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The Authority of the Holy Spirit in the Natural Life of Man.

BY THE REV. E. STEINLY, M.A.

I. STANDPOINT.

CAN we rightly speak of the authority of the Holy Spirit of God in the life of the world as distinct from the life of the Church?

In the Church, witness is borne that the Eternal Word of God, through whom all things were made, became flesh in Jesus, the Son of Mary, and that this one Eternal and Incarnate Word, alike the Firstborn of all creation and the Firstborn from the dead, is Lord over all mankind. Moreover, this witness, it is affirmed, is borne in the Church by the Spirit of God Himself, howbeit not apart from, but as the very source and ground of, the witness borne by the spirit of man. Are we to suppose that the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirits to the authority of the Word of God only in the Church, or may we suppose, and indeed affirm, that in the world also, God has never left His Word without the witness of the self-same Spirit? The answer that we give to this question will have more than an academic significance, since it will condition the strategy of our preaching of the Gospel, as well as affect the form of our philosophy.

Of necessity, Christians can try to give an answer to this question only from the standpoint of the Christian faith. As Christians we stand, or at anyrate we believe that we stand, on the mount of "special," that is to say, unique and final revelation, and that, as we gaze upon the plains of human life, we are able to see things which those living wholly on the plains of "general" revelation (if there be such) either see less clearly or do not see at all.

First of all, we see how great is the gulf fixed between man and his Maker owing to what is termed "original sin." Man, we affirm, has so far rebelled against, and grieved the Holy Spirit of God, that he has not scrupled to set up for himself false gods, made in man's own image. He has been able to do this because of his capacity for self-transcendence. In consequence, the *de jure* authority of the Creator-Spirit of God has given place to the *de facto* authority of the creature-spirit of man. As Paul puts it, man has "worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator." Man, being thus self-alienated from the life of God, is at the same time alienated from that life by God Himself, so that man cannot reconcile himself to his Maker. He does not, however, thereby cease to be either religious or rational, but henceforth, his worship becomes divorced from knowledge of God, and his wisdom a thing which is not from above. In short, the natural man, seen from the standpoint of the Christian faith, is both idolatrous and self-deceiving.

Secondly, however, although the Christian sees, in a way which the non-Christian does not, how great is the gulf between sinful man and his Maker, yet he also detects marks of the presence of the Spirit of

God in the lives of men which to others are quite invisible. Men's hearts, he would say, burn within them because of the gracious presence of that Spirit, without knowing the cause of such burning. Likewise, men's minds are quickened by His creative touch, and yet have little or no conscious knowledge of Who it was who touched them. Indeed, man's corporate rejection of the authority of the Holy Spirit, as He bears witness to the claims of the Word of the Creator, sometimes finds formal expression in individual lives and groups either as "honest doubt" or as militant atheism, but it by no means follows that from such individuals and groups the Holy Spirit has been wholly withdrawn. On the contrary, it is possible to have that mediated, yet immediate, knowledge of God, termed faith, even though, as Dr. John Baillie has pointed out, such knowledge be utterly repudiated. Most Christian thinkers have put forth the contention, of course, that knowledge of God is really a matter of inference. As the late Dr. Hastings Rashdall has affirmed, "even among theistic nations, an immediate knowledge of God is claimed by very few."¹ Dr. Rashdall himself, shared this inferential view of man's knowledge of God. Prof. A. N. Whitehead maintains it in his book, "Religion in the Making." The great St. Thomas Aquinas maintained it. For such thinkers, it is the business of philosophy to create a belief in God, if there be God. All arguments for belief in God, however, are usually singularly unconvincing, save to those who already believe in God on other grounds. It would appear, therefore, that Dr. Baillie is nearer the truth when, in reference to some words of the late Professor Cook Wilson, he writes that "the proper business of philosophy is not to create relief but to bring it to a consciousness of itself."² Nature is not so much an argument for, as a sacrament of, her Maker. In consequence, all men, as St. Paul indicates, know God, although not all men glorify Him as God and therefore are conscious that they know Him. Despite, then, the professed ignorance of any personal presence of God among large sections of the human race, and despite the general moral failure of man which lies behind that ignorance, Christians may rightly speak of the authority of God's Spirit in the life of the world, and seek to understand something of its exercise and meaning.

