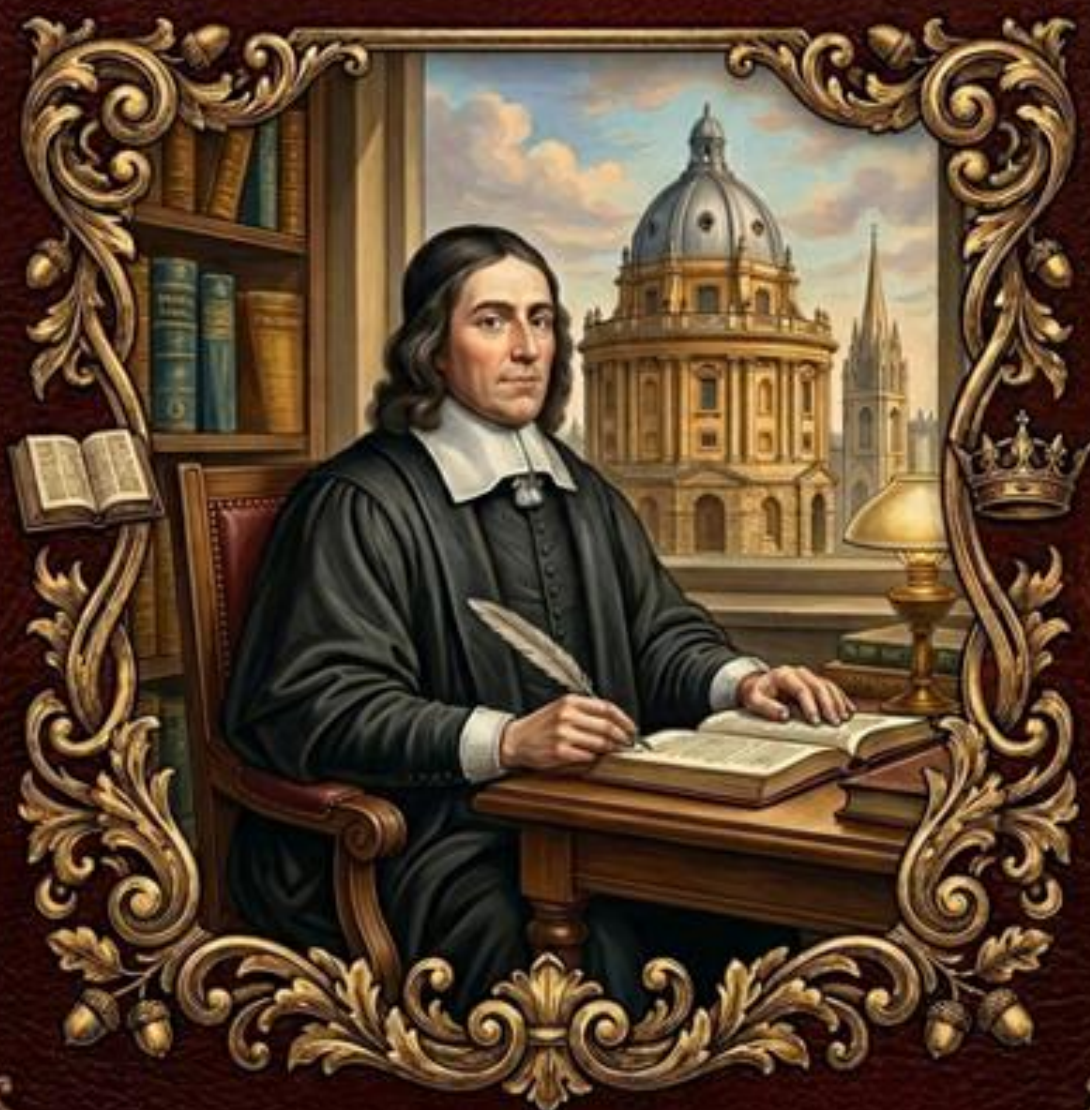


THE NATURE OF TRUE THEOLOGY

Volume 2: On Natural Theology



JOHN OWEN



MONERGISM

THE NATURE OF TRUE THEOLOGY

VOLUME 2: ON NATURAL THEOLOGY

JOHN OWEN

Monergism Books

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the second volume of our Claude-generated translation of John Owen's *The Nature of True Theology*. *Volume 2: On Natural Theology* consists of Chapters 4-6 of Book 1, and an extended Digression on Universal Grace. Similar to *Volume 1*, this volume is *c.* 23,000 words long, making it not too intimidating for the general Christian reader. Hebrew and Greek texts have usually been transcribed with an English translation in square brackets. *Volume 3* may need to be longer owing to the nature of the material. Generally speaking, we intend to follow the general principle that less is more when it comes to length. Our objective is to make this material appealing to the general Christian reader who may find overly lengthy volumes off-putting.

CHAPTER IV

Part One: On Natural Theology, or the Theology of the First Man

The theology of the first man, ἐνδιάθετος [internal] — Its description — In what sense it is natural — The degrees, force, and efficacy of innate light — The περιεργία [over-curiosity] of the scholastics, the error of the Socinians, and of others — The origin and necessity of natural theology — The obedience of the first man — An exposition of the promised reward, of sin, and of punishment — The corruption of original theology — The manner of the corruption — The first covenant abolished, and with it the theology resting upon it.

I. All the theology of all men has regard either to the ἐνδιάθετον [internal] word and is called natural (for the most part, that is, since it was never alone), or to the προφορικόν [expressed] word, which was drafted in as a replacement for the obliteration of that ἐνδιάθετου [internal word] through sin, and is called supernatural or the theology of revelation. We must treat of the first in the first place. It can and ought to be considered as pure, as corrupt, and as apostate.

II. The state of integral nature, or of men placed under the law of creation alone, presents itself to us in the first place. In that state, theology was ἐνδιάθετος [internal] and natural — yet not altogether ἔμφυτος [innate]. For from the beginning it was augmented by revelation, and was moreover to be yet further augmented. In that state, it is called pure. It was moreover a saving light, consisting in the knowledge of God as creator, legislator, governor, and rewarder. We call it light, since this appellation suits all theology by the usage of Scripture. This light was implanted in man by God in the act of creation itself; it was immediately augmented through an outward revelation of the divine will in the sacramental precept, and was to be increased from day to day through the contemplation of the works of God. And this light was able to render him wise in the duly performed obedience to God according to the covenant of works, unto his own happiness and the glory of the divine power, wisdom, goodness, grace, and justice. Such was the theology of the first man.

III. Now this light — or spiritual wisdom — God implanted in the mind of man in the very act of his creation. It was congruent with, indeed altogether necessary for, the condition in which and the end for which he was made, Eccles. 7:29. Although therefore it was by its nature, and with respect to its use and end, plainly supernatural (for that man should obey God according to a covenant promising an eternal reward was of the most free constitution of God), yet because it was ἐνδιάθετον καὶ ἔμφυτον [internal and innate], we call it natural to him. That is properly called natural, which necessarily accompanies the nature itself, or takes its rise from the principles of nature. In that sense, it is agreed that this light was not natural to man. For it neither necessarily follows upon human nature so that it cannot be separated from it, nor can it be drawn out from the natural

faculties of the soul by their own proper and native power. But since it belonged to the rectitude of nature with respect to its primordial state, and was implanted in man as placed under the law at his very creation, with respect to his ultimate end, it cannot be denied to have been natural. But concerning these matters, enough and more than enough has been disputed elsewhere against the papists.

IV. Concerning this light — or the knowledge of man in the state of uncorrupted nature — with respect to its degrees and efficacy, there is some contention of opinions. The scholastics extol it with sufficient magnificence, being here as everywhere full of empty speculations and audacity in curious determinations. The Socinians imagine the first man to have been a fungus and a stock, scarcely possessed of reason; they serve him up, as it were, for ridicule — as one ignorant of God, himself, his wife, and the other creatures. They maintain that the one precept given to him by God was that concerning not eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Whether he had a mind or a conscience, whether he acknowledged any dependence upon God, they do not know, or at least feign not to know; for the feigning of ignorance is very often the colour of the most insolent boasting of knowledge. Thus they thought fit to patronise the most abominable errors concerning the fall of the first man which they foster, and concerning the state of sin: “Adam, like an infant or child, did not know that he was naked,” Smalcius, *On the Truth of the Deity of the Son*, ch. 7, p. 2 — as if he were truly deprived of sight before he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and “Concerning his own wife he knew only what the senses could observe,” as the leader of the flock himself speaks, *On the State of the First Man*, ch. 4, p. 119; “Nor,” says he, “did he have a clear understanding of the power of the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil,” p. 147 — as if the whole effect of the first sin arose from the power of that tree; and again, “although he was mortal, he did not know that he was mortal,” ch. 4, p. 118 — namely, lie must be covered with lies, lest it rain through. In order to prove that Adam lost almost nothing through sin, they affirm that he never had anything, since he could not lose what he never had. A lid worthy of the dish! We shall, on an even balance so far as possible — leaning neither toward those men’s περιεργίαν [over-curious meddlesomeness] in asserting, nor toward these men’s dependent audacity in denying — briefly weigh the theology of the first man.

V. That God is by right of creation the supreme Lord of all things is acknowledged by all creatures. Hence, dependence upon God necessarily accompanies the existence of all, and is accommodated to the principles of the nature which he communicated to each. All creatures, therefore, as such, and each according to the capacity and disposition with which they are furnished, celebrate and serve the Creator: Ps. 145:10, “All your works shall praise you, Lord”; and hence the Psalmist by κατὰ προσωποποιίαν [personification] very many times exhorts all and each of them to duly discharge that duty. The holy chorus of the church whether militant or crowned unanimously establishes this eternal and invariable reason of divine worship, Rev. 4:11 Ὁ ἅγιος εἶ, Κύριε, λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν, καὶ τὴν δύναμιν· ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα, καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου εἰσὶ καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν [Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy will’s sake they exist and were created]; to which the catholic assembly of all creatures responds, ch. 5:13: Καὶ πᾶν κτίσμα ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐν τῇ γῇ, καὶ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς, καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης ᾧ ἐστι, καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα, ἤκουσα

λέγοντας· Τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων [And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that are in them, I heard saying: Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever]. For since God wrought all things for himself — that is, for his glory, Prov. 16:4 — it was fitting that all these things should render glory and honour to him. Moreover, as it belongs to that supreme right of God and dominion over all things to appoint for each its proper and ultimate end, so it belongs to that dependence that there should be present a law and rule of operations tending toward that end. All creatures have a definite end and a law of operation, for the very reason that they are creatures. That law, therefore, was cognate to all. But the rational creature, since it bears a twofold aspect — namely that of a creature, and that of a rational being capable of eternity — receives from God a twofold dependence: one common or natural, of which we have spoken, and another proper or moral. This is the obedience owed to God according to the creature's condition. In order to exact this obedience from the creatures, nothing more is required than that God should be set before them as supremely good and best. Accordingly, he demands fear and worship because he is יְיָ [the Lord], that is, the Lord of all: Mal. 1:6, “If I am Lord, where is my fear?” That this should not be known from the very act of creation was impossible. That innate law ought to have sufficed for the duly rendering of this obedience. Thus, at last, both the ultimate end and the creature's dependence upon God are established. Concerning this innate law, two things may be considered: the law itself — that is, the norm of required obedience — and the knowledge of the law. That this most beneficent, most great, supreme

governor and rewarder is to be loved, worshipped, and feared, in such a way that the moral order of this dependence — which, since God the Creator is supremely just and holy, embraces all justice and holiness — should be continued until his ultimate end is reached: this is the sum of this law. And this law is that ἐνδιάθετον [internal] word, ἀξιόπιστον [worthy of belief] and altogether infallible, which was, as it were, the doctrine in the theology of the first man. The knowledge of this law did not differ in reality from the law itself. And it is apparent that this saving light consisted in this: that by its force and guidance, man might duly render to God the obedience owed to him according to the law, so as to attain his proper end. And this was the theology of the first man. Constituted in the state of moral dependence upon God, and subject to the authority of God, and thereby capable of the eternal blessedness of enjoying the Creator, he had the innate and ἔμφυτον [implanted] law of those operations which were necessary for the attaining of that end; and was moreover furnished — in the knowledge of God and of all the means of his worship — with that wisdom by the force of which, according to the will and mind of God shining in it, he was able to render duly the obedience prescribed in the law. But since this ἔμφυτος [innate] law — which in this theology supplies the place of doctrine, or the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος [internal word] — was innate in the mind of man, it was not in reality distinct from that light, or habit of mind, by which the doctrine of God and his worship is savingly perceived, with respect to the matter itself — or speaking, as they say, materially; nor was it anything more than the fountain and origin of that order of dependence of the rational creature. But with respect to exercise, and actual obedience, and speaking formally, it was distinct from it.

VI. Since therefore God made man upright, Eccles. 7:29, in his own image, Gen. 1:26, 27 — which consists in wisdom, justice, and holiness, Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:23, 24 — and commanded him, as he had commanded the other creatures, to have dominion over them for his glory, to which dominion he would be altogether unequal unless the natures of those creatures had been thoroughly known to him; and since he exacted from him obedience under penalty of eternal death, and with the promise of the reward of blessed life — it is established that he was furnished with that wisdom and moral light by which he was able both to know God and to understand perfectly the ἔμφυτον [innate] law and the revelation of the properties of God in all creation, and the sacramental νομοθεσίᾳ [law-giving]. For one furnished with this theology, absolutely nothing was lacking either for rightly worshipping God, or for living well and blessedly.

