Scripture. He wrote:

> Before sin, man had the knowledge of created things and through their images he was led to know God, to praise, to worship and to love him. The purpose for which living beings exist, is to lead us to God. When human beings fell because of sin, they lost such knowledge and so there was no one who could bring all things back to God. Thus this book, that is the world, seemed dead and destroyed. Therefore, there was a need for another book through which the previous book had to be enlightened, in order to acknowledge the true meaning of things. This book is nothing but Sacred Scripture, which contains metaphors, images and teachings about the book of the world. In this way, the book of Scripture restores the whole world, and allows the latter again to lead us to know, to praise and to love God.[24]

According to Bonaventure, we need the Sacred Scripture to understand the book of nature. It restores what is lost in the world and us due to the Fall.

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21 As cited in Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 238.

22 As cited in Blowers, *Divine Economy*, 321.

23 Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books,"239.

24 As cited in Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 240.

Concerning natural theology, Raymond of Sabunde (Raimundo de Sebunde) wrote an important work, i.e., *Theologia Naturalis seu Liber Creaturarum* (1436).[25] He seems to prioritize the book of nature before the Bible at least for two reasons: (1) he emphasized that our knowledge of nature precedes and confirms the Bible for nature is like a door to enter and a light to illumine the Bible; (2) the knowledge of the book of nature is available to everybody, while the Holy Scripture can be accessed by clergymen alone [in his times].[26] He also demonstrated excessive epistemological optimism. According to Raymond of Sabunde, humans can not misunderstand or misinterpret the book of nature, thus, there is no heresy in the study of nature.[27] Regarding this tension in Raymond's thought, Tanzella-Nitti concludes as follows:

> from a cognitive point of view, the book of Nature is primary and more fundamental: its knowledge is more universal and connatural to us, that is tailor-made for the human mind; from the point of view of dignity, the book of Scripture has a higher value, because of the authority on which words contained therein are based. Yet, the priority of Nature serves the Scriptures, because it is directed to the knowledge of the latter: thus all matter is counterbalanced once again, and Sebond finds his way once more.[28]

However, Raymond seems to open the way for the autonomous usage of *liber naturae* in the later periods.

The metaphor of "two books," namely Scripture and nature, was harmoniously upholding the Christian theology and interest to the natural sciences in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[29] Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the founding father of the seventeenth-century scientific approach, adopted the "Two Books" theory. In *The Advancement of Learning*, he wrote, "God's two books are . . . first the Scripture, revealing the will of God, and then the creatures expressing his power; whereof the latter is a key unto the former."[30] Then the book of nature is seen as "a hermeneutical key to interpret the Scripture."[31] Similarly, Robert Boyle (1627-91), a Christian scientist, wrote in *The Excellency of Theology Compared with Natural Theology*, "as the two great books, of nature and scripture, have the same author, so the study of latter does not at all hinder an inquisitive man's delight in the study of the former."[32] Accordingly, Bacon emphasized that the knowledge of God could be found in the created order, but he distinguished the natural philosophy from theology or divinity cautiously:

> … let no man upon a weak conceit of sobriety or an ill-applied moderation think or maintain, that a man can search too far, or be too well studied in the book of God's word, or in

25 He was a Catalan scholar, doctor in Medicine and Theology, and president of the University of Toulouse (1428-35). See Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 241.

26 Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 241.

27 See Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 241.

28 Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 242.

29 See Alister E. McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 149.

30 As cited in Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 227.

31 Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 227.

32 As cited in McGrath, *Open Secret*, 149.

> the book of God's works, divinity or philosophy, but rather let men endeavour an endless progress or proficiency in both; only let them beware that they apply both to charity, and not to swelling; to use, and not to ostentation; and again, that they do not unwisely mingle, or confound these learnings together.[33]

This distinction was likely the preliminary step to make science (natural philosophy) independent from theology. In other words, the independent reading of the universe in natural philosophy presumes its sufficiency from theology. However, Bacon probably did not intend the arrogant separation or the conflicting view between these disciplines.