II. THE FACT OF SIN.

Since, however, God's Holy Spirit bears witness to the authority of His Word with, and not apart from, our spirits, it is well that we should note carefully the bearing of the fact of sin and the Christian doctrine of the Fall upon the fact and doctrine of that divine witness. As is well known, Dr. Barth, the great Swiss theologian, resolutely affirms that, in the words of Dr. J. A. Mackay, "the revelation-value of natural theology in all its forms is a mere human presumption."³ "I am an avowed opponent," writes Dr. Barth himself, "of all natural theology." He is this because he believes, with the compilers of the old Scottish Catechism, that "the Image of God (is) utterly defaced in man." This doctrine of total corruption, as it is termed, is Dr. Barth's intransigent answer to the humanism of to-day, as it was the intransigent answer of many of the Reformers to the humanism of their day. In consequence, God's revelation of Himself is, for Dr. Barth, quite literally His revelation as the *hidden* God. It is "like a

sudden flash of light in a dark room.”⁴ Without that flash of light, man, Dr. Barth would maintain, walks wholly in darkness. If this is the case, then, of course, there can be little point in talking about the authority of the Holy Spirit in the religious and rational life of natural man. Moreover, Dr. Barth would appear to teach that, even in the lives of believers, that Word of God in Christ to which the Holy Spirit testifies, continuously draws near, but never actually abides within, the heart of sinful man. “The Scriptural announcement of God’s revelation,” he writes, “must be ever increasingly *becoming* the voice of the living God to us.”⁵ Thus, if one interprets Dr. Barth aright, he teaches that not only does man’s being in the image of God only become actual fact when the light of the Spirit of Christ our Saviour shines in his heart, but also this light is a series of intermittent and uncertain flashes, and not a continuous glow. It is difficult to believe however, that Socrates, for example, was as totally corrupt as his judges, or that Paul, when he told Christians to walk as children of light, only thought of them as children of darkness, howbeit a darkness occasionally dispelled by a flash of light. Dr. Barth’s whole position, in fact, seems to imply that God’s creative activity is wholly identical with His gracious activity, that this activity is absent from the life of natural man, and that it is revealed to the life of the Christian believer by the Holy Spirit only in terms of promise and never in terms of fulfilment.

Far from identifying the creative with the gracious activity of the Spirit of God, Dr. Emil Brunner, Dr. Barth’s great contemporary, makes a clear-cut distinction between them. Dr. Brunner refuses to believe that man’s religious and rational life is wholly conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity in such wise that natural man is utterly devoid of any revelation of God. For him, “no religion in the world, not even the most primitive, is without some elements of truth . . . no philosophy . . . (is) without truth—not even materialism.”⁶ Howbeit, so profound is the error in either of these that the revelation in them is but “indirect.” In fact, it merely signifies that the form of God’s image whereby man, as a responsible and rational being, is distinguished from the beasts, is unimpaired by the “Fall” while the content of that image, whereby man possesses both freedom and goodness, is “wholly effaced by sin.” It is obvious, of course, that man’s life is divided against itself. Nevertheless, Dr. Brunner’s interpretation of this as a clearcut division between form and content is much too cut and dried. For one thing, as Dr. John Baillie points out, the ravages of sin affect the form no less than the content or filling of man’s life. For another, as this same author also notes, the doctrine of total depravity, whether applied to both the form and content of the divine image in man, as in the case of Dr. Barth, or applied, as by Dr. Brunner, to the content alone, is erroneous, since total corruption is merely a limiting conception, and not anything which can exist. However, by distinguishing, as he does, between two varieties of revealed knowledge, rather than between natural and revealed knowledge, Dr. Brunner has rid himself from the metaphysical presuppositions of Stoic pantheistic thought, whereby the soul of man was conceived to be a detached fragment of an immanent world-soul, and set human life once more under the active authority of the Spirit of the living God.

Thus, whereas the Stoic, Zeno of Citrium, regarded man's moral and spiritual knowledge as due to innate ideas,⁷ the Christian regards such knowledge as "the blessed fruit of God's (that is to say, the Spirit's) personal and historical dealings with man's soul."⁸