VII. From this, an estimate can be made of the obedience of the first man and the proposed reward, together with the nature of the sin itself, and also the threatened punishment. For the obedience to be rendered by virtue of the covenant had to be conformable to his innate light, or the theology delineated above; and the covenant itself, as co-natural with Adam, was so known to him; for it is established that by the force of this theology, he knew both his duty and his reward. The sacramental precept added over and above did not reveal the covenant, but opened the way for its ratification. The proposed reward consisted in nothing less than the eternal enjoyment of God. The same is still the voice of the law: “Do this, and you shall live”; for God has never appointed any other reward for obedience rendered by virtue of a covenant. At what point, finally, after the passage of what space of time, it would have fallen to Adam to enjoy God under the aspect of the reward — since God himself never foreknew this as a future event — is a

subtle and dangerous disputation. That the first man, had he stood in his primordial state, would have obtained the reward, and that the reward itself would have been God himself, is established from the nature of the covenant; the time and manner in which it would have fallen to him thus to enjoy God, neither the nature of the thing nor the sacred page indicates. The obedience of the first man, therefore, would have been a universal and express image of the image of God in all things; the reward would have been God himself. His first sin, moreover, since it was committed against the directive force of this theology, it is plain consisted in the total subversion of the order of the moral dependence of the creature upon God; hence, the punishment of that sin is eternal separation from God, with the addition moreover of that supplement of sensible punishment which vindicative justice could not but exact. After, therefore, the body and soul of the sinner had experienced the first death in their mutual separation, they were to be reunited — by divine power so far serving justice — in order to undergo the second death, consisting in eternal separation from God under the most grievous punishments; from this condition we have been freed through Christ. The reward and the punishment annexed to the first covenant, therefore, with respect to their substance, so to speak, and those annexed to the new covenant, there was nothing in between. God himself and separation from God contain the nature of both on either side. Nor can any other reward or punishment be assigned; it may perhaps be said that each has been augmented, by virtue of the new covenant, by the accession of certain degrees. Hence the reward is now described, κατ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν αἰώνιον βάρος δόξης [as a surpassing and yet more surpassingly eternal weight of glory], 2 Cor. 4:17; and the punishment as θάνατος εἰς θάνατον [death upon death], ch. 2:16. Concerning the resurrection of Adam

ἐκτὸς τοῦ λόγου ἐνσαρκώσεως [apart from the word of the Incarnation], Scripture is truly silent; for it does not pursue empty hypotheticals, nor does it curiously discourse from the supposition of a state that was never to be. But concerning the state of those who are altogether strangers to the mediation of Christ, since they never believed in him, nor sinned against his grace of which they never heard anything, it speaks plainly enough. To hold that Christ merited the resurrection from the dead to condemnation for sins committed without law and without any knowledge of Christ is impious. Since therefore Adam's immortality in his primordial state depended by no means on internal principles of nature, but on the sole and most free good pleasure of God, once that external conserving cause was removed through sin, it was necessary that Adam should die at a certain definite time, and be brought out by the force of the covenant from the state of natural death to judgment.

VIII. Let it suffice to have discussed this much concerning natural theology considered in its primordial and native purity; it remains that we briefly survey its ἀφανισμόν [abolition] through the entrance of sin.

IX. The entrance of sin, and the abolition of the divine covenant through that entrance, are known from elsewhere and are here presupposed; and so we must treat here only of the removal of this theology through them.

X. It will be granted that all theology must be sufficient for the attaining of its proper end. This end consists in the glory of God and the eternal happiness of the theologians themselves. The image of God in man having therefore been abolished through the entrance of sin, that ἔμφυτος [innate] law of θεογνωσίας [the knowledge of God], of which we have spoken, is utterly stripped of the nature and use of theology, so that the whole human race must rightly be judged to have been through sin disinherited of all true

theology — and these things must be taught. There was so close a union between that original doctrine and the habit of mind that once torn apart, they could not maintain their station. But that saving light, which we have demonstrated constituted as it were the proper form of this primordial theology, was extinguished through sin; and so theology itself suffered ἀφανισμόν [abolition]. Furthermore, no doctrine can properly be called theology which does not rest upon some divine covenant by the force of which the theologians themselves can please God and at last enjoy him. For all theology of wayfarers directs men in the knowledge of God and urges them toward the rendering of obedience due according to the norm of the covenant which it has pleased God to enter into with them. But that covenant, which was the foundation of this primordial theology, was, as I said, abolished. For what should it now do? When, although it prescribes all things well, there is yet no one who can comply. The doctrine of that covenant is indeed still most true: “for he who does the things of the law shall live in them.” But the covenant itself, after the entrance of sin, retained no force as a means of bringing men to God. Nor, because men are compelled to bear the authority of its commandments, are they to be called covenant members, since they are held by its bond only from the supreme right and dominion of God, of which he cannot divest himself. Indeed, to such a depth of misery was man brought through sin, that even the doctrine set out in the law of nature, however accompanied by the primordial light, was not sufficient for directing sinners in the way of life, nor could it, however much it might wish to, utterly save sinners. For to know God and to obey him as creator, governor, and rewarder, unless one is moreover furnished with the knowledge of his grace and mercy through Jesus Christ, suffices for no one’s salvation after the entrance of sin. The ἐνδιάθετον

[internal] and innate light, therefore, through sin, lost the ends, saving use, and force of effectively directing theologians in the way of life, which belong to true theology.

XI. And this is the reason why, from the apostasy of the theologians, the theology itself was also utterly abolished, which we shall not find to have occurred subsequently. For since all theology, as we have said, is founded in a covenant, once the covenant is destroyed, it was necessary that the theology itself should fall. This covenant, however, entered into with Adam, rested upon an absolutely universal moral dependence upon God. It could not, therefore, in any way be the case that it should not be rendered void through the first sin. In the same way, the matter stands with the new covenant. The theology of the covenant members rests upon the covenant. Whether any of the covenant members can fall away or be cast out from that covenant, we are not now disputing. The covenant itself cannot be abolished, because it was ratified in and with Christ the mediator; nor therefore can the theology resting upon it be shaken. However often, therefore, the theologians may have defected from its doctrine, as we shall see very frequently, yet the theology itself remained altogether stable and immutable, the nature of the covenant so requiring. Thus it has fared with this theology, and let it suffice to have treated of it briefly, since it lasted but a short time, and the doctrine concerning it is drawn from but very few places of Scripture.

CHAPTER V

Part Two: On the Corruption and Loss of Natural Theology.

Natural theology, how far it survives after the entrance of sin — Its λείψανα [remnants], what they are and of what kind, demonstrated — What it is from the law of nature; its force, Rom. 2:14, 15 — The force of conscience — Atheists — That God can be known from his works is shown.

I. That primordial and native light of which we have hitherto treated was, as we said, extinguished through sin. Hence, all men are called blind — indeed, darkness itself; for that ἐνδιάθετος [internal] doctrine, together with the helps by which it was to be extended with respect to its object, was no longer capable of attaining its proper end. Whether this original theology, though corrupt and labouring under its own vitiation, is still surviving, we shall now see.

II. That there is still implanted in the hearts of men a sense of God as creator, governor, and judge, together with some indelible knowledge of good and evil in relation to the government of God, and of the distinction between the honourable and the base, is both confessed by almost all and

shall be proved by us. The apostle sets it out at Rom. 2:14, 15. Moreover, sinners possessed of reason still enjoy the benefit of contemplating the works of God. For it is not credible that sin has so overwhelmed the nature of men as to appear to have utterly shaken off the law of dependence and subjection inscribed upon their hearts by the Creator. We do not say that men are born furnished with some knowledge of God; they have none at all. But we say they are born with the power of knowing; nor do they know and perceive in this natural manner — retaining an implanted power of knowing God which stimulates toward rendering him some worship, and which will of itself assert itself in adults possessed of reason, no less certainly and necessarily than the act of reasoning itself — we have no reason to doubt, since we experience it.

III. But these things must be proved, since it is long since theologians taught us to distrust what we see and feel. First, therefore, we shall see that many λείψανα [remnants] of natural theology still survive in the minds of sinners; then, whatever they are, that they do not constitute true theology.

IV. We say therefore that human nature, though brought to so great a ruin by sin and for the most part reduced to the mere residue of itself, is still furnished with the relics of this theology. That God exists, and that he is such as the very reason of truth requires him to be — namely, best by reason of virtue, greatest by reason of benefits — this does not escape it. This knowledge it reckons to itself as received from God the Creator. That law and reason which teaches and proclaims this truth still has force in our nature. That there is some law of nature is the voice of nature itself — that is, it bears testimony to itself. But wherever there is a law, it is necessary that some lawgiver be acknowledged; the author of the law of nature can be none other than the author of nature. This law, therefore, teaches that God

exists and is to be worshipped, and that right and justice are to be observed among men; as Scripture also testifies, Ps. 145:15; 141:7-9; Job 12:7-10; 37-39; Isa. 40:12; Matt. 6:26; Acts 17:26-28. The first dictate of this law concerning God is, Rom. 1:19: Τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς [What can be known of God is manifest in them] — that is, among the Gentiles, who have been given over to nature alone as their instructor. Now this τὸ γνωστὸν [knowable thing] of God is manifest not merely among them — that is, in some of them, namely the philosophers — but in them, in all of them, that is, through ἔμφυτον θεογνωσίαν [innate knowledge of God]. The same apostle also charges all men alike with having held down ἀλήθειαν [the truth] (concerning the nature and attributes of God, that is) ἐν ἀδικίᾳ [in unrighteousness], v. 18. But those who hold divine truth unjustly do retain some divine truth. Furthermore, this law inscribed in the hearts of all is said to be so victorious over all vices and prejudices that it affirms even the most wicked and profligate of all bipeds to be not ignorant of the judgment of God upon sinners to be punished, v. 32. But those who acknowledge the right of God to punish sins cannot be ignorant of the same right of his demanding obedience, nor of God himself. Secondly, the same law exacts from all the moral obedience owed to God. Having shown that God exists, it teaches that he is to be worshipped: Rom. 2:14, 15: Ὅταν γὰρ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα (the written law, that is, such as was given to the Jews) φύσει (yet, by the force of the law inscribed in their hearts) τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῇ (what the written moral law commands), οὗτοι νόμον μὴ ἔχοντες (that is, written, or revealed immediately by God in any other manner) ἐαυτοῖς εἰσι νόμος (because namely they have that law innate in themselves); οἵτινες ἐνδείκνυνται τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν [For when the Gentiles who do not have the law by

nature do the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts]. “The work of the law” — that is, what the law effects; an effect like itself — they show to be written or engraved in their hearts; that is, they have a law implanted, an ἐκτύπωμα [impression] or copy of the written law. It is necessary that this should answer to the written law precisely. But we know what the written law teaches and in whose name and by whose authority. And the law which those who lack it have for themselves is ἀντίστροφος [correspondent] to it. Since therefore all men without exception have this law, inasmuch as it is of nature and from nature equally common to all; and since this law expresses that divinely revealed law which commands and forbids in the name of God; it is evident that all those who are by no means capable of living a life free from the authority of this law cannot but have some knowledge of God and acknowledge the moral obedience owed to him.

V. Of this truth, also conscience (as they say) is a thousand witnesses. Hence, the apostle goes on to complete the remaining argument: Συμμαρτυρούσης αὐτῶν τῆς συνειδήσεως, καὶ μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων [Their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts in the meantime accusing or else excusing one another]. That conscience is man’s judgment concerning himself, with respect to the judgment of a superior, the thing itself proclaims; hence βροτοῖς ἅπασι συνείδησις Θεός [for all mortals conscience is God], in Menander. But he who is of such ὑπεροχῇ [preeminence] as to have dominion and to exercise judgment in the hearts of men, is God. The natural κατηγορία [accusation] or ἀπολογία [defence] which is performed by the help of conscience in every man, therefore has

regard to none but God. But it is altogether impossible for anyone to wrest all power from this judge, who in all persons discharges the office of God. How much would a Cain, a Judas, Neros, Caligulas, and even lesser monsters of crime, have paid to be free from its scourges? This condition of human nature must be acknowledged to be placed outside all the ways and reasonings of our counsel and will. None of the wise number conscience among those things they contend are ἐφ' ἡμῖν [in our power]. Those who would too eagerly make man absolute lord over himself in everything converted conscience into Furies, Alastors, Eumenides — torturers of their own right. Let sinners be secure as to their condition from the judgment of men, or unsolicitous of the ferocity of present things; let them despise to such a degree the extreme hazards of life and the sum of temporal things that they voluntarily inflict on themselves the ultimate penalty — this tribunal, when they are manifestly guilty of crime, they cannot flee. We have argued this matter elsewhere.