The other significant figure in the rising era of modern science was Galileo Galilei (1564–1642). Of course, Galileo believed the Judaeo-Christian God is the Author of the Two Books, for "the Holy Scripture and Nature equally proceed from the divine Word, the former as the dictation of the Holy Ghost and the latter as most observant executrix of God's command."[34] Nevertheless, Galileo observes further:

> Philosophy is written in this all-encompassing book that is constantly open before our eyes, that is the universe; but it cannot be understood unless one first learns to understand the language and knows the characters in which it is written. It is written in mathematical language, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures; without these it is humanly impossible to understand a word of it, and one wanders around pointlessly in a dark labyrinth. (EN 6: 232; F 183)[35]

Similarly, in the Letter to Castelli (1613) and the foreword of *the Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems* (1632), he wrote, "*the great book of Nature is the proper object of natural philosophy*," thus the reading of the book of nature is for scientists, not for theologians.[36] This paradigm shift should be noticed because the metaphor's meaning is knocked down from what was meant by early Church fathers at first.[37] Consequently, the notion of the book of nature secularized and unrooted from its theological background and preceded the anthropocentric modern thoughts includes: deism, rationalism, and romanticism.[38] This reversal in interpreting the book of nature is particularly elaborated by Rene Descartes that leans on the autonomous-unaided reason to understand God.[39]

The notion of *liber naturae* was interpreted in various ways. Nevertheless, the idea of a dialectic opposition between the book of nature and the Holy Scripture was not known in the Patristic and Medieval ages.[40] Contrarily, the clashing narrative of the two books emerged in later periods. On the one hand, some theologians keep the foremost authority of the Holy Scripture compared to the book of creation. Perhaps they will be criticized

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33 As cited in Peter Harrison, "The Metaphor 'the Book of Nature' and Early Modern Science," in *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History*, ed. Klaas van Berkel and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 10.

34 As cited in Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 243.

35 As cited in Fred Ablondi, *Reading Nature's Book: Galileo and the Birth of Modern Philosophy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 55, emphasis mine.

36 As cited in Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 243. Cf. McGrath, *Open Secret*, 149–50.

37 For example, St. Augustine said, "*everyone, even the illiterate, can read the book of the universe*." Calvin also shows a similar idea that God's glory in the world is evident to both the learned and the uneducated (see Fergusson, *Creation*, 31). On the contrary, Galileo limits the reader of the book of nature to scientists or mathematicians alone (cf. Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 243; Jorink, *Reading the Book*, 27–8).

38 For further discussions, see Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 227; Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 243–4.

39 Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book", 227.

40 Tanzella-Nitti, "The Two Books," 242.

for rendering the Bible as the sole source of theology or exalting *nuda Scriptura* (naked Scripture) instead of *sola Scriptura*. On the other hand, some theologians attempt to make a balance in reading both types of divine revelation that harmoniously disclose the same God as the divine author of two books.

"The Book of Nature" in Reformed Tradition

In the Reformed tradition, the book of Scripture is revered as the authoritative rule upon believers' faith and life (*sola Scriptura*). In such circumstances, Eric Jorink describes it as "a fertile soil for the metaphor of the book" that "the book of nature was linked to and sanctioned by the Book of Books."[41] Due to the limited space, this article will only explore the main Reformed confessions in this section instead of presenting Reformed theology as a complete discourse. The later section will consult the outstanding Reformed theologians in discussing general revelation in the book of nature and the Reformed viewpoint on natural theology.

The historic Reformed confessions robustly demonstrated that the revelation of God is manifested in the general and special revelation. In the Gallican Confession (1559), the book of creation and Scripture firmly implied as follows:

> As such this God reveals himself to men; firstly, *in his works, in their creation, as well as in their preservation and control*. Secondly, and more clearly, in his Word, which was in the beginning revealed through oracles, and which was afterward committed to writing in the books which we call the Holy Scriptures.[42]

Furthermore, the Belgic Confession (1561) Article 2 expounds it in a more pronounced manner:

> We know God by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes *like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: God's eternal power and divinity*, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All these things are enough to convict humans and to leave them without excuse. Second, God makes himself known to us more clearly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for God's glory and for our salvation.[43]

Opposed to Galileo, nature is the source of knowledge of God, not only intended for the expert reader alone. Based on the second article of Belgian Confession, Jorink concludes, "Nature is not primarily the field of natural philosophers and engineers, but the starting point for religious meditation. Nature is a book and, as such, just like the Bible, the object of exegesis."[44] Therefore, these Reformed confessions undoubtedly confirmed the two modes of divine revelation as the legitimate sources of knowledge of God.