There is, then, in man, as Dr. Baillie asserts, "no *nature* apart from *revelation*. Human nature is constituted by the self-disclosure to this poor dust of the Spirit of the living God." Dr. Barth's teaching implies that this truth is of significance for the natural man only in a merely archæological sense, and Dr. Brunner's, that it is of significance only in a merely formal sense. God's revelation of His own Lordship, to which, we believe, the Spirit of God has called them to bear witness, does not necessarily imply, however, that such revelation is not found outside the Christian Church or is found only in a formal sense. In the world, as in the Church, revelation, as Dr. H. H. Farmer affirms, is a category of personal relationship,⁹ although, as we have seen, men may not be aware that it is such a category. This implies, as Dr. Farmer points out, not that man is passive and God alone active, but that man is active, in some sense, on the personal level, as distinct from the impersonal. Thus, in contrast to Dr. Barth and his followers, who confine revelation to the Christian Church, and affirm that revelation *is* divine activity, 'as if the copula expressed an identity,'¹⁰ it is contended that we are not mistaken in looking for the marks of God's self-revelation in the world, and that "revelation *per se* is not identical with divine activity—but it is also human receptivity; and receptiveness is not entirely a passive thing." Likewise, in contrast to Dr. Brunner and his followers, it is contended that this receptivity of the divine Word constitutes something more, even in fallen man, than the form or empty frame of the *imago dei*. The fact that men worship false gods does not necessarily mean that they do not at the same time, however ignorantly, also worship the true, and that what they worship in ignorance is not set forth in knowledge in the Christian gospel. Similarly, because men are afflicted with "the most disgraceful ignorance"¹¹ of imagining that they have knowledge of that of which they are ignorant, does not necessarily imply that such ignorance is absolute or that all men are equally ignorant. Thus, we are not mistaken if we believe that the Spirit of God has never left Himself wholly without witness in the worship and reasoning of man, even in his fallen state and that the Christian, if anyone at all, may through the guidance of the same Spirit of God, discern positive marks of such witness.

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MAN AS RELIGIOUS.

In his book, "The Natural and the Supernatural", the late Dr. John Oman, seeking to find that in man whereby he became set free from the leading-strings of his nurse, mother nature, comes to the conclusion that it is to be found, not in man's capacity to reason, or make tools, or laugh, but in his capacity to be religious.¹²

The ground of all religion, as Dr. R. Niebuhr has affirmed, is the essential homelessness of the human spirit in the world.¹³ Human life points beyond itself. It possesses a mysterious capacity of self-transcendence, that is, of standing continuously outside itself in terms of infinite regression. This capacity of self-transcendence leads

inevitably to the search for transcendent Reality. In this search, "the mind", to quote some words of Dr. H. H. Farmer, "works in a predominantly synthetic way, not breaking impressions up, but rather fusing them together into significant totalities."¹⁴ Moreover, this synthesising activity of the mind is a matter of intuition, not of volition, since "to synthesise impressions by a deliberate act of the will into total significant situations, apprehended as such, is impossible."¹⁴ Synthesising intuitions are not under volitional control for the further reason that "they are part of what is essentially a feeling response to the world," since they "have to do at some point or other with the relationship of whatever is going on to our own interests and values."¹⁴

Human life, then, points outside itself religiously and intuitively, to a transcendent Beyond. It does something more, however. It falls into the temptation to make itself into that Beyond. This is the significance of any system of polytheism such as, for example, the Olympian system. The gods of Homer, when they emerge finally from that ultimate foundation of primitive religion which, as Mr. Christopher Dawson writes, is "an obscure and confused intuition of transcendent being,"¹⁵ are really beings made in the likeness of men. To them we may apply some words of the late Professor George Adam Smith, written concerning the gods of the nations around Israel: "Their gods were made in their own image, their religion was the reflex of their life."¹⁶ Being made in the image of men, these gods do not claim to be Creators, as Dr. Gilbert Murray has pointed out, but only conquerors.¹⁷

Since man is made in the image of his Maker, however, he can never remain satisfied with a god or with gods made in his own image. "By virtue of his capacity for self-transcendence," writes Dr. R. Neibuhr, "he can look beyond himself sufficiently to know that a projection of himself is not God."¹⁸ Thus the Athenians came to look, not merely at, but also beyond, the Olympians. First, these gods were themselves symbolized through the art of the sculptor. Subsequently, however, as Dr. Murray has indicated, each god himself was conceived to be, not transcendent Reality as such, but only a symbolic aid towards conceiving that Reality. It was in this symbolical sense that "Socrates," as Professor E. O. James states, "could profess his belief in the old Olympian heroes."¹⁹ Thus the story of the development of Greek religion is the story of a movement both towards and away from idolatry. Men created gods in their own image, but had not completed their task before they began to recognise that these gods were really only projections of themselves, and at best, therefore, not Reality itself but only symbols of Reality. In Greek religion we have both man's idolatrous worship of false Gods and his ignorant worship of the true God. The false gods are but "vanities"; as the Acts of the Apostles indicates, but the "unknown God" behind these is none the less the True, and He it is who, in the Christian Gospel, is made known to all mankind.