VI. But let the matter speak for itself. Do we not all experience the human mind to be so prone to giving assent to this truth — namely, that God exists — so eager to run into its embrace, without which it would not merely be deprived of its dignity and honour and cast into the lowest order, but would even be ignorant of itself, that when the terms of which the proposition consists are spelled out, it is not permissible to dissent from it? Whether this happens by a certain impulse and instinct of nature — by which argument reason is both itself its own argument and sufficient for itself — or whether it employs the swiftest discursus and does not perceive that it has been reasoning until it has already with the whole consent of its mind yielded to the proposition in question: experience testifies that the human mind rests immutably in this truth. Plotinus speaks admirably to this effect, *Enneads*,

III, lib. 7, speaking of eternity, which he does not distinguish from God himself: Τὸν αἰῶνα, he says, καὶ τὸν χρόνον ἕτερον λέγοντες ἑκάτερον εἶναι, καὶ τὸν μὲν περὶ τὸν αἰῶνα εἶναι φύσιν, τὸν δὲ χρόνον περὶ τὸ γινόμενον· καὶ τὸ δὲ τὸ πᾶν αὐτόθεν μὲν καὶ ὥσπερ ταῖς τῆς ἐννοίας ἀμφοτέραις ἐπιβολαῖς ἐναργές τε παρ' αὐτοῖς περὶ αὐτῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἔχειν πάθος νομίζομεν λέγοντες τε αἰεὶ καὶ παρὰ πάντα ὀνομάζομεν [Saying that eternity and time are each different from one another, and that the former pertains to everlasting nature while time pertains to that which comes into being; and that the whole of this we suppose to carry within our souls, as it were spontaneously and by both approaches of thought together, a certain manifest impression concerning these things, as we continually speak of them and name them on every occasion]. So be it; let there be impious men who would too earnestly wish God not to exist, indeed, who have dared openly to profess that they believe God does not exist; but since this supreme impiety and wickedness never fails to be accompanied by every other kind of villainy, who will persuade me that those impure scoundrels who sustain themselves in boldly calumniating human nature — with everything that partakes of it resisting — are not also lying shamelessly about themselves? Whatever the case may be, what madness would it be to give credence to three or four disgraces of human nature, not only against the constant and consenting voice of all good men, but of nature itself? “For he alone saw first that the gods exist, because nature itself had impressed the notion of them in the minds of all. For what nation is there, or what kind of men, which does not have, without instruction, some anticipation of the gods? which Epicurus calls πρόληψιν [preconception] — that is, a certain previously conceived form of a thing in the mind, without which nothing can be understood, or inquired into, or

disputed,” says Velleius in Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, Bk. I, ch. 16; and Seneca, *Epistle* 17: “We conclude that the gods exist, among other reasons, from the fact that the opinion of the gods is implanted in all, and there is no nation anywhere so abandoned against laws and customs as not to believe in some gods.” That there is some God, Δόξαν καὶ ἐπίνοιαν κοινήν τοῦ σύμπαντος ἀνθρωπίνου γένους ὁμοίως μὲν Ἑλλήνων, ὁμοίως δὲ βαρβάρων ἀναγκαίαν καὶ ἔμφυτον ἐν παντὶ τῷ λόγῳ γινομένην κατὰ φύσιν [is an opinion and conception common to the whole human race alike of Greeks and alike of barbarians, necessary and innate in every being that comes to possess reason by nature], says Dio of Prusa in his *Orations*; and hence Aristotle forbids entering into disputation with those who doubt whether the gods are to be worshipped, since this ought to be placed beyond controversy by the dictate of right reason. Οἱ μὲν, he says, ἀποροῦντες πότερον δεῖ τοὺς Θεοὺς τιμᾶν, καὶ τοὺς γονεῖς ἀγαπᾶν ἢ οὐ, κολάσεως δέονται [Those who are in doubt whether it is necessary to honour the gods and to love one’s parents, need punishment], *Topics*, Bk. I, ch. 9 — they are to be compelled by penalties, not convinced by arguments. The whole chorus of the wise, all of them, are of one and the same mind in this matter. The Philosopher conjoins the worship of God and love of parents, which it is agreed come from nature. Justin calls these notions σπέρματα ἀληθείας παρὰ πᾶσι [seeds of truth among all], *Apology* II. “No soul is without fault, because no soul is without the seed of good,” says Tertullian, *On the Soul*. That men for the most part name the gods, assenting to πολυθεότητι [polytheism], is to be ascribed to corrupt traditions and prejudices prevailing against the native disposition of human nature: so Lactantius — “What pardon for their impiety can those hope for, who do not acknowledge the worship of him whom it is unlawful for any man to be wholly ignorant

of? For even when they swear, when they make wishes, when they give thanks, they name not Jupiter or many gods, but God; so truly does truth itself burst forth from unwilling breasts, compelled by nature.” And it is most true that in the midst of idolatries, this native and primordial light of reason so effectively asserted itself that it compelled most who were the most profuse in idol-worship to confess one God, supreme and greatest: Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ τὰ μάλιστα ὁ πρῶτος καὶ μέγιστος ἐκεῖνος Θεὸς ὁ τεκτινόμενος ἡμᾶς [And therefore especially that first and greatest God who fashioned us], in Dio, *History*, Bk. 56, concerning Tiberius Caesar. Aristotle, in his work *On the World*, adds the reason for πολωνυμίας [the multiplicity of names]: Εἷς, he says, δὲ ὢν, πολωνυμὸς ἐστι, κατωνομαζόμενος τοῖς πάθεσι πᾶσιν ἅπερ αὐτὸς νεοχμεῖ [Being one, he has many names, being named by all the effects which he himself introduces]. Julian bears distinguished testimony to this πρόληψιν [preconception] of human nature concerning God and the worship of him: Πάντες, he says, ἀδιδάκτους εἶναι θεῖόν τι πεπεῖσμεθα, καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο ἀφορᾶν, ἐπ’ αὐτό τε οἶμαι σπεύδειν· οὕτω διατιθέμενοι τὰς ψυχὰς πρὸς αὐτὸ ὥσπερ οἶμαι πρὸς τὸ φῶς τὰ βλέποντα [We are all persuaded, without being taught, that some divinity exists, and that we must look toward it and, I believe, hasten to it; our souls being disposed toward it just as, I believe, those endowed with sight are disposed toward the light]. Hence, that ancient formula in use among those placed in dangers and perils of appealing against the injuries of others, that the gods exist. It was the voice of nature crying to the God of nature: “While each man for himself clamours that the gods exist and do not neglect human affairs,” Livy, Bk. III. And, “There is a heavenly power; there is great Jupiter,” the same, Bk. VIII. So also it was with Sulla fearing the treachery of Bocchus’s son Volux, in Sallust’s *Jugurthine War*; and in

Plautus' *Captivi*: "There is indeed a God, who both hears and sees what we do." Cyprian admirably said in his work *On the Vanity of Idols*: "This is the sum of the fault: to be unwilling to acknowledge him whom you cannot be ignorant of." Eusebius also expounds this opinion admirably, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, Bk. II, ch. 9: Φύσει μὲν οὖν καὶ αὐτοδιδάκτοις ἐννοίαις μᾶλλον δὲ θεοδιδάκτοις, καλὸν τε καὶ ὠφέλιμον τυγχάνειν τὸ σημαῖνον τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ προσηγορίαν τε καὶ οὐσίαν, πάντες γὰρ ἄνθρωποι κοινοῖς λογισμοῖς προειλήφεσαν τοῦ τῶν ὅλων Δημιουργοῦ, τοῦτο πάσῃ λογικῇ καὶ νοερᾷ ψυχῇ φυσικαῖς ἐννοίαις ὑποσπείραντος [By nature therefore and by self-taught conceptions — or rather by conceptions taught by God — that which signifies the name and essence of God is found to be something excellent and most useful; for all men by common reasonings have had a prior conception of the Creator of all things, who has sown this into every rational and intelligent soul by natural notions]: "That excellent and above all useful thing which signifies the name and essence of God, led by nature itself and by notions impressed upon the soul from itself — or rather divinely inspired — no one fails to understand; for all peoples by a certain common sense of reason have received this, since the same Maker of this universe has sown it into every soul endowed with reason and intelligence by certain natural thoughts."¹ So he. And Tertullian, *Against Marcion*: "We define God to be first known by nature, then further known by doctrine." And in the *Apology*: "Do you wish us to demonstrate it from the testimony of the soul itself" (that God exists and is one) "which, although pressed by the prison of the body, although limited by bad institutions, although enervated by lusts and concupiscences, although enslaved to false gods, yet when it comes to itself — as from debauch, as from sleep, as from some sickness — and suffers its own sanity, it names God; this alone, because the

one true God is properly good and great, and what God has given, is the voice of all. It also attests him as judge. God sees, and I commend it to God, and God will repay me. O testimony of the soul naturally Christian! Finally, when pronouncing these things it looks not toward the Capitol but toward heaven. For it knows the seat of the living God; from him and from thence it descended.”

VII. Moreover, as most of the wise had noted these κοινὰς ἐννοίας [common notions] or προλήψεις [preconceptions], so also they had ascertained that force of conscience which we have set out. Menander: Βροτοῖς ἅπασι συνείδησις Θεός [For all mortals conscience is God]. Speaking of Tiberius, *Annals*, Bk. VI, ch. 6, Cornelius Tacitus: “To such a degree had his own crimes and villanies turned even upon himself for his punishment. Nor was the most excellent of the wise men wrong in affirming, when he used to say that if the minds of tyrants were laid open, they could be seen lacerated and beaten; since just as bodies are torn by lashes, so is the mind by savagery, lust, and evil counsels. Indeed, neither fortune nor solitude protected Tiberius from being compelled to confess the torments of his breast and his own punishments.” Fear arising from the consciousness of sins, Cicero calls “the most savage master”; and “the wicked,” he says, “are harassed and pursued by Furies, not with burning torches as in the fables, but with the anguish of conscience and the torment of fraud,” *On the Laws*, Bk. I. Tiberius, continually tormented by that anguish, who had rejected all remedies — both the commission of fresh crimes, and withdrawal from the company of men, and the fear of vengeance — could not refrain from, wearied of himself, publicly confessing in a letter to the senate what torments he had endured in his breast. “What shall I write to you, conscript fathers,” he said, “or how shall

I write, or what in the world shall I not write at this time? May the gods and goddesses destroy me more miserably than I feel myself daily perishing, if I know,” Suetonius, *Tiberius*, ch. 61. Otho also, after the nefarious crime of slaying Galba, was so terrified that he attempted by every kind of piacular rite to propitiate the shade of Galba; according to the same witness. The Satirist speaks admirably:

“... *Whose mind is cold ... the breast sweats with silent guilt.*” — Juvenal, *Satire XI*.

And again:

“*But why do you think these men have escaped, whom a mind conscious of dire deeds holds amazed, and beats with a deaf blow, while an inward torturer shakes the secret scourge? They carry night and day in their breast a punishment far more severe than any which the stern Caelicus or Rhadamanthus invented — their own witness.*” — *Satire XIII*.

The Historian presents a striking example in Jugurtha, after the perpetration of innumerable crimes: “Nor after that,” he says, “was any day or night quiet for Jugurtha; nor did he sufficiently trust any place, or any mortal, or any time. He feared citizens and enemies alike; looked about him on all sides and started at every noise; often rested at night in different places, contrary to the dignity of a king; was sometimes roused from sleep, took up arms and caused a tumult; being so agitated by a certain panic and frenzy.” — Sallust, *Jugurthine War*.

And this is the first foundation, or the first part, of natural theology in the corrupt and sinful state; from which, whoever has not ceased to be a man cannot wholly cease to be a theologian.

VIII. Furthermore: from the contemplation of the works of God — both of creation and of providence — this residual knowledge of God can daily

be fostered and augmented; for this theology, such as it is, rests not on human nature alone but on the whole world.

IX. First, nothing can be said more expressly to this purpose than what the Psalmist has: Ps. 19:1-7, “The heavens declare the glory of the mighty God; and the expanse shows forth the works of his hands. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge,” etc. This Psalm celebrates a twofold principle — or rather medium — of the revelation of God: namely, his works and his word. In comparing these with one another, it prefers the latter to the former in salvific effects (which indeed it ascribes entirely to this alone). But the former it demonstrates to declare the glory of God throughout the whole circle of the earth. The revealed matter mentioned here is the glory of God, and also the power which he put forth in the creation of all things; that is, as the apostle expresses it, Ἀΐδιος αὐτοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεϊότης [his eternal power and divinity], Rom. 1:20. The media of this revelation are the heavens and the sun, and the days and nights succeeding one another as they revolve in their circuit. The manner of this revelation is variously expressed: they are said to declare, to show forth, to utter, to manifest, to speak. All of these are metaphorical, but they sufficiently indicate efficacy toward the proposed end. Added in the way of circumstance is the fact that this revelation is catholic — extended, that is, to all the extremities of the inhabited world. The Psalmist does indeed add that this doctrine of the works of creation and of the providence of God is not sufficient for anyone rightly to know God and holily to worship him, since he attributes those effects entirely to his word, or to the doctrine contained in holy Scripture. But, meanwhile, he expressly affirms that the essence, glory, and power of God are so revealed through it that all the

inhabitants of the circle of the earth may thereby learn both that God exists and that he is infinitely separated from all the idols of the pagans.