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41 Jorink, *Reading the Book*, 44.

42 As cited in Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 68, emphasis mine.

43 As cited in Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 68, emphasis mine; cf. Jorink, *Reading the Book*, 20.

44 Jorink, *Reading the Book*, 21.

Cornelis Corstens (1598) wrote in his commentary on Question 25 of Heidelberg Catechism: "As regards God's unity, that is well testified for us from the creation of all creatures. Because in this *all visible creatures are like letters in a beautiful book to show us their creator*."[45] Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83), a prominent expositor on the Heidelberg Catechism, expounds that the notions of general principles (including the difference between things proper and improper) cannot be resulted by either mere chance or irrational nature, but "necessarily be naturally engraved upon our hearts" by God himself.[46] According to these commentators of the Heidelberg Catechism, the book of creation demonstrates to us God the Creator and the innate human conscience engraved within our hearts naturally.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) in Chapter 21 Article 1 states:

> The light of nature sheweth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is good, and doeth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might.[47]

This statement relies on the role of creation in declaring the glory and power of God the Creator (Rom. 1:20; Ps. 19:1-4, 97:6; etc.). Chad Van Dixhoorn, a commentator of the Westminster Confession, observes the meaning of "the light of nature" as follows:

> There is the "light of nature", by which is meant the divine imprint which is left on each of us by our Maker. That is, we are made in God's image and even though we are fallen creatures, God's image remains stamped upon us. And there are "the works of creation and providence". The world that we see and the world about which we read tell us of our Creator and Provider.[48]

In accordance, Johannes le Maire (1567–1642), an Amsterdam minister, described the creation as a "long and large letter; not only written to the faithful but to all men, to all who are enlightened by the light of nature."[49] For him, the key to the book of creation is the Holy Scripture so man can know God from *liber naturae* with help from the Bible.[50]

Concerning the noetic effects of sin in the post-Fall world, the Westminster Confession Chapter 1 Article 1 stated,

> Although the light of Nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation.[51]

This statement asserts that the general revelation in nature is insufficient for sinful humanity to be saved from the eternal wages of sin. Nonetheless, Canons of Dordt III/IV Article 4 (1618-9) declared,

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45 As cited in Jorink, *Reading the Book*, 52, emphasis mine.

46 See Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, p. 114.

47 *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian, 1990), 89–90.

48 As cited in Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 12.

49 As cited in Jorink, *Reading the Book*, 35.

50 The same standpoint was also held by two leading orthodox Calvinist theologians: Lambertus Danaeus (1530–1595) and Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676). See Jorink, *Reading the Book*, 63, 67.

51 *WCF*, 19; cited also in Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 11.

> There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by virtue of which he retains some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from enabling man to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him—so far, in fact, that man does not use it rightly even in matters of nature and society. Instead, in various ways he completely distorts this light, whatever its precise character, and suppresses it in unrighteousness. In doing so he renders himself without excuse before God.[52]

Thus, notwithstanding the noetic effects of sin, the light of nature in the fallen human still functions to some extent though it will never be adequate for saving knowledge.

Discussion with the Common Objections

This section will identify and clarify theological objections to the natural theology. First, it will refer to the general revelation in the creation and reply to the objection from the noetic effect of sin in the fallen world. Second, it will refer to God's two types of knowledge and define natural theology as the cognitive reflection on what God revealed in the book of nature. Third, it will admit the limit of natural theology in soteriological insufficiency and show its apologetical necessity in gospel proclamation by a biblical example.

General Revelation and Noetic Effects of Sin in the Fallen World

Genesis 1 describes how great God, the Creator, made heaven and earth. Then, the divine architect-artisan called the whole created realm as "good" (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and even "very good" (v. 31). But the biblical story proceeded to the section of crisis, i.e., the Fall in the third chapter of the book of Genesis. For humanity in Adam failed to obey the divine command, then the sin affected all of humankind. This universal consequence of the Fall infected the whole of humanity.[53] Correspondingly, sin also affects the intellectual faculty of the fallen human so that humans can not know God properly to serve him wholeheartedly. This notion is designated as the "noetic effects of sin." Based on the noetic effects of sin and the dichotomy of nature-and-grace, some Reformed tradition representatives, such as Barth, Berkouwer, and Van Til, rejected the natural law.[54] Despite their rejections, the early Reformers (Calvin, Melanchthon), the Reformed Orthodoxy theologians (Gisbert Voetius, Richard Baxter, Herman Witsius, Francis Turretin), and the Reformed confessions (Canons of Dordt, Westminster Standards) robustly accepted the concept of common notions.[55]