Natural religion signifies man's rejection of, and craving for, a transcendent "He", and not just a transcendent "It," Who can be to man what Dr. H. H. Farmer has called a "final succour." Because the Olympians were not that, they gave place eventually in popular devotion to the deities enshrined in the Mystery Cults of the Hellenistic

Age. These cults spread because they met, or claimed and were felt to meet, that "final succour" of which Dr. Farmer speaks. In that age of despair, men were conscious, in a way that we are not conscious, of what Dr. J. S. Whale has called "the vast, empty senseless nothingness of death",²⁰ with the result that the human spirit was seized with a great craving for some assurance of immortality. The mystery religions seemed to give at least some degree of assurance, even if only they gave, as no other religion of that time gave, moving and tragic expression to that craving. They gave relief because they were each, in the words of Wordsworth, "a timely utterance." Were they more than this? It is difficult to believe that they were not, if only in some dim and largely unconscious sense. At any rate, they provided the soil in which the seed of the message of the Gospel was sown, and, as Dr. John A. Mackay has written, "the full truth about the seed can only be known by the response of the soil in which it is planted."²¹ In the rise of the Mystery Cults, no less than in the allegorising process which made the Olympian deities symbols of Reality, and not Reality itself, we may discern the outskirts of the ways of the Spirit of God, as He bears authoritative witness to the call of the true and living God.

Perhaps this is the place to say a word about what have been called "natural sacraments." Continental theologians are wont to describe those "phenomena which regulate the communal life of humanity", as Dr. Martin Dibelius describes them, as "the orders." By "natural sacraments" are meant, I presume, "orders which are of a natural kind, such as, for example the orders of sexual life, the family. "It is part of our belief in God the Creator," writes Dr. Dibelius, "that, with this creation, orders were also indicated that gave a clear indication of God's will."²² But "we live in a fallen world," this writer continues, "in which all created life . . . has become distorted." In consequence, these orders provoke man to disobedience or excess. Yet they do not thereby cease altogether to point man to his Creator. Rather do they mediate, however imperfectly, a meaning beyond themselves which enables natural man, to distinguish between what St. Paul calls "natural use" and "that which is against nature." They point to, as well as veil, the will of the Creator. Of course, if we believe, with Dr. Barth, that the image of God has been wholly defaced in fallen man, or, with Dr. Brunner, that it has been wholly defaced as regards content, if not as regards form, we will not speak of these natural orders as sacraments, but if we believe, with Dr. John Baillie, that the facts of man's life do not warrant such interpretations of the effect of the Fall, then we will not hesitate to speak of natural sacraments, and see, in the joys and discipline of family life the world over, marks of the authority of the Spirit of God as He both makes the marriage of two human beings "a preparation and anticipation of the ultimate communion of spirit with spirit"²³ and makes the care and discipline exercised by parents towards their children a pointer to the care and discipline exercised by the One God and Father of all towards those who are members of His family, not by virtue of creation only, but also by right of adoption and grace.

We have touched upon the significance of religion in the Graeco-Roman world, and of the religious significance of what have been called

“natural sacraments.” It is a far cry chronologically from the pre-Christian age in Europe to the age following upon the Renaissance, but it is not so religiously. Each was an age of so-called “natural religion” in the development of which spontaneity had given place to reflection. Whereas, however, Christianity as a historical and an eschatological religion triumphed over the natural religion of the ancient world, it was the natural religion of the post-Renaissance age which really triumphed over Christianity, partly by absorbing from Christianity a monotheistic faith, and partly by casting its mantle over the new scientific movement and giving to scientific discoveries the significance of prophetic revelations. God became the God of Nature (spelled of course, with a capital “N”) rather than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Isaac Newton was his prophet, so much so that a pagan, pious and scientific generation could acclaim with delight the words of Alexander Pope :

Nature and Nature’s laws lay hid in night :
God said, Let Newton be ! and all was light.²⁴

“Religion,” writes Dr. Farmer, “inevitably grows feeble and corrupt if it be isolated from the other interests of life.” This natural religion which had such a vogue in this country in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries differed from the natural religion of the ancient world in that it was really “a mental abstraction from the reality of a historical religion,” a pleasing hobby, in fact, rather than a faith by which to live. The universe was now known to be God’s toy, provided for the enjoyment of His children (of course, men *were* His children !) and His children were quite adorably captivated with it. So religion, in becoming “Natural,” became bloodlessly rational, and deistic.