X. The apostle confirms the same truth no less clearly at Rom. 1:18-20: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness; because that which can be known of God is manifest in them; for God has made it manifest to them. For his invisible things from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood through the things that are made — namely his eternal power and divinity — so that they are without excuse.” I am unwilling to entangle myself much with those things about these words that are controverted outside our present purpose. The putrid invention of the Socinians, twisting the words of the twentieth verse to the doctrine of the gospel, has long since been exposed. For the rest, the thing revealed is in general called τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ [what can be known of God]; specifically, his eternal power, divinity, and wrath, or vindicative justice. The media of revelation are the works of God — the things he made, namely the works of creation which have existed since the world was founded, and the works of providence which still operate from heaven. The manner is through a certain disclosure of these things innate to them, and the consideration of the mind which they indelibly occasion. This revelation attains through these media such a degree as to be called a manifestation of the things revealed among those to whom it is made. The end is ἀναπολογησία [inexcusability] — not absolute inexcusability indeed, but with respect to the use of the benefit of this revelation. Whether moreover τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ is rendered by “what can be known of God” or by “what ought to be known,” the matter comes to the same thing; for it is not said absolutely, but with respect to that manifestation which comes through

the works of creation and of the providence of God — from which it can be known that God exists, that he is eternal, omnipotent, and just; and this ought to be known from these works; nor does the apostle extend that τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ [what can be known of God] further in this place. To be sure, those things which are natural to God, and necessary in respect of the exercise once the object is posited, whatever they may be, fall no less exactly under this manifestation than those of which express mention is made. But those whose exercise, all objects being posited, depends on the most free will of God — such as grace and mercy toward sinners — stand on a different footing. For of these there is no revelation except in Christ, which we have demonstrated more fully elsewhere.

XI. Nor less illustrious are those passages in which the Holy Spirit himself uses this very argument and proves from the works of God that God exists, that he is known, and that he ought to be worshipped. And who will prevent us from being wise according to the dictate of the Holy Spirit? For the rest, Ps. 8; 145:8-15; 147:4-6; Job 12:7-10; 37-39; Isa. 40:12; Matt. 6:26. This argument is pressed at length either by God himself or by the prophets in his name. To dwell on all of them would be too long and foreign to our purpose. Let us briefly run through two arguments of the same apostle to this end; the one at Acts 14:15-17, the other at ch. 17:24-28. The first runs as follows: “Sirs, why do you do these things? We also are men of like passions with you, announcing to you that you should turn from these vain things to the living God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are in them. Who yet did not leave himself without witness, doing good and giving us from heaven rains and appointed seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” These are the words of Paul and Barnabas defending themselves against the impious worship of the

Lystrans. First, they teach that the worship itself and the object of worship which they had devised for themselves are μάταια [vain] — that is, foolish and empty; then they designate the true God, both by the attribute of life and by the effect of his works. Namely, the living God is he who made heaven and earth. And they prove that he has borne to himself through the works of his providence such a testimony concerning himself that all could thereby know him and easily distinguish him from vain, dead, and worthless idols — what could be said more plainly? Οὐκ ἀμάρτυρον ἑαυτὸν ἀφῆκεν [He did not leave himself without witness] — that is, he testified both that he exists and that he governs this world by his providence; and this, by the works of his providence. Not indeed that he bore this testimony to himself to the end that men should savingly know him and be converted; for how could he seriously have intended this, when in the meantime he willingly permitted them to continue in their own ways? But only to this end: that those who, spurning him, attached themselves to vain idols, should be ἀναπολόγητοι [without excuse].

XII. The apostle proceeds by the same mode of argument at Acts 17:24-29. This περικοπὴν [passage] of the apostolic speech, however, since it must be discussed at more length by us when we come to treat of the sufficiency of this revelation for salvation, we have not thought fit to expound further at present. And these teachers — that is, the works of God — the wise men celebrated even among the nations acknowledged. Οὐρανὸς οὐδέποτε παύεται διδάσκων ἄνθρώπους [Heaven never ceases to teach men], says Plato in the *Epinomis* appended to the *Laws*. “And who is so blind that when he has looked up to the heavens he does not perceive that there are gods?” as Cicero in his *Response to Aulus*. And Zaleucus entered into his laws: Τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὴν χώραν πάντας πρῶτον

πεπεισθαι χρὴ καὶ νομίζειν θεοὺς εἶναι, καὶ ἀναβλέποντας εἰς οὐρανὸν, καὶ τὸν κόσμον, καὶ τὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς διακόσμησιν, καὶ τάξιν, οὐ γὰρ τύχης, οὐδ' ἀνθρώπων εἶναι δημιουργήματα [All who inhabit the city and the country must first be persuaded and believe that the gods exist; and looking up to heaven and to the world and to the order and arrangement in them — for these are not the works of chance or of men], etc. In keeping with these, Tatianus: Τοῦτο, he says, διὰ τῆς ποιήσεως αὐτοῦ ἴσμεν, καὶ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ τὸ ἀόρατον τοῖς ποιήμασι καταλαμβανόμεθα [This we know through his creation, and the invisible things of his power we comprehend through his works]. See Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertation* I; Maimonides, *More Nevukhim*, Pt. I, ch. 34. It cannot indeed be denied that all those things which by their nature lead to the knowledge of God and some sense of his attributes are turned by many in a different direction and interpreted otherwise than they ought. We have seen most frequently that none are more inclined to atheism than those who profess to track down by every footprint the knowledge of all things — especially those which are hidden and concealed by nature — for they abuse the contemplation of all things, careless and negligent of their God, merely in order to satisfy the innate curiosity of the mind in considering the connections and knots of secondary causes. So also those who, over a long series of years, have pondered the vicissitudes of things, it frequently happens that so far from thereby understanding and fearing the πολυποικίλην [manifold] providence of God, they slide by their native vice — the blindness of the mind and the malice of the heart — into atheism. Hence arose the proverb that no old man fears Jupiter; but these vices of certain men are not to be ascribed to human nature itself. The words of Aristotle as cited by Cicero in *On the Nature of the Gods*, Bk. II, are excellent — from which work they are taken it is

uncertain, for they nowhere appear in Aristotle himself: “If there were beings,” he says, “who had always dwelt underground, in good and well-lit dwellings adorned with statues and pictures and furnished with all the things with which those who are considered blessed abound, and yet had never gone up above the earth — but had received by report and hearing that there is a certain divine power and force of gods — and then at some time the jaws of the earth were opened and they were able to escape from those hidden seats into these regions which we inhabit and come out; when they suddenly saw the earth and the seas and the sky, and perceived the magnitude of the clouds and the force of the winds, and looked upon the sun and recognised both its magnitude and beauty and also its power in creating the day by diffusing light through the whole sky; and when night darkened the earth, they saw the whole sky adorned and studded with stars, and the varying lights of the moon both waxing and waning, and the risings and settings of all these, and their fixed and unchangeable courses through all eternity — when they saw these things, they would surely judge both that the gods exist and that these great things are the works of the gods.” To which may be added very many of the things which Cicero himself argues in that same place. The sum is: that some excellent and eternal nature exists and is to be wondered at and admired by the human race, the beauty of the world and the order of heavenly things compels us to confess; these are the words of the same Cicero in the second book *On Divination*.

1. Since Claude’s translations of the Greek and Latin quotations of Eusebius are slightly different, we have retained them.

CHAPTER VI

The sufficiency of natural theology for salvation is examined; it is proved by various arguments to be insufficient — The doctrine of this theology is imperfect, and so too is its habit — A digression on universal grace and the will of God to save those who lack the word.

I. Since such has been the knowledge of God, and resting upon such media, as has prevailed and still prevails among sinful men destitute of supernatural revelation, let us see further whether by its force and help those who have been or are imbued with it could attain their ultimate end, such that it might still seem to merit the name of true theology. There can be a twofold sufficiency, with respect to God and his supreme judgment upon men, of any doctrine: one with respect to ἀναπολογησίαν [rendering men without excuse], the other with respect to salvation. The apostle ascribes the first to this knowledge, Rom. 1:20; the latter we assert it to be unequal to. For —

First, all those ages in which the greatest part of mortals lived destitute of heavenly revelation are called χρόνοι ἀγνοίας [times of ignorance], Acts

17:30. These God, in a manner, overlooked by conniving at them, permitting the nations to walk in their own ways, Acts 14:16, not announcing to them that they should repent. Through that ignorance, they were all universally ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ [alienated from the life of God], Eph. 4:18. So that, with respect to special grace and love, there was no communication between them and God.

Secondly, all that knowledge of which men in that state were capable of becoming partakers pertained to the law; but to whom the law itself does not suffice, nor can the knowledge of the law suffice — especially a knowledge that is imperfect; nor does an imperfect knowledge of the most absolute and perfect law profit a whit with respect to its end. But the apostle shows at length that the law itself is unequal to this matter — namely, that one should please God — at Rom. 3 and 4.

Thirdly, χωρὶς πίστεως ἀδύνατον εὐαρεστῆσαι [without faith it is impossible to please him], Heb. 11:6; but ἡ πίστις ἐξ ἀκοῆς, ἡ δὲ ἀκοὴ διὰ ῥήματος Θεοῦ [faith is from hearing, and hearing through the word of God], Rom. 10:17.

Fourthly, Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ, ἵνα γινώσκωσι (homines) πατέρα τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν Θεὸν, καὶ ὃν ἀπέστειλεν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν [This is eternal life, that they should know the Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent], John 17:3. Καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἄλλῳ οὐδενὶ ἡ σωτηρία [And there is salvation in no other], Acts 4:12. But since the promise of Christ was not made until after the fall — in which promise the mercy of God toward the human race first appeared — and all the knowledge of God which men have apart from special revelation is only that portion of it which the first parents possessed in the state of integrity, it

is altogether impossible that anything concerning Christ, of whom all knowledge is ἐξ ἀκοῆς [from hearing], should flow from it.

Fifthly, this entire knowledge, whatever its extent, served only the covenant of works; from which covenant, once made void through sin, it could direct men to no obedience except from fear of punishment; but when anyone “performs the precept from fear of punishment and not from love of justice, he does not perform in his mind what he performs in deed, and therefore is inwardly guilty of sin, however innocent he may seem to himself,” as Augustine aptly puts it.

II. There are therefore two things in the theology of fallen man: first, the internal light still surviving, which is, as it were, the faculty or δύνάμις [power] of theology; and second, the revelation of God through the works of creation and providence, which is theology as it were considered objectively, or its doctrine. To neither of these, with respect to the ultimate end, dare we ascribe theological efficacy for salvation. For we are obliged to charge the first with imperfection both with respect to the doctrine it reveals — which, not exceeding the compass of the law as we said, contains nothing related to the knowledge of Christ — and also with respect to the manner of perceiving divine things by which its efficacy is circumscribed; which, since the minds of men are profoundly beset with darkness and blindness, cannot be spiritual. To the other also we ascribe the same imperfections — for the same reasons — since it neither exhibits a ὑποτύπωσις [sketch or outline] of all absolutely necessary doctrine, nor puts itself forth with that efficacy by which saving light can be infused into a blind intellect; for Jesus Christ alone brought life and incorruption to light, and that through the gospel, 2 Tim. 1:10.

III. Those who maintain that the revelation of the divine mind — and accordingly of our obedience — through the works of creation and providence rests upon a general will of God to save all men, are besides being compelled to ascribe to God useless desires, imperfect purposes, and an inefficacious intention which he either will not or cannot render efficacious — a mercy never and nowhere exerting itself — also employ distinctions of such a kind and so restrict their assertion within such limits, that they are under the necessity of confessing that this revelation has never been, nor could have been, of salutary use to any mortal whatever. For just as that separation of this revelation from those illusions by which the prince of darkness has in wonderful ways made sport of the wretched little men bound to himself — a separation which they maintain to be necessary — cannot take place without the light of the word; so neither can that removal of darkness, blindness, and prejudices from the minds of men — without which it is necessary that all revelation should be rendered vain — be procured without the special assistance of the Holy Spirit.

DIGRESSION ON UNIVERSAL GRACE

A Dissertation on the Sufficiency of Natural Theology in the State of Sin for Salvation

I. Since there is not the same opinion among all on these matters, it is our pleasure to take them up from somewhat further back, and to subject the opinion of certain most learned men to examination ὡς ἐν παρόδῳ [in passing]. That this manifestation of God is not only sufficient for salvation for sinful men, but that sinful men are themselves endowed with that power by which they can make such use of this manifestation as ultimately to obtain salvation in very deed — this was once contended by the Pelagians, and almost the whole company of the Arminians have gone over to their opinion. To engage with them at present is not our intention. They have in the writings of ancient and modern authors enough to exercise themselves for long enough. Some part of this controversy has lately begun to be agitated among brethren. The projectile was pleased to be called universal grace. And it seems that the hinge of this strife turns not only upon truth but among some upon brotherly charity as well. Such is the manner of living

among Christians, unmindful of gentleness — indeed of human frailty. Neither the duty exacted by the nature of evangelical grace, nor the mercy due to the weak human condition, so that we may bear with equanimity those who are separated from us in opinion on minor matters, promotes anything. We confess that the best of men know only ἐκ μέρους [in part]; we are unwilling to acknowledge that any of the saints are so perfectly transformed through the renewal of the mind into the light of God as to be overshadowed by no remnants of darkness, liable to no errors. Yet each thinks this ought to be said of all others, but not of himself. For when it comes to the matter itself and examination, there is no man who does not comport himself as if he were the possessor in good faith of all truth to such a degree that it is scarcely fair for anyone to enjoy this common light who dares to differ from him. Now the difference between the μὶορφωσιν [form] of truth and its δύναμιν [power] is this: the former illuminates the mind only with the knowledge of what is true and as it were compels it to give assent to evangelical doctrine; but the latter moreover also stamps its impress upon the whole soul and renders the mind itself in all things conformable to it.