The book of nature is a kind of book that generally reveals the natural knowledge of the Creator of the cosmos. The book of nature refers to the nonverbal-nonsaving manifestations of God revealed to all humankind, especially in the created world and the innate

52 As cited in Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 38, 210, emphasis mine.

53 Cf. Heidelberg Catechism Question 7.

54 Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 175.

55 See Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 46–47.

sense of deity.[56] Both the book of nature and Scripture were authored by the breath of God (cf. Gen. 1-2; Ps. 104:29, 30; 2Tim. 3:16).[57] In the same vein, Heltzel summarized Calvin's thought on the general and special revelation:

> Calvin's distinction between God as Creator (general revelation) and God as Redeemer (special revelation) is predicated on an acknowledgement of the integral interface between the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture. Together the two books reveal this dual aspect of God in Christian theology—Creator and Redeemer.[58]

Correspondingly, the same triune God revealed the general and special revelation supernaturally. Bavinck writes:

> The Scriptures do not distinguish between "natural" and "supernatural" revelation. Creation revelation is no less supernatural than Scripture; in both, God himself is at work and his providential creating, sustaining, and governing form a single mighty ongoing revelation.[59]

In addition, Luther suggests reading the human body, the heavens, plants, animals, or any other constituent of the created cosmos since it could bring a devout Christian to a deeper knowledge and love of the Creator.[60] Contrarily, Barth held the view that God's revelation in Scripture is all that matters and the book of nature is ignored, yet Scripture itself asserts that there is a knowledge of God to be acquired by observing the creation.[61]

The human mind has been injured and stained due to the sin, or "the noetic effects of the fall/sin."[62] In Romans 1:18-23, Michael F. Bird comments about the noetic effect of sin as follows:

> Sin turns people's minds away from God and even against God. This is called the noetic effect of sin. Sin does not simply mess with humanity's moral compass. Sin infects the mind to such a degree that human reasoning assumes a default position that is hostile to God. People prefer to be stupefied by their sin rather than immerse themselves in God's majesty.[63]

The problem is not about the cognitive capacity of human beings failing to recognize God's existence. The problem is the hostility of the human mind that rebel, disobey and not submit to God, who is worthy of worship.[64] According to Plantinga, the original sin caused "blindness", "imperceptiveness", "dullness", "stupidity" or "cognitive limitation" on the intellect of human thus he/she is unable to have proper knowledge of God.[65] Moreover, Plantinga expounds, "And in addition to *the general injury* due to the condition of sin itself, there is also the possibility of *special damage or disease:* perhaps in some people at some times, the

56 Cf. Bolt, "Two Books," 316.

57 Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 225.

58 Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 226.

59 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:301.

60 Crowther, "Lutheran Book of Nature," 23.

61 Cf. Holder, "Legitimacy of Natural Theology," 34.

62 Cf. Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 226; Paul Helm, "John Calvin, the Sensus Divinitatis, and the Noetic Effects of Sin," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43 (1998): 88, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1003174629151.

63 Michael F. Bird, *Romans*, The Story of God Bible Commentary: The New Testament Series 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 56.

64 Cf. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 203.

65 See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 207.

sensus divinitatis doesn't work at all."[66] This statement shows his outright pessimistic view on *sensus divinitatis*. Yet, in *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, Plantinga wrote later:

> ... we human beings typically have at least some knowledge of God, and some grasp of what is required of us; this is so even in the state of sin and apart from regeneration. The condition of sin involves damage to the *sensus divinitatis*, but not obliteration; *it remains partially functional in most of us*. We therefore typically have some grasp of God's presence and properties and demands, but this knowledge is covered over, impeded, and suppressed.[67]

His opinion seemed ambiguously stretched on the degree of the damage of *sensus divinitatis* from "does not work at all" [in some people] to "partially functional" [in the majority of people]. In the Institutes Book 1 Chapter 3, Calvin wrote about the *sensus divinitatis* as follows:

> There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. Ever renewing its memory, he repeatedly sheds fresh drops. Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor him and to consecrate their lives to his will.[68]

Paul Helm summarized well Calvin's thought regarding the sense of deity:

> So the basic position is that all mankind have the *sensus* in virtue of their humanity, presumably in virtue of their being created in the image of God, and this *sensus* has not been eradicated by the fall, but it continues to function, or rather to malfunction, to the same universal extent.[69]

In sum, the sense of divinity still exists in sinful humankind, but due to the noetic effects of sin, it malfunctions to lead us to submit to and worship God satisfactorily.[70]

The noetic effects of sin do not nullify the divine revelation in nature or wholly obliterate the natural knowledge of God in human nature. John Calvin emphasized that the natural world continues to provide clear and inexcusable evidence as God's handiwork, for "*men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him*" (Inst. Book 1, Chap. 5).[71] Romans 1:20 tells us, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made." As also stressed by Douglas J. Moo, "*Not only has God left clear evidence of himself in the world he has made, but this evidence is actually perceived by people: It is 'clearly seen'; 'God has made it plain to them' (v. 19).*"[72]). Accordingly, God reveals himself in the

66 Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 215.
67 Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 51.
68 As cited in Helm, "John Calvin," 89.
69 As cited in Helm, "John Calvin," 90.
70 Cf. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 205.
71 As cited in Helm, "John Calvin," 98.
72 Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 68, 60.

creation as his handiwork, thus "never leaves anyone without a witness" (Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:19).[73] Even after the Fall, the physical reality found in this created universe still records the perceivable marks of the divine Author of the book of nature.[74] Nonetheless, Paul's purpose was to show that people have knowledge of God through observing the book of creation but they suppressed (v. 18) and distorted (vv. 21-23) it under the dominion of sin.[75] It does not imply that natural theology can not provide any sound argument because of the noetic effect of sin.

Conversely, the correct conclusion derived from the general revelation in nature is suppressed "in the form of refusal to belief or distortion of belief."[76] The noetic effects of sin do not annihilate the "truth" that is suppressed.[77] Despite this fact, sinful humanity, without excuse, decided not to glorify and thank God (v. 21) under this suppressed and distorted knowledge.[78]

Knowledge of God and Natural Theology

Calvin acknowledges the natural knowledge of God in the postlapsarian world. He argues from Romans 2:14-15 that this knowledge to "distinguish between justice and injustice" is "indelibly engraven on the human heart . . . is not a doctrine which is first learned at school, but one as to which every man is, from the womb, his own master."[79] Plantinga's main reason for rejecting natural theology is that the theistic belief is properly fundamental. The "properly basic" means theistic belief can be rational for a person, even if the person does not have any argument or evidence for theistic belief.[80] Thus the direct knowledge of God does not depend upon the availability or the validity of theistic arguments offered by natural theologians.[81]

Historically, the Reformed orthodoxy acknowledges two kinds of knowledge of God: innate knowledge of God (*cognitio dei insita*) and acquired knowledge of God (*cognitio dei acquisita*). The first type is the knowledge of God that is naturally implanted in human nature.[82] The second type is the knowledge of God that is acquired by rational inference from observing and pondering the orderliness and beauty of the created world.[83] Francis Turretin (1623-87) writes as follows, "*The natural, occupied with that which may be known*

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73 Bavinck, *RD*, 2:90.

74 Cf. Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 225; McGrath, *Open Secret*, 184.

75 See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 85–86.

76 Andrew Ter Ern Loke, "Theological Critiques of Natural Theology: A Reply to Andrew Moore," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematicsche Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 61, no. 2 (2019): 212, https://doi.org/10.1515/nzsth-2019-0011.

77 Loke, "Theological Critiques of Natural Theology," 213.

78 Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 87; Bird, *Romans*, 56.

79 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 54, 45, quoted in Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 64–65. Cf. Alvin Plantinga, "The Prospects for Natural Theology," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 308, https://doi.org/10.2307/2214098; Plantinga, "Reformed Objection," 51.