Worse was to follow. A great thinker, Friedrich Schleiermacher, arose who, in leading the attack against this so-called natural religion, caused religion itself to pass finally out of the realm of theology into that of anthropology. He led the attack, not in the name of revelation and the personal Self-revealing God, but in the name of religion considered as a thing-in-itself, and the feeling-state which characterizes it. Schleiermacher was in fact, guilty of “the very error with which he charges the rationalists,” “except that he commits it in the realm of feeling whereas they had committed it in the realm of reason”²⁵, namely, the error of abstraction. He established for religion a false autonomy, isolating it not only from philosophy and ethics, but also thereby from its “Object,” or rather its “Subject,” and so largely denuded it of all objective content. Henceforth, religion no longer meant what it meant, for example, to Calvin, in his *Institutio Religionis*. At best, it merely connoted man’s eerie concern with an Object comprehended, as by Dr. Otto, under what the late Dr. B. H. Streeter has termed the “portmanteau-conception”²⁶ of the Numinous. In the end, however, it becomes “simply blind feeling, feeling without all content,” as, for example, in Dr. Julian Huxley’s “Religion without Revelation.” In this connection, it is interesting to note some words of Dr. Quick, in his book “The Gospel of Divine Action” to the effect that “from many Anglo-Catholics, Otto’s impressive work received a warm welcome” because it seemed to give “the

clue to the real business of religion—adoration of a mysterious presence ‘wholly other’ than the end and interests of natural humanity,”²⁷ and so justified, of course, extra-liturgical devotion before the Sacrament.

What are we to say of the whole movement in the post-Renaissance age first, of “natural” religion, that is of a religio-rational approach to external or physical nature and second, of “positive” religion, that is, of a religio-emotional approach to internal or psychical nature? Here, if anywhere, man would appear to be in the far country, feeding upon the husks of his own abstractions. These could not nourish his spirit, apparently cast away, as it now seemed to be (though this was not ultimately the case) from the presence of the Holy Spirit of God, with the result that, in our own day, it shivers in the winter and gropes in the darkness of a cold and dead materialism. As a final comment on the whole movement, some words of J. A. Chapman, based upon Dr. E. Brunner’s “Mysticism and the Word” may be quoted, thus: “Intellectualism is the degeneration of the Word; it is the Word which no longer knows its origin and meaning. Romanticism is the reaction against this, but in attacking intellectualism, it attacks the Word itself and thereby injures the spinal marrow of the Spirit.”²⁸

The bloodless and stillborn child of Schleiermacher’s approach to “religion” is a thing called “comparative religion,” a non-existent, like Aristotle’s “matter,” which “neither is nor is not” but is just “not yet”! The non-Christian religions of the East do at least exist. Historically, they have been preceded by an age of polytheism, corresponding to the age of the Olympians and this polytheistic age itself followed one in which the unity of awareness of the Supernatural remained, as Dr. Oman puts it, “a general dim background of one reality.”²⁹ Yet, although polytheism represents the break-up of this primitive unity of awareness, it does not do so absolutely. On the contrary, to quote Dr. Oman again, “it is doubtful if there ever was a polytheism entirely without a sense of one Supernatural as a dimly felt awareness.” Polytheism is characterized, in fact, not by the absence of the presence of the one supreme God but, as Mr. G. K. Chesterton has pointed out in his book *The Everlasting Man*, “the presence of the absence of God.” There is “a void, but it is not a negation; it is something as positive as an empty chair.”³⁰ In short, polytheism is really a kind of jungle in which the One true God is lost, and yet somehow known to be lost.

It is the quest for this lost One which lies behind those historical or “positive” religions which arose out of a background of polytheism. To interpret them merely as exemplifications of a phenomenon called religion is woefully to misinterpret them. The call of the unknown God, in however faint and misunderstood a fashion, is somehow echoed and heard in them, and the key to unlock their meaning is to be found in the authority of the Spirit of God and not in the states of the soul which they may or may not tend to foster. Men in the main sought for the lost One by going in two apparently opposite directions. Some trod the *via mystica*, seeking for the Eternal behind the illusion of the transitory. Others trod the *via apocaliptica*, seeking for a revealing of the Eternal in the transitory. Humanly speaking, they have not found, or rather they have not been found. Yet, in the light

of the Christian faith that it is God who seeks us and not just we who seek God, we may apply to all seekers the well-known words of Pascal : "Thou wouldest not be seeking me, hadst