II. It is not unknown to any learned man who cares to know the affairs of religion and of the churches of Christ, what wranglings and quarrels have not long since occurred between certain learned men in the Netherlands and some of better repute in France over this matter. To recount the occasions, origin, and progress of that controversy as it has been agitated among them for some years now — since it has been more than sufficiently published abroad from the exercises, observations, apologies, and vindications published on either side — would be nothing other than to waste one's effort. For no one can spend his study more unprofitably than in producing

into the light what is of itself too well known, and what it were to be wished had never been known at all. I have not yet been so wearied of peace or of brotherly charity as to be willing to thrust myself importunately and rashly into the middle of a conflict which is agitated by various emotions of the soul arising from things that are in reality ἔξω τοῦ πράγματος [beside the point]; I have other things to do. But if I set forth candidly what I myself think concerning that part of this controversy which is not other than our present undertaking — indeed so situated that unless doubt about it is removed, I can scarcely safely proceed along the road laid out — without any desire on my part to contradict anyone, I hope it will be grievous or troublesome to no one.

III. I could have wished that these most learned men had entered upon this arena with greater gentleness and zeal for Christian modesty, and with less pride (may the word be pardoned) and φαντασία [vanity]. For I fear that with impartial judges free from partisan zeal, those excuses will not suffice which they will perhaps put forward — excuses which they could have dispensed with at the least possible cost to the opinion they hold to be true, or to their reputation. For what of it? Is it of equal moment with what counsel and what disposition of mind we approach the handling of sacred things? Do we believe that the Holy Spirit — without whose special help and guidance we can neither begin anything piously nor bring anything to a happy conclusion (for that something which we appear to accomplish by our own powers is in reality nothing) — is willing to mingle himself with our minds when the affections of our souls are exacerbated, or when our minds are impeded by anger, hatred, revenge, or desire for fame, by which he is most heavily burdened? Ought we not to strive with all our strength lest, having announced truth to others, we ourselves be, with respect to its

δύναμιν [power], ἁδόκιμοι [reprobate]? Since it is also most certain that no one can ever rightly perceive divine truth as it is in Jesus, unless he has denied himself from the bottom of his heart and has laid aside to the utmost of his power all pride and all prejudice — how can we expect that others will be taught that truth by us, the power of which we do not so experience in ourselves as to have been delivered over into its τύπον [pattern]? For it is the character of all evangelical doctrine flooding our minds with its native light to render us meek and humble, and most like to its Author — namely that wisdom which is from above: “First indeed it is pure, then peaceable, equitable, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without disputation and not at all feigned,” James 3:17.

IV. But those who come from the other party would bring brethren who differ from them into danger of peace, or of reputation with their churches — let them do so without me as their rival. To deprive learned and pious men, ministers of churches, and rectors of schools, of the freedom of their own judgment in controversies of this kind; and to desire to bring them under the yoke of prescribed opinions throughout the whole exercise of their office — would be nothing other than to introduce an intolerable tyranny into the church of Christ. Nor indeed would I expect either any notable progress of truth, or an οἰκοδομὴν ἐν ἀγάπῃ [edification in love] of those professing the truth, where the dispensers of the divine word are compelled to be the slaves of another’s arbitrary will in all their work. Neither the rationale of the institution of the evangelical ministry, nor the nature of the gospel or of faith itself, nor the distinctions of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, nor brotherly charity, nor the edification of the church, nor the condition of the light whereof we have been made partakers in this life, nor innumerable divine precepts, nor the guidance of grace which we

experience, will bear the imposition of such a burden. But how greatly that opinion of those who aspire to dominion over brethren — that no division of opinions ought to be tolerated in matters which do not immediately pertain to the foundation of faith — has already long since afflicted the Christian cause almost everywhere, is too well known to need our narration.

V. These things being premised, let us subject to consideration that thesis which some oppose to our position concerning the total insufficiency of corrupt natural theology for salvation. It is this: that God wills adults who lack his word to be saved. Whether those who soberly weigh within themselves what it is to be saved and what it is to lack the Word of God will readily give assent to this thesis, I greatly doubt. Let partisan zeal be laid aside for a moment; let consideration of that connection which this thesis has with other opinions be set aside; the matter will be plain. Let the disputants only take care lest they contradict by their syllogisms that communion which they themselves have graciously obtained with God through Jesus Christ in matters of eternal salvation — and perhaps these contests will be quieted.

VI. Now the will of God concerning the salvation of those who are to be saved has regard either to the end and event — and is called intention, purpose, or decree — or to the means which those ought to use who would be saved, and is called a precept. But in what sense God wills those to be saved who in fact will never be saved, whom he willingly permits to walk in their own ways, in which it is altogether impossible for them to be saved, whom he does not and will not call to repentance through that medium through which alone it is possible for anyone to be called to true repentance — that, I confess, is beyond my dull understanding. For he who grants only those means of salvation which can reveal neither who is the author of

salvation, nor through whom it is to be obtained, nor what that salvation is, seems rather to be said to be unwilling than willing for the salvation of those to whom he grants them. If this controversy is to be settled by referring it to those who are furnished with spiritual αἰσθήσει [perception], and who, relying on the help and assistance of all salvific means — even of the Holy Spirit himself poured out πλουσίως [richly] through Jesus Christ — know what it is to serve God in the midst of temptations, so as at last to obtain salvation by his ineffable grace; placed outside the ropes of contention, the estimation of it would be easy.

VII. Whoever would survey in his mind those parts of the world which are still without the word, and would contemplate what is the condition of the wretched men spending their days in them, with respect to eternal salvation, will without doubt remain suspended in his mind regarding that will of God which certain learned men extol. I know they will contend that their most dreadful condition is to be ascribed solely to their own wickedness; nor do I absolutely deny that this ought to be so. But I deny that their wickedness exceeds that with which all those are naturally imbued to whom, because he wills them to be saved, God has granted his word. In what sense, therefore, God is to be said to will the salvation of those who will never be saved, and to whom he is unwilling to supply the means necessary for salvation, is a matter too entangled to admit of easy resolution.

VIII. Some assert: “The word can be preached to them, but it is not done through our negligence and sloth.” That the gospel can be preached even to those to whom it is not preached, no one doubts. For what contradiction seems to arise from the matter itself? But that what God has determined from eternity should not be done can be done with respect to the event —

this has not yet been proved. That it is not actually preached to more, nor was formerly preached, Scripture ascribes to the will of God, Ps. 147:19, 20; Matt. 11:26; Acts 16:6, 7. It does not appear to come about thus from our negligence and sloth. Even if it were so, the difficulty would not be removed. For no one doubts that God can take away that sloth from us if he will. But, except where there is duty, negligence and sloth have no place; and all our duty depends on the will of God calling us to duty. But how will they show that we are called by God to the duty of preaching the gospel to those who have hitherto lacked it in the various parts of the world? Let us grant to learned men that there is no need of any ecclesiastical mission for discharging that office. For who is furnished with that catholic authority so as to send others in that way? But I should like to know what that providence of God is which makes us so certain of his will that we can take up that work in faith, or who are those who are furnished with the gifts for duly accomplishing it. I confess that we are all too negligent and slothful in administering that province in the work of the gospel which God has graciously committed to us; καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα τίς ἱκανός [and who is sufficient for these things]? But truly, that the charge of our sloth extends so far as to make it imputable to us also that the gospel has not been preached to the inhabitants of America — to me, at any rate, free from all the heat of disputations — is not credible.

IX. But it is our pleasure to look more deeply into the opinion of these most learned men. First, therefore, they concede “that no pagan has ever made use of, nor could have made use of, those evidences of God set before him by nature or by the works of providence, in such a way as to repent and obtain salvation apart from the preaching of the word.” So speak certain most celebrated men; and thus they show that they differ most widely in

this matter from all the Pelagians, most of the Arminians, and also from certain petulant abusers among us here. And why indeed should not the estimation of the whole of this controversy be made here? Have we nothing better or greater from ourselves than to waste time disputing whether that can happen which never has happened, is not going to happen, and which God has purposed within himself should never happen? But the matter is otherwise, as we shall see.

X. They add, therefore, “that such aids have been given to the pagans as lead, in and of themselves, to some degree of saving knowledge.” So speaks a most learned man of great name in theology. But every degree of saving knowledge is itself saving. And all saving knowledge consists in the knowledge of the covenant of grace. Unless, therefore, that degree of saving knowledge which can be obtained through these aids is more plainly set out, I shall be free to profess that I neither grasp nor understand that degree. Even the smallest degree of saving knowledge requires saving renewal of the mind. That there should be some degree of saving knowledge in a blind mind is impossible. For the renewal of the mind consists in saving knowledge. But where there is renewal of the mind, there is the Holy Spirit, who alone works and effects it. Those aids, therefore, which lead to some degree of saving knowledge also lead to the obtaining of the Holy Spirit, renewal of the mind, and true faith. But that this is the peculiar work of the gospel, the gospel itself teaches everywhere. If, however, by saving knowledge only saving doctrine is intended — not the renewal of the mind — then the meaning of that proposition is that these aids lead sinful men to the doctrine of the gospel, or at least to some degree of it. Whether that is true, we shall see below.

XI. In the state in which we now are, unless we know Jesus Christ, whom God sent, and God reconciling the world to himself in him, we cannot obtain eternal life. But all that knowledge of God which sinful men can acquire without the word from the works of creation and providence is only the knowledge of God as creator and governor of all; concerning redemption, there is the deepest silence. But they object: “If these things are correct, they result in this: that a man, even if it be supposed by way of impossibility that he is well and dutifully engaged in the school of nature and brings all the force of his understanding to bear on considering and learning what is there either heard or seen, can yet draw nothing from those evidences except this one thing — that there is some most holy, most just, most powerful, and most wise God who founded and governs this universe; and that he himself is a sinner, guilty of violating the divine law, and therefore subject to heavenly wrath, and most certainly to be visited with death and the curse without any hope of pardon. Thus, it is necessary that God objects all these things to men with the intent that they should learn that they are certainly and infallibly damned, and that no place is left to them either for salvation or for repentance that would help them.” But this speech is faulty in many respects, and it comes about thus when matters are handled from partisan zeal and not with equity and goodness. For if it is lawful for learned men to suppose whatever they please, whether it be possible or impossible, no one can prevent them from inferring whatever they wish from it. And if I am unwilling to suppose what ought certainly not to be supposed, because it contains a tacit τοῦ ἐν ἀρχῇ [petition of the principle]/petitio principii [begging of the question], the whole speech immediately collapses.¹ Then again, who has ever said that only this one thing is taught through the works of God? More things can be taught, yet in

such a way that Christ is not taught; the works of God teach that this supreme God is to be loved and worshipped with all one's might — for they teach that he is God. And there are also other heads of corrupt natural theology, as we shall show. Furthermore: those who affirm that God reveals himself through his works so that men may know him as the creator, governor, and ruler of all, most powerful, most holy, most just — they do not say, nor if they wish to be consistent with themselves can they say, that he sets all these evidences in the works of nature and providence before men with the intent that they should learn that they are certainly damned. But you will say: from their position, sinful men can learn nothing else with respect to their eternal salvation. So be it! You will not quickly show what evil will arise from this position. For what? Shall anyone bring a suit against God because he is just, and cannot but be just? Is an accusation to be brought against him because men are sinners, and because they cannot be ignorant of his right, namely, that those who had committed sins were worthy of death? Because they have wickedly defected from the state in which they could have received saving things from that revelation of his? But does he not set forth his pardoning mercy (that is, in the covenant of grace) through the works of creation and providence? What then? Does the law of God itself, which contains a far clearer manifestation of God than those other aids and evidences of which we speak, declare that mercy? Or will any mortal dare to bring charges against God for this reason? Does not the apostle everywhere argue that through the law is the knowledge of sin, but not of its remedy? Granted, therefore, that a man duly and diligently performed his duty in the school of the law, he yet can learn nothing there other than that he is a sinner and certainly to be condemned. Is the law

therefore sin? Is God unjust who gave it? Μὴ γένοιτο [God forbid] — and yet as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.

XII. They will say “that God grants this manifestation of himself to men with the mind and will not that it should be despised but that they should rightly use it for the knowledge of sin, repentance, and the worship of God according to the nature of those things.” Whether it has ever entered the thoughts of any mortal in a dream that God sets his evidences before men with the mind and will that they should be despised, I greatly doubt. But that he sets before those who lack the word the works of his providence with the mind and will that they should rightly use them for repentance — which he knows well they will never do, as the learned men with whom we have to do also know — they will scarcely gain credence with those who by God’s benefit do not lack the word. Nor would the learned men themselves so unwisely arrange their own rules. Furthermore, what they understand by the mind and will of God in this question, they do not teach with sufficient accuracy, but of these things later.

XIII. Some assert that the hinge of this controversy is placed in this question: “whether any gentleness and placability of God toward sinful men has been made manifest in the works of nature and providence.” But with their leave, this cause stands very differently. We know that some gentleness of God toward sinful men is manifested through the works of providence: “For with much patience he endures the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction.” But that gentleness is not the same as that which consists in pardoning mercy, of which remission of sins is the effect. But without the knowledge of this, it is impossible for anyone to arrive at saving repentance. Furthermore, there is no mention of the will of God here, whereas the question is about that alone, and not about the nature of the

things themselves, nor about whether some degree of saving knowledge can be obtained from this manifestation. Although we should also be glad to treat of those. But I almost wonder that pious and learned men, translated from darkness into the marvellous light of Christ, who have purified their souls through obedience to the truth through the Spirit, can speak so jejunely and languidly of the saving knowledge of the pardoning divine mercy. But there is no need for me to be further troublesome to the learned men in examining their words. I know that in this cause I am carried away by no partisan zeal, sworn to the words of no master or synod; I shall therefore set forth the state of the controversy as faithfully as I am able. In the first place, I shall set out the things on which the parties agree; then the things in dispute. I shall perhaps say the whole matter more briefly than so great a matter ought to be said; but for our purpose, I hope, with sufficient clarity; for to speak amply and grandly in a cause in which I feel only humbly and submissively does not please me.

XIV. The following is therefore conceded:

1. That there is some natural knowledge of God, or θεογνωσία ἔμφυτος [innate knowledge of God], which we have set out above.
2. That there has been made through the works of creation and providence a revelation of the eternal power and divinity of God as creator and governor of all.
3. That whatever men know of God, or can know by the force of the revelation granted to them, they ought to use all of it to that

end: that they may worship him, love him, glorify God, and render themselves in all things obedient to him.

4. That none of the pagans, by reason of their native blindness and wickedness, and the cunning of the devil ensnaring them on all sides with corrupt superstitions and nefarious idolatries, has submitted himself to the authority of God or complied with him according to the measure of the knowledge of him which he had or could have had, and that therefore they are all altogether without excuse.
5. That Christ the mediator is not revealed through these media — at least not to such an extent as to have been savingly perceived by those who have only obtained these media.
6. That the revelation of Christ the mediator through the gospel is absolutely necessary for obtaining salvation.
7. That besides all external revelation of God and his will, made by whatever means, there is need of the efficacious power of the Holy Spirit flooding the mind with saving light, in order that anyone may spiritually understand spiritual things, to the glory of God and his own eternal salvation.
8. That God has not purposed within himself from eternity that any of those should be saved to whom he grants no other media of salvation than the works of nature and providence.

Concerning all of these, there is scarcely any question among the orthodox.

XV. The hinge of the whole controversy, therefore, seems to turn on these two questions. First, it is asked: “Whether that manifestation of God which he grants through the works of nature and providence to sinners destitute of the word contains any degree of truly saving knowledge, under the guidance of which they might arrive at true and God-pleasing repentance and obtain eternal salvation.” Second: “Whether God grants this manifestation of himself with the mind and will” — that is, with the purpose and intention — “that those to whom it is granted” (as it is granted to all men without exception) “may come to true repentance and God-pleasing repentance, and thus obtain eternal salvation, even though they are destitute of the word.” That is: both the sufficiency of the means and the intention of God with respect to the salvation of those who lack the word fall under controversy.

XVI. It has seemed worthwhile to subject briefly to examination certain arguments drawn from the Scriptures which appear in the writings of some in this controversy. Now the first is derived from the Pauline words which we cited above, from Acts 17:24-26, to which some add certain things from ch. 14:16. From these passages, they say, it is established “that God sets forth all his works in nature and the governance of nature with this mind, that sinful men should seek him and find him” — and they affirm that Paul most expressly testifies to this. But this affirmation scarcely touches the state of the controversy, much less settles it. It remains to be seen what that is by which they attempt to establish credibility for their opinion from these passages, and then how they weave their proofs.

XVII. First, therefore, having established that God administered those aids to men destitute of the word with this mind, that they should seek and find him, they conclude that there are contained in these aids all those

things which are necessary to be known in order that God should be sought and found. “To seek God,” they say, “is not to investigate whether he exists, but to flee to his faithfulness and to seek the protection of his grace. And to find God is to obtain and obtain by entreaty the sought protection of his grace, and to experience his most holy divine majesty propitious and benevolent.” Reply: To flee to the faithfulness of God is to trust in God; and those who do this are blessed, Ps. 2:12. To seek the protection of the grace of God includes self-denial and resignation to the grace of God, which always produces justification, Luke 18:13, 14. And this is to experience the most holy divine majesty as propitious and benevolent, which has fallen to no one except in the remission of sins. And so through these interpretations of the words of Paul, they seem to be aiming at savingly believing in God with a living and efficacious faith for salvation.

XVIII. But how immensely they amplify their proposed thesis here. Perhaps they who argue thus sense that they have advanced further in argument than they hoped, so that they cannot restrain themselves sufficiently to remain within the limits of the question as it is commonly proposed by themselves. For what? Is the manifestation of God through the works of providence to be thought to contain, in the opinion of those great men, everything that is necessary to be known so that sinful men may flee to God with complete confidence of soul, experience him as propitious, worship him, and believe in him? Why then do the same learned men deny that those works of providence reveal Christ? Or why do they assert that the knowledge of Christ is necessary for living faith and for obtaining salvation? Indeed, if this be so, what need is there for the word? Or in what sense do we say that Christ through the gospel brought life and incorruption to light?

XIX. Since, however, it has come to this, let us see how they attempt from this passage to establish this opinion. The entire rationale of the argument used by the learned men depends on the construction of the apostolic περιοχή [passage] and the meaning of the words “seeking” and “finding” God; and they demonstrate the mind and counsel of God from that structure of words — namely, that Paul said ζητεῖν τὸν κύριον [to seek the Lord] in place of ἔνεκα τοῦ ζητεῖν [for the sake of seeking], in order to declare the mind of God in setting his works before sinful men — a τρόπῳ λέξεως [mode of expression], as they affirm, familiar to the Greeks. And they prove that seeking God ought not to be taken in any other sense than that which they have set out, by adducing all the passages in the Old Testament in which mention is made of seeking and finding God.

XX. And so indeed these most learned men conduct their case: but whether they have followed the mind of the Holy Spirit and the force of the Pauline argument, a brief exposition of the occasion and sense of the apostle’s words will show. Paul therefore, while he was at Athens and was provoked in spirit at seeing the city full of idols, Acts 17:16, could not refrain from immediately — contrary to what seems to have been his first resolution — publicly setting forth and proclaiming the living God, in opposition to all those μάταια [vain] idols by whose religion the most superstitious city was held. And since this was his purpose, he uses an argument both most ready and most forceful, drawn from the creation and governance of all things. Moreover, in order the more closely to bind the idolaters themselves, he teaches that they are most profoundly destitute of all excuse in the worship of idols; since these very works of God which were set daily before them clearly pointed to their author — that God exists, and that he is supreme, good, wise, powerful, and everywhere present — so

that it could be nothing other than the height of madness to wish to be ignorant of him whom they could not possibly be wholly ignorant of. Indeed, he says, this living God, the creator and ruler of all, sets before the consideration of all his works of nature and providence with this mind — that they should seek their author through those aids, if perchance by groping they might find him; so that those who have forsaken him or relegated him to the last place as unknown — him who alone both is and can be known — and betaken themselves religiously to those things which either do not exist and never existed anywhere, or are vain and foolish, cannot but be both ἀναπολόγητοι [without excuse] and αὐτοκατάκριτοι [self-condemned].

XXI. The apostle therefore proves that the gods of the Gentiles are vain idols, and that the true and living God, the one maker and ruler of this world, has so set himself before them that they could very easily and without difficulty have known him from a certain consideration of his works which he set daily before them. If, therefore, they had paid attention, and had sought God — as they ought, and as they could not deny him to be — through the aids of their knowledge which he supplied to them in abundance, they would surely have found him, since he was not far from them, and would not have betaken themselves to dumb idols and vanities. Nor are the words of the apostle to be extended beyond the subject matter and the occasion of the discourse.

XXII. Let us see further what those apostolic words mean — “that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps by groping they might find him” — as they appear to regard the counsel and will of God. Since moreover those with whom the apostle had to do were most superstitious idolaters, it is evident that the event is not intended by those words, nor any purpose of the divine

will with respect to it, since God is destitute neither of power nor of wisdom to execute his purposes. It is certain that those words denote the nature and character of the things themselves — and accordingly that counsel of the divine mind by which he willed to set those things before all men in such a way as to constitute them external and sufficient media in their kind for attaining the proposed end: namely, that they should seek and find the creator and ruler of all. That God therefore sets before men destitute of the word the works of nature and providence with this mind and will — that following their guidance they should, forsaking false gods and that whole Lernaean swamp of idolatry which the blindness of the human mind and the cunning of Satan had introduced into the world, seek and find their author and the ruler of all — and that nothing further can be elicited from those passages, seems evident. Indeed, the apostle makes no words at all concerning the will and counsel of God in creating and governing the world. He proves that the Gentiles were able to arrive, through the mere contemplation of the works set before them, at that knowledge of him which we set out above. Concerning the placability of God, concerning the remission of sins, concerning the bosom of mercy, concerning invocation and prayers, concerning saving repentance, concerning zeal for holy and upright living — which without faith no one can possess — and concerning very many other things of this kind which certain learned men endeavour to chisel out of these passages, there is profound silence.

XXIII. Let us see, moreover, how the learned men endeavour to prove their thesis from these words of the apostle. First, therefore, they affirm that Paul said ζητεῖν τὸν κύριον [to seek the Lord] in place of ἕνεκα τοῦ ζητεῖν [for the sake of seeking]: but since no necessity or reason compels that interpretation of the apostolic speech, this must be judged to have been said

gratuitously. But there is altogether no need for us to stir up a dispute about that phrase; let us therefore allow the learned men to use their right in the detachment of these words from the proper place they occupy in the apostolic discourse at Acts 17:27, and their application to other words of the same apostle found at ch. 14:16 — provided they have leave to do this. Let us also grant that τὸ ζητεῖν [seeking] ought to be taken in the same sense as κατοικεῖν [dwelling] is used in the preceding verse, and that it denotes the counsel of God in creating and governing the world to this extent: namely, that this world by its own nature is fitted to manifest him. What further then appears to follow? Namely, that εἰ ἄραγε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὗροιν [if perhaps by groping they might find him] ought to be expounded in the same manner, and thus to denote the same intention or will of God. But why so, pray? Namely, if εἰ ἄρα [if therefore] and εἴπως [if in any way] are taken for ἵνα [in order that] and ὅπως [so that]. But whether this is always the case or only sometimes, the learned men will not, I think, say that it is always the case, since they can produce only a single example where εἴπως seems capable of being taken in that sense; concerning εἰ ἄραγε [if perhaps], they are silent; εἰ ἄραγε occurs perhaps in only this one place in the New Testament; εἴγε [if indeed] and εἰ ἄρα more frequently: Acts 7:1; 8:30; 2 Cor. 5:3; Gal. 3:4; Eph. 3:2; 4:21; Col. 1:23 may be examples. Let the reader try whether he can extort from any one of those passages at least that meaning and use of those particles. Concerning εἴπως, there is no need for us to be solicitous, nor anxiously to inquire what Eustathius has expounded of its use, since it does not occur in our text. But it is difficult to believe that the apostle set out the mind, counsel, and will of God in words that denote the utmost uncertainty. Accordingly, that God in creating and governing the world gave such evidences of his power and divinity that

through them men could be roused to seek the creator of all, and also to make trial of their powers in finding him and distinguishing him from all idols — this is the meaning of this passage. Namely, God, who is incorporeal and invisible, left as it were his own traces in those works in such a way that by following them he can be found.

XXIV. But in the sense of the words “seeking” and “finding,” some think they have found a firmer support for their cause. That those media of the knowledge of God of which we treat are, in some respect at least, sufficient for seeking God and perhaps finding him in the manner of which the apostle speaks cannot be denied: for otherwise the apostle would have to be judged unjust in demanding this of those who had no other media. But they affirm that to seek and find God is not “simply to investigate God, that men may know that he exists and what he is” (although those words appear to express nothing else), “but to flee to his faithfulness, to rest in him, to worship him by invocation and prayers, to embrace him with entire confidence of soul, and to experience him as propitious; and accordingly that those media supplied to all are sufficient for these ends, and are appointed by God to be sufficient” — namely, for men destitute of the word. But since these words, if only they use them in no other sense than that in which they are employed in holy Scripture (nor indeed does it befit a theologian to use any such words in a sense that diverges from the single rule and norm we have for thinking and speaking about sacred things) complete the whole work of saving faith, and have thus equated those media with the very word of God itself, which he has “magnified above all his name,” with respect to the matter itself — they will doubtless concede that they need very powerful arguments and proofs to establish that παράδοξον [paradox]. And so in order to confirm their interpretation of these words, some bring forward all

the passages in the Old Testament in which mention is made of seeking and finding God, and affirm that those words cannot be taken in those passages in any other sense than that which they have set out. They also assert that the same is the meaning of those words in this place, and that this is not to be doubted. That it is not to be doubted is easy to say; but I not only doubt it, but judge it to be plainly most false; nor can I sufficiently wonder how it can come into the mind of anyone to assert it.

XXV. For in all those passages holy Scripture speaks concerning the covenanted people of God, but in this passage concerning those only who were strangers to the promises of the covenants. In those passages, it speaks of those who were, in actual fact, at least in profession, believers; in this case, of idolaters. In those passages, it speaks of those who knew God in the word and abominated idols; in this, of those to whom he was wholly unknown. In those passages, the concern is with seeking and finding the favour of a known God through Christ; in this, with seeking God through the works of nature and providence, that he may be known. In those passages, the concern is with a known God who has for a moment turned away in external dispensations on account of sin, and with finding him propitious in Christ through the promise; but in this, with seeking an unknown God and distinguishing him from idols. Are we now to think that those words are used in the same sense about those and about these? — that is, about those who, as the covenanted people of God, as believers, justified in Christ, instructed in the word, resting on the promises of the gospel, had need to seek the face and favour of God; and about those who, destitute of the word and of all revelation of Christ, strangers to the divine covenant, ἄθεοι [godless] in the world, having only the works of nature and providence set before them, had to know that God exists and that those

idols of theirs were not φύσει [by nature] God? Nay, let not even the lightest suspicion of this kind enter any pious mind.

XXVI. Nor is it said absolutely of those whom the apostle charges with negligence and sloth for not having considered the works of God, that they should seek God, but that they should seek in a certain manner — namely, “if perhaps by groping they might find him.” Whether that can be said of those saints mentioned in the Old Testament who, resting on the most certain promises of God in Christ, were accustomed to approach him, I leave to the reader to judge. It is therefore one thing altogether to seek the favour and grace of God revealed through his word, by the force of his promises in Christ; and another to seek the unknown God in the works of nature and providence, if perhaps “he might be found by groping.”

XXVII. But since all the theologians who follow the new method, as it is called, think that the firmest support of their cause is placed in a certain placability of God which they assert is apparent in the works of providence, it will perhaps be found not unprofitable if, taking this matter up from somewhat further back, I briefly set out what ought to be thought concerning that placability which almost fills both pages of this disputation, and what the nations themselves destitute of the word perceived concerning this matter. Since, moreover, in all the arguments of the most illustrious men, that placability meets us everywhere, whatever I say by way of summary in order to move it from its place may be counted as gain.

XXVIII. We have described above the state and condition of sinful men destitute of the word, with respect to the knowledge of God. We have also shown what natural δύνανται [power] of knowing God, asserting itself spontaneously in adults, what προλήψεις [preconceptions] and κοινὰ ἔννοιαι [common notions] they retained in that state. And we have also

demonstrated at length that those innate notions of God can be fostered, augmented, and elicited through the contemplation of the works of providence. And this mode of knowing God, in the state of integrity, would have abundantly sufficed for men for the duly rendering of all obedience and for obtaining the reward of obedience. Through the entrance of sin, however, it has been so disturbed that from it sinners hang in doubt, and can have no clear account of the worship of God from it. On the one side, they could not but apprehend God as good, bountiful, and patient — a quality also connatural to man. But on the other side, constrained closely by the consciousness of sin and the sense of divine wrath and indignation, or vindictive justice, distracted by anxious care and various thoughts, they were of necessity compelled to waver hither and thither in the greatest uncertainty. For if on the one side any hope ever shone upon them, so that they seemed to themselves to have it settled what they might expect from the goodness and bounty of God — on the other side, desperation mingled with horror immediately rendered all resolutions previously begun always uncertain, so that, having utterly despaired of all hope (convicted by their own hearts) they were consumed, Heb. 2:15.

XXIX. Now the works of providence set before them served as it were a hostile aid to both sides of these presumptions, warring with one another in opposite directions in the souls of sinners. For while they weighed the rains and the appointed seasons for bringing forth fruit given from heaven, and other benefits on account of which they solemnly called the divine power most good, they were accustomed to be of good courage, to speak all things good, to celebrate the author of those benefits and to adorn him with words marvellously. But when they also saw the wrath of God against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, revealing itself from heaven,

immediately they could not but feel that all that hope with which they had falsely flattered themselves was done with.

XXX. Nor do I speak only of what ordinarily happens in such a state, when it could not have been otherwise. For the knowledge of God of which we speak has regard to his natural attributes — so the apostle teaches us everywhere. The free acts of the divine will do not pertain to it, as we shall see. For those attributes are known partly from innate notions and partly from their effects. Of any free act of the divine will, there is no natural notion or preconception. On the one side, goodness, and the vindicative justice which it necessarily posits, on the other — these are natural to God. Of both, there is some *πρόληψις* [preconception] among all. But the external effects of these are diverse and contrary. All the works of providence seem to be referable to these respective fountains. No one destitute of special revelation is able to refer them elsewhere. Those whose issue is not necessary, given that all the objects stand on a different footing. But on the most free arbitration of God, it depends that goodness and justice, with respect to their effects, should meet each other and mutually embrace. Unless one thinks that God punishes sin from the necessity of his nature, and also pardons it from the same necessity. That placability of which we speak pertains hither — it is in God altogether arbitrary, or a most free act of his will, if indeed anything of this kind can be assigned to God: for it properly expresses neither any attribute of the divine nature nor any act of his will. Agitated, therefore, by these contrary blasts of wind, as it were, men went in contrary directions according as the one or the other notion prevailed in their minds.

XXXI. For some, converting the goodness of God into a certain everlasting leniency — which is either a vice or at least is situated on the

border of vice, and unworthy of the supreme ruler — utterly cast aside all thoughts of the wrath and severity of God, charging with the most odious crime of superstition those who were touched by any care or concern for them. That the majority of the impious are thus minded Scripture testifies, Ps. 50:21; and most of the wise followed this way, as will be shown later. Some, meanwhile, worn with the fear and foreboding of the wrath and vengeance of God, spent themselves continually, whom Plutarch most wittily castigates in his little book *On Superstition*. The sacred page also depicts them, Mic. 6:6, 7. There were also those who, resting on ancient traditions, suspected that the idols they worshipped were capable of being appeased and could be propitiated through sacrifices, at whom, however, the chorus of philosophers laughed. But that the works of providence had suggested to them any such placability of the divine will — there is not the slightest ground for suspicion; if anyone pleases to suspect it, we cannot prevent him, since suspicion lies in each man's own power, but in this matter it is entirely lacking in proof. It is certain that the custom of sacrificing among the nations is to be attributed partly to inveterate traditions flowing from the institutions of God, and partly to the pride and cunning of the ancient serpent, nefariously drawing the worship of God to himself. Nor did even the wisest of the Gentiles hand down any other origin for it. We have taught before that the origin of sacrifices is to be assigned to the will and most free arbitration of God alone; it is impossible that knowledge and observance of them should have flowed to the nations destitute of supernatural revelation from any other fountains than those we have indicated.

XXXII. Now there were those who, in order to extricate themselves from the snares in which they felt themselves entangled by those contrary notions

of God and his nature which they had conceived from the diverse effects enumerated above, devised for themselves two principles of all things, two gods — one good, the author of all goodness, the other perverse, powerful over evils and punishments. This persuasion, handed down as a tradition, still persists among a large part of the common people of America. Hence, the Tlaxcalans, terrified by the Spanish Cortez with the horror of his artillery, sent ambassadors to inquire which god he was — the good one who gives fruits, or the evil one who delights in human blood — in order to know how he was to be received. Nor is this a recently born persuasion; indeed, it is most ancient. “Labeo, whom they proclaim most expert in such matters, distinguishes the good divine powers from the evil ones by diversity of worship; he asserts that the evil gods are propitiated by bloody and gloomy supplications, but the good ones by joyful and pleasant observances,” as found in Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. II, ch. 11.

XXXIII. Nor does it seem unworthy of note that those among the ancient idolaters who appeared to venerate the divine power with some affection of soul above the rest of mortals, resting on the deepest persuasion of its wrath and vengeance, always had recourse to the terrible method of propitiating the gods — namely, ἀνθρωποθυσίας [human sacrifices]. Let the Carthaginians serve as an example; that they were led by a very great reverence for the divine power among pagans, Plautus more than sufficiently implies when he assigns to the character he brings upon the stage no other speech than what appears to savour of an unusual sense of religion. And the Punic faith is a Roman proverb; which would have had no place if Hannibal had known not only to conquer but to use his victory; or on the other hand had polluted the very Roman name with no less infamy. But the abominable sacrifices of those same men are most well known.

XXXIV. And truly, such has been the condition among the nations. For since in the works of nature nothing whatsoever of placability toward sinners could be apparent — since they were completed before all consideration of sin and appointed for a wholly different end — while the works of providence, whatever of goodness or patience they made manifest, were counterbalanced by the disclosure of wrath and indignation; and since the use of sacrifices was introduced only from a detestable, because most foully corrupted, tradition, or by the cunning of Satan — whatever may be the case with that placability, it is evident that the nations destitute of the Word of God were condemned to the darkness of all ignorance of pardoning mercy that leads to saving repentance.

XXXV. Furthermore: all revelation of God pertains to some covenant. But there are two covenants between God and men — one of works, the other of grace. The media of revelation of which we treat must necessarily pertain to one of these; but if they pertain to the former — namely, the covenant of works — how can they manifest any placability in God? By the terms of that covenant God is not placable. If they are to be referred to the latter, and the works of providence are to be held as media of administering the covenant of grace — they ought to declare not God as placable, but as propitiated, reconciled, and reconciling the world to himself; if at least they are to be thought to preach truth itself. The revelation therefore of placability in God pertains neither to the covenant of works nor to the covenant of grace. That is, there is none at all. They can indeed reveal the goodness, patience, and longsuffering of God — which God exercises toward the vessels of wrath; but not his placability — and let the illustrious men see therefore in what sense they have so often attributed to God that placability, which, since it cannot be said to exist in God under any respect,

can certainly be revealed through no media. If once the heat of disputation has cooled, and a pious soul has seriously pondered within itself what it is to deal with God in Christ concerning the remission of sins — such reasonings as these will be found to vanish more quickly than the word.

XXXVI. Let us proceed to the consideration of the other passage in the same book — namely, Acts 14:16, 17 — whose entire force, however, which it may seem to have in this cause, we have transferred to the preceding argument. The words of the apostles to the Lystrans are as follows: “Sirs, why do you do these things? We also are men of like passions with you, announcing to you that you should turn from these vain things to the living God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are in them; who in past ages permitted all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, doing good and giving us from heaven rains and appointed seasons for bringing forth fruit, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

XXXVII. Having therefore announced the living and true God, the apostles show what his mind was toward the nations destitute of the word in past ages — that is, throughout all that time in which he left them without special revelation of himself, before the preaching of the gospel — namely, “he permitted them to walk in their own ways.” Then they set out the manner and end of the divine dispensations toward them so left: for he did not leave himself without witness. From both parts of this apostolic speech the learned men endeavour to fortify their opinion — especially from the latter. For first they contend that God permitted the nations to walk in their own ways only to this extent: that no prophet’s or apostle’s preaching had interposed against their corruption; then they affirm that the testimony which the apostles say the living and true God bore to himself in the works

of providence testifies not only that he exists, nor only that he is powerful and wise, but also that he is most good — and indeed in sinners — with that kind of goodness and benignity which is called mercy, Luke 6:35, 36. From which it follows, they say, that through that testimony of God concerning himself, some degree of his placability and goodness toward sinful men was also disclosed — without which it cannot be that a sinful man should be brought to true repentance and true worship of God.

XXXVIII. From what has been conceded by us on the one hand, and proved on the other — that unless they were to introduce, by no legitimate consequence, mention of the worship of the true God, repentance, and placability — the fair reader would easily perceive that our opponents can chisel nothing at all from this passage that appears to favour their cause. But it does not please us to argue from testimonies of Scripture in this manner; to draw powerful arguments from words considered precisely, omitting the occasion of the whole speech and the scope of the passage, does not seem adequate; we shall briefly consider both.

XXXIX. When therefore the crowd of Lystrans, astonished at the miracle of the healing of him who had been lame from his mother's womb, had suspected that Paul and Barnabas were gods — namely Jupiter and Mercury — and the priests had urged them to sacrifice to them, the apostles, no less disturbed almost by their idolomania than those had been struck by the divine power which accompanied them, “having rent their garments, sprang into the crowd, crying out and saying: Sirs, why do you do these things?”

XL. Since moreover the crowd was caught and entangled in a twofold error — both most pernicious — one being that Jupiter and Mercury were gods, capable of miraculous healings, and that Paul and Barnabas were Mercury and Jupiter in disguise — the apostles meet both; and first,

immediately to clear their own faith, they cry out that they are men, subject to the same passions as they; then they teach that Jupiter and Mercury, and all that worship with which the astonished crowd wished to honour them in their name, are τὰ μάταια [vanities] — fictitious and impious things; and that they themselves are proclaiming that living God who made heaven and earth. But it would have been easy for the crowd to object to them: if there is such a God as you proclaim, and he alone, so that our divinities have no place with him at all — how did it happen that we have never heard anything of him until now? And that he has not cared to have himself preached either to us or to our fathers in past ages? In order to meet this inveterate prejudice of the whole world at that time — from which the cause of truth, unheard of everywhere, stood condemned — the apostles teach that this living God, in accordance with the authority he has over all, permitted the nations in past ages — of whom these Lystrans were some part — to walk in their own ways, that is, in the vanities of idolatry, and did not call them to the knowledge of himself and true worship; and thus they hint at the οἰκονομίαν [dispensation] of the New Testament (concerning which they knew they would immediately have to contend also against the Jews) by which, the middle wall of partition being broken down and all distinction of nations, peoples, and families removed, God calls all indiscriminately to repentance. But lest they should by this speech of theirs appear to have given the Lystrans an excuse for having worshipped those idols — seeing that the true God had not been revealed to them, nor could they have been obliged to worship him whom they wholly did not know — they subjoin that ἐπανόρθωσιν [correction] by which they show that they were altogether ἀναπολογήσους [without excuse] in their idolatry — on account, namely, of some revelation of the true God granted to them

through his works. For although (they say) it pleased him to permit the nations to walk in their own ways and not to call them to repentance through his word, he yet always so revealed himself to them through the works of his providence, and bore that testimony to himself, that it was done not without grave sin and notable folly, that turning away from him thus revealed, they and other nations betook themselves to idols — especially since those very works by which he bore witness to himself were of such a kind that from them flowed all the good things of which the nations had been made partakers.

XLI. Since therefore this is the scope and end of the apostolic discourse — to show that God so revealed himself through the works of providence, in those times when he permitted the nations to walk in their own ways, that they had no cause at all and could not without the most grievous sin have turned away from him to vain idols — let us see what the learned men endeavour to chisel out from this in support of their cause. They say first: “These evidences which are set before the nations testify concerning God, not only that he is wise and powerful, but moreover that he is most good.” So be it; we think him good and beneficent from whom we receive any benefits at all, and most good from whom we receive all. Nor have we ever said that all the nations have at any time become so brutish as not to acknowledge the giver of all benefits as most good. The orator testifies to the contrary: “You, O Capitoline,” he says, “whom the Roman people have named ‘most good’ on account of your benefits.” — *Pro Domo Sua*, 57.

XLII. “But,” they say, “those evidences prove that God is most good toward sinners”, — and let this also be conceded. For how far the nations acknowledged themselves as sinners against God is not the place here to inquire. But since the apostle himself would not have known sin “except the

law had said, Thou shalt not covet,” Rom. 7:7, it is established that those who were destitute of that law laboured under a sufficiently gross ignorance of the nature of sin. But let us grant that the nations knew themselves to be sinners; let us grant that God was good toward them, convicted of sin — what further then appears to follow? Namely, that God is good, gentle, and merciful toward sinners; for Christ affirms that this goodness toward sinners is mercy: Luke 6:35, 36 — for having said “The Most High is kind toward the ungrateful and the wicked,” he immediately subjoins “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father is merciful.” Therefore, God is merciful toward sinners — who denies it? Even toward the ungrateful — who will gainsay it? But also toward the perishing? Why not? Since we know that “with much patience he endures the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction,” Rom. 9:22. For although he is daily provoked by them, he does not yet immediately *ταρταροῖ* [cast them into Tartarus], but even heaps upon them many benefits to be repaid at an appointed time, Hos. 2:9. But this mercy — or goodness of God — is spoken of broadly and improperly, taken for whatever disposition toward doing good; thus he is said to be merciful not only toward men but toward all his works — namely sheep and oxen and the rest of the cattle of the field, Ps. 145:9, 15, 16. But that this mercy or benignity expressing itself in earthly and *βιωτικοῖς* [temporal] matters — which for most are occasions and enticements of sinning — is the foundation of true and saving repentance, is neither what the apostles say, nor is it true, nor can it be proved from their words by any legitimate consequence. Concerning the special mercy from which flows the remission of sins, not one word has ever been spoken in the whole of Scripture where the condition of those who are destitute of the Word of God is set out: for

this mercy is in Christ alone. But those οἱ ἐξ ἐναντίας [on the other side] deny that Christ is revealed through the works of providence.

XLIII. Since therefore only that mercy which Jesus Christ set forth from the bosom of the Father is the foundation of saving faith and repentance, we can concede without the smallest prejudice to our cause — indeed, since we have no cause other than truth itself, we most gladly concede — that knowledge of the other mercy proposed through the works of providence has been present. What may be added concerning that apostolic correction — “Yet he did not leave himself without witness” — may all be conceded in a sound sense; for God did not permit the nations to walk in their own ways in such a manner as to have thrown off all care and authority over them. Indeed, the apostles say that he always bore testimony to himself through his works to such a degree that it was in no way free for the nations to repudiate the knowledge of him and give themselves over to idols.

XLIV. From this however they proceed thus: “What Paul said — that God formerly permitted the nations to walk in their own ways — signifies nothing other than this one thing: that God had hitherto interposed against the corruption of the nations through the preaching of no prophet or apostle; had not deemed the nations worthy of any vocal testimony concerning himself and his affairs — which honour he had deigned to confer on the one nation of the Jews.” But this one thing is great. All the external media of saving repentance and salvation are contained in that one thing alone with which God deemed the nations not worthy, Ps. 19:4, 9-11; 147:19, 20. That any saving knowledge of God, any calling to repentance, or saving faith can be obtained from any source other than that one medium has not yet been proved. But they proceed: “The following words,” they say, “altogether signify that God, among those very nations themselves, always bore

witness, by the daily evidences of nature and his providence, to what men ought to think concerning him, and with what reason they ought both to worship his divine majesty and to order the rest of their life. By works of nature, the works of creation are understood.” What those evidences of God would have taught sinners about God so as to lead them to repentance — since they teach nothing and can teach nothing other than what was adapted for teaching in the state of integrity — has not yet been established; let us therefore dismiss them in this disputation. All hope is in the works of providence. That they taught the nations what they ought to think of God — to the extent that God set himself before them through them — we acknowledge. That the nations were able to learn from those same teachers, with what reason they ought to worship his divine majesty and order the rest of their life, with what reason will this be proved? Six hundred such things can be said gratuitously. For the rest, even these things are said too loosely. Whoever wishes to set out that account of worshipping God and ordering one’s life by which the nations could have savingly approached God, will be doing something worthwhile. That God exists; that he is the creator, ruler, and governor of all — powerful, wise, the munificent giver of temporal benefits; and therefore that idols are vain, and all worship of them foolish, absurd, and insane: this the apostles prove by the testimony drawn from the works of God. Concerning the true worship of God and the right ordering of life, there is profound silence among them.

Some add: “Since the nations turned a deaf ear to all these admonitions and cast off with horrible ingratitude all care and worship of their creator and ruler, who is at once most good and most great,” the apostle signifies “that God is now recalling them from their vain and pestilential customs by means of his apostles’ ministry, with a more acute and clearer voice.” But

the apostles are so far from drawing any comparison between the calling that is effected through the gospel and that other calling through the works of providence, that they are altogether silent about the gospel and all its doctrine. Nor indeed should the preaching of the gospel be so reduced to the same rank as those evidences which God sets before men through the works of nature, as to be called only a more acute calling, made with a clearer voice, of the same kind of calling, that is. For that calling which is through the revelation of the mystery hidden from ages and generations, and by which God made known the riches of that glorious mystery, is immeasurably distant from that testimony which he bore to himself as ruler and munificent giver of all through the works of providence. That other calling is to be called more acute and made with a clearer voice, which is of the same kind and nature as this one, differing from it only in degree or manner of presentation. But since the whole foundation of the evangelical calling is placed in the disclosure of God the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit, and almost all its force lies in the declaration of pardon, reconciliation, and the remission of sins through the blood of the θεάνθρωπος [God-man] Mediator, and in the efficacious dispensation of the Spirit — all of which things, together with other things of the same kind completing that calling, were hidden in the bosom of God from ages and generations in which he permitted men to walk in their own ways, as being destitute of his word — it is not to be equated in any sense with those evidences set before men through the works of providence, nor placed with them in the same series. And I wonder a little at those who know what it is to repent savingly and to believe in God, that they can speak so.

XLV. They proceed and thus complete this argument in their peroration: “Since therefore that testimony of God which sounds everywhere

throughout the earth contains those things which pertained to recalling the nations from their ways, and translating them from idolatry to the worship of the one true God, from crimes and villanies to justice and honesty — it is altogether necessary that through that testimony of God some degree of his placability and gentleness toward sinful men was also disclosed; without which it cannot be that a sinful man should be brought to true repentance and true worship of God.” But this speech is faulty in various ἀνακολουθησίᾳ [inconsistency of reasoning]. For concerning the recalling of the nations from their ways through that testimony of God sounding everywhere throughout the earth, there is no mention among the apostles; indeed, they testify that God permitted them to walk in those ways. That the nations could not have been recalled from those ways except through the gospel, the apostle here clearly enough intimates, and elsewhere openly teaches, Acts 17:18; Eph. 1:10; 3:9-11. It is one thing that God did not leave himself ἀμάρτυρον [without a witness] among the nations; another, that he recalled them from idolatry to the true worship of himself. Of the true worship of the true God, in that testimony sounding far and wide — no word, because nothing about Christ, through whom alone we can draw near to God, Eph. 2:12-15, 18. Then, from where does it appear that God cannot bear himself such a testimony as would render idolaters without excuse, unless he moreover disclosed his placability?

XLVI. For what has this placability to do with convincing idolaters of error, madness, and wickedness? “But from the fact that God bestows all good things on sinners, it is apparent that he is placable and shows himself placable to them through those good things.” Since those good things are understood only in one class — namely, that of βιωτικῶν [temporal things] — we deny that proposition. God many times bestows those good things on

those whom he hates, toward whom he is furnished with an immutable purpose of punishing, whom he has devoted to destruction, whom he has pronounced to be to be destroyed and tormented with eternal punishments, Ps. 73:4-12, 18-20. But those things from which no one can discern love or hatred cannot disclose that God is placable, Eccles. 9:1, 2. When God heaps benefits upon the impious in order to fatten them at their own fat and feed them up for the day of slaughter — is he to be thought to bestow these things on them with the purpose of showing that he is placable? It is agreed that God certainly knew that the nations destitute of the word would make the worst possible use of those temporal benefits, and could not rightly use them for his glory. He also constituted them witnesses of his patience and wisdom, Job 38:25, 26. And he very often uses their accumulation to blind men in their sins. How, therefore, will they show that he is placable? — especially when there are innumerable and most certain signs of wrath and of divine δικαίωματος [righteous judgment] against sinners mingled with the administration of those benefits. But let us grant what neither the apostle affirms nor can be elicited by any legitimate consequence from his words — namely, that the nations were able to gather from the works of God some degree of his placability toward sinners. Are we therefore to think that they were called to true repentance? For since those same nations acknowledged his right — namely, that those who had sinned were worthy of death — and could not understand whether there was any possible way of actually appeasing and reconciling him who they only somewhat suspected might be placable, with respect to that right of his — how, pray, are they to be thought to be recalled to true repentance through that knowledge? Indeed, it is established that saving repentance cannot be without faith — since repentance pleases God, which cannot be without faith, Heb. 11:6. But faith

in God cannot exist except through Christ. I mean that kind of faith which is the foundation and companion of saving repentance. But the works of providence do not disclose Christ. Nor is God revealed in Christ as placable, but as propitiated and reconciling the world to himself, 2 Cor. 5:19. There is therefore no placability; nor if there were, could it be revealed through the works of providence; nor if it were revealed, would it be a foundation for any sinner either of faith or of repentance.

XLVII. Certain nations indeed imagined some of their idols to be placable. And why should they not easily imagine that divine power which they themselves had made to be convenient and accessible to themselves? For since man had of his own accord cast off that image of himself in which the true God had created him, and thereby had taken away from himself all communion with that true God his creator, he himself attempted to fabricate and as it were create new, fictitious gods in that corrupted image in which through apostasy from the true God he was now constituted; and having involved himself in vices, since it pleased him, he established daily in his mind a divine power fashioned more after his own likeness and more agreeable to himself. Hence, there was nothing in his own nature of which he did not immediately suppose the same to have place in those gods which he had devised for himself at pleasure. Hence, he imagined them wrathful, placable, easy-going, and austere, each man according to his own genius and disposition. But what has this to do with our God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ — “whom no man has seen; the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him”?

XLVIII. There still remains an argument which I have for that reason put off to this last place, because if I had not found it to have pleased certain learned men — I fear carried away by partisan zeal — I would have judged

it a puerile sophism, and unworthy of occupying any place in this cause. It is extorted from the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, v. 21, 22. "Because," some say, "men did not use τῷ γνωστῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ [what can be known of God] as was fitting for them, they were made without excuse" — that is, because they polluted themselves with the crime of idolatry, of which the apostle treats in that place, even though God had disclosed his eternal power and truth through the works of creation. What then? "If they had made good use of it, they would not have been without excuse; if they had not been without excuse, they would have been excusable; if they had been excusable, they would have been excused." Reply: If it had been equally easy for men destitute of the word to make good use and bad use of τῷ γνωστῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ [what can be known of God], this reasoning would have some show of probability. But this is assumed gratuitously and is a *petitio principii* [begging of the question]. And yet the whole of this speech hangs on this. Because it is most certain that men were able to make bad use of τῷ γνωστῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ, and the apostle shows that they did so use it, therefore, their being able to use it rightly is assumed, but most falsely.

XLIX. Furthermore, if they had made right use of it — in that kind of use, that is, of which the apostle speaks — how far would they have been excused? As far as to be saved? But nothing at all concerning their salvation appears in the apostle; indeed, he proves at length that no one was ever able to obtain salvation through the use of those media granted to the nations, apart from the saving grace of God in Christ. They could indeed have so far abstained from the most foul crime of idolatry as to have given no rightful occasion for the apostle to charge them with it in the manner done here. Of this enthymeme therefore — "because they did not make good use of τῷ γνωστῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ, they were made without excuse; therefore if they had

made good use of it, they would have been excused” — if the consequence be judged legitimate (which is, however, most false, since the ratio of bad and right use of the media of salvation, or of saving knowledge of God, is not the same), the meaning is nothing other than “they would not have polluted themselves with the crime of idolatry.” For those words “excusable” and “excused” must necessarily be restricted to the subject matter of which the apostle treats, which is true everywhere. But they proceed in their argument: “They would not have been excused,” they say, “unless they had fled to the mercy of God; and they would not have fled to him unless that manifestation under which they lived had taught that they must flee to him.” Reply: They would have been “excused” to the extent that the apostle treats of them in that place, even if they had not fled to the divine mercy. That they were able to use τῷ γνωστῷ [that knowledge] further, remains to be proved.

L. And these things may suffice as a specimen; at least that we may see what kind of arguments those are which learned men on every side use in this cause. Further progress is impeded both by the rationale of the present work and by the lucubrations of others on this very cause, recently published.

1. The sentence in Owen’s original reads: Et si nolim supponere ea quæ sane non sunt supponenda, quia tacitam τοῦ ἐν ἀρχῇ petitionem includunt, statim concidit tota oratio.