80 Sudduth, "Revisiting the 'Reformed Objection,'" 41. In Plantinga's own words, "argument is not needed for rational justification; the believer is entirely within his epistemic right in believing that God has created the world, even if he has no argument at all for that conclusion. The believer doesn't need natural theology in order to achieve rationality or epistemic propriety in believing; his belief in God can be perfectly rational even if he knows of no cogent argument, deductive or inductive, for the existence of God-indeed, even if there isn't any such argument" (Plantinga, "Reformed Objection," 50).

81 Cf. Sudduth, "Revisiting the 'Reformed Objection,'" 41, 43.

82 Louis Berkhof explains that *cognitio dei insita* denotes an intuitive knowledge under the influence of the *semen religionis* implanted in man as created in the image of God and not obtained by laborious reasoning. See Sudduth, "Revisiting the 'Reformed Objection,'" 42.

83 Sudduth, "Revisiting the 'Reformed Objection,'" 45.

of God (to gnōston tou Theou), is both innate (from the common notions implanted in each one) and acquired (which creatures gain discursively)."[84] Bavinck distinguishes the implanted and acquired knowledge of God as follows:

> It is important, however, to make some distinction between implanted and acquired knowledge of God. In the former God's revelation acts upon human consciousness, creating impressions and intuitions. In the case of the acquired knowledge of God, human beings reflect upon that revelation of God and seek by reasoning and proof to rise above impressions and intuitions to clearer ideas. ... This distinction must not be restricted to so-called natural theology in opposition to revealed theology. God reveals himself to us in his handiwork of creation, but even Christian believers depend on Scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit to truly know God the Creator. We are indebted to Scripture for both implanted and acquired knowledge.[85]

By this distinction, we do not need to reject theistic arguments because it is God's acquired knowledge. Michael Sudduth puts together two types of knowledge of God in an accordant way, "Theistic inferences operate in tandem with immediate knowledge of God. We might even say that the former confirms and supplements the latter. We are also not committed to supposing that we first come to believe in God by way of inference."[86] Similarly, Augustus Strong wrote, "Although the knowledge of God's existence is intuitive, it may be explicated and confirmed by arguments drawn from the actual universe and from the abstract ideas of the human mind."[87] This compatible attitude to natural theology is consistent with the Reformed orthodoxy rather than Plantinga's stance.

On the other hand, Plantinga argues from the properly basic belief to object to natural theology. Sudduth gives a strong counter-argument as follows:

> ... the proper basicality thesis does not entail a denial of the value or usefulness of theistic arguments, so it is exceedingly difficult to see how the proper basicality thesis can adequately motivate a rejection of natural theology in point of logic. This is true even if we restrict our focus to the epistemic value of such arguments. The proper basicality thesis, at least in its standard form, states that some theistic beliefs can have some (perhaps highly exalted) positive epistemic status for some people under certain conditions in the absence of natural theology. This is properly speaking a denial of certain strong forms of theistic evidentialism, not natural theology. The project of developing theistic arguments, and the belief that such arguments are epistemically efficacious, must be distinguished from the epistemological view that there can be no knowledge of God without such arguments. Of course, natural theology might still be necessary in a more restricted sense.[88]

Citing Calvin, Plantinga shows his ambiguous attitude toward natural theology as follows:

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84 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1992), chap. 1.2.7, quoted in Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 4.

85 Bavinck, *RD*, 2:67. For further elaboration on the intuitive (precognitive) reading of Bavinck's general revelation, see Sutanto, "Neo-Calvinism," 502–4.

86 Sudduth, "Revisiting the 'Reformed Objection,'" 45.

87 As cited in Sudduth, "Revisiting the 'Reformed Objection,'" 46.

88 Sudduth, "Revisiting the 'Reformed Objection,'" 43–44.

> On Calvin's view, properly functioning human cognitive capacities will indeed produce belief in God; the modules of the design plan governing the production of these beliefs are indeed aimed at truth; *belief in God taken in the basic way, therefore, does indeed have warrant. Hence natural theology is not needed for belief in God to have warrant;* the natural view here, in fact, will be that *many people know that there is such a person as God without believing on the basis of the arguments of natural theology. Of course it doesn't follow that natural theology has no role at all to play; there are lots of roles to play besides that of being the sole source of warrant.*
>
> And even if such arguments are not needed for theistic belief to have warrant (even if they are not the sole source of warrant for theistic belief), *it doesn't follow that they cannot play the role of increasing warrant, and significantly increasing warrant*. Here it may be useful to make a comparison with other beliefs that have warrant in the basic way.[89]

Contrary to his outright objection to natural theology, he demonstrates such inconsistency in a hypothetical situation implied by his standpoint:

> Perhaps my belief in God, *while accepted in the basic way, isn't firm and unwavering;* perhaps it isn't nearly as firm as my belief in other minds. Then perhaps good theistic arguments could play the role of *confirming and strengthening my belief in God*, and in that way they *might increase the degree of warrant* belief in God has for me.[90]

He asserts that the theistic belief has a warrant without natural theology, but natural theology can still play a role in increasing the warrant of theistic belief. Remarkably, he mentions the possibility of the fundamental theistic belief that "is not firm and unwavering", and the possibility of natural theology in increasing the warrant of theistic belief in such a situation. By distinguishing two types of knowledge of God, we do not need to follow Plantinga's inconsistent stance toward natural theology.

Contrary to his reading, Bavinck's stance on natural theology is "*neither overestimating nor disdaining*," since:

> Christian conviction about what can be known about God apart from special revelation is *a valid natural theology*. However, when this natural theology stands on its own and in a self-sufficient and rationalistic fashion *sets aside the need for special revelation*, it is *an invalid and impious activity*.[91]

In other words, he disapproves of an autonomous natural theology that rejects the special revelation as guidance. Sudduth comments on Bavinck's view:

> In the case of the acquired knowledge of God, human beings reflect upon that revelation of God. Their minds go to work, thought processes are set in motion, and with clear heads they seek by reasoning and proof to rise from the observation of creatures to [the reality] of God … Commitment to immediate knowledge of God does not motivate the rejection of theistic arguments. Quite the contrary: *theistic arguments*

89 Plantinga, "The Prospects for Natural Theology," 311, emphasis mine.

90 Plantinga, "The Prospects for Natural Theology," 311–2, emphasis mine. Cf. His rejection of belief based on the argument in Plantinga, "Reformed Objection," 53.

91 Bavinck, RD, 2:67, emphasis mine. Contra Plantinga, "Reformed Objection," 49–50.

> *are typically taken to represent the reflective elaboration of a more primitive, spontaneous knowledge of God, and the human impulse towards reflective knowledge is itself as natural as the impulse to believe in God. Natural theology is therefore a consequence of our constitution as human persons*.[92]

Therefore, natural theology is a rational reflection on what God revealed in the book of nature.[93] The general revelation and the implanted knowledge of God do not eradicate natural theology. Although the rational reflection of *liber naturae* should be distinctly identified from the general revelation and the innate knowledge of God, it does not necessarily deny natural theology at all. Both types of knowledge of God complement one another. By works of the Holy Spirit, these *duplex cognitio dei* draw us to more profound awe and submission to the true God who discloses himself in the general and special revelation.

Soteriological Insufficiency and Apologetical Necessity

We affirm the limit of general revelation in nature about salvation. The natural knowledge of God makes the sinful human without excuse for dishonoring God (Rom. 1:19) but does not reveal any of the salvific knowledge of God.[94] In other words, we can discern God's power and wisdom in the book of creation, but his salvific plan is revealed in Christ's event only in the book of Scripture.[95] The book of nature can not satisfactorily bring the unbeliever to true faith and saving knowledge.[96] However, it does not mean that the reflection on the book of nature is useless, unnecessary, or excluding the authority of the Holy Scripture.

In Acts 17:22-34, Paul the Apostle uses general revelation in the book of nature as "a stepping-stone" to proclaim the good news to intellectuals in Athens.[97] He identifies the "unknown god" they worship with the God he proclaims to them. He began with the fact that God created humankind and continued to God's revelation through Christ's resurrection (v. 31).[98] Impressively, he even cites Greek poets Epimenides of Crete and Aratus of Cilicia as the point of contact for evangelism.[99] Remarkably, Paul also appeals to the "sense of divinity" and an awareness of the ordering of the cosmos as the "point of contact" (a kind of apologetic device) for the gospel proclamation.[100] In this biblical example, we can see both general and special revelation put in accordance to serve the gospel proclamation.[101] Thus, the natural knowledge of God is not substitutionary but preparatory to the saving knowledge in Jesus Christ, as the Holy Scripture proclaims.

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92 Sudduth, "Revisiting the 'Reformed Objection,'" 46, emphasis mine.
93 Cf. Sutanto, "Neo-Calvinism," 509–510.
94 Cf. Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 226; Moo, *Romans*, 69; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 122.
95 Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 86–87; Harrison, "The Metaphor 'the Book of Nature' and Early Modern Science," 9.
96 See Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 18.
97 Moo, *Romans*, 69.
98 Loke, "Theological Critiques of Natural Theology," 217.
99 Holder, "Legitimacy of Natural Theology," 34; cf. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics*, 122–3.
100 McGrath, *Open Secret*, 183–184.
101 Holder, "Legitimacy of Natural Theology," 35.

Conclusion

Tracing the historical overview of the book of nature in Christianity and Reformed tradition, we should have a consistent stance toward the general revelation in *liber naturae* and *theologia naturalis*. Contrary to Plantinga's objection, Bavinck already wrote, "natural theology is upheld in its truth and valued by all Reformed theologians."[102] Regarding the metaphor of *liber naturae*, this article is a proponent of an intermediate stance between those who exalted *nuda Scriptura* (with the objection to God's revelation in nature) and those who hold *the nature alone* as a good source of knowledge of God (with the rejection to the guidance of Scripture).[103]

After delivering the historical overview of the metaphor of *liber naturae*, I discuss common objections to natural theology. God discloses himself in two manners of revelation: general and special. The noetic effects of sin do not deprive God's general revelation in nature or entirely eradicate the natural knowledge of God in humanity. By distinguishing two kinds of knowledge of God, we can classify natural theology as the acquired knowledge of God. Accordingly, we can discern the pervasive divine revelation in creation from natural theology as the rational reflection upon it. We should admit that natural theology cannot offer the saving knowledge only manifested in Jesus Christ as the Scripture taught. Nonetheless, natural theology can be a preliminary step in the gospel proclamation.

According to the Reformed confessions and early Reformed theologians, Reformed tradition stands within the historic Christian orthodoxy regarding the book of nature and Scripture. The metaphor of Two Books, natural contemplation (*theoria physikē*) and scriptural contemplation (*theoria graphikē*) represented the strong commitment of patristic theologians to read creation through the lens of Scripture.[104] Heltzel expounds, "*According to the Reformed tradition, the recovery of the 'Book of Nature' as a source of theology must be interpreted through the revelation of God in Christ, disclosed in salvation history as narrated in the biblical literature*."[105] Accordingly, Calvin emphasized that the book of nature must always be interpreted through the spectacles of the book of Scripture.[106] Jorink concisely summarizes the analogy of spectacle in Calvin's thought:

> The contemplation of the Book of Nature is a first step towards the Lord; this removes our innocence and ignorance and draws our attention to his existence. The next and decisive step is to read the Bible, "whereby God is known not only as the Founder of the Universe and the sole Author and Ruler of all that is made, but also in the person of the Mediator as the Redeemer" [Calvin, Institutes I, VI, 1]. *The Holy Scripture is like a pair of spectacles that dispels the otherwise confused and imprecise notions of God and clearly shows us the true God* [Inst. I, VI, 1; I, XVI, 1].[107]

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102 Bavinck, *RD*, 1:87.

103 Cf. Harrison, "The Metaphor 'the Book of Nature' and Early Modern Science," 13.

104 Blowers, *Divine Economy*, 315.

105 Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 233.

106 Cf. Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 226; Harrison, "The Metaphor 'the Book of Nature' and Early Modern Science," 15.

107 Jorink, *Reading the Book*, 46, emphasis mine. For similar notions in thoughts of the Reformers and Bavinck, see Sutanto, "Neo-Calvinism," 511 and Bavinck, *RD*, 1:321.

Therefore, the hermeneutic principle is that the "book of Scripture" must be the norming norm (*norma normans*) and the insights obtained from the "book of nature" have secondary normativity.[108]

In conclusion, retrieving the book of nature in the history of Christianity and Reformed theology can consistently affirm natural theology. We need to distinguish natural theology from general revelation in the creation without disdain or overestimating it extremely. In the Reformed Evangelical perspective, the "book of nature" should be read in the spectacles of the Holy Scripture, and natural theology has an apologetical function as a preparatory step in the gospel proclamation.

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108 Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book," 233.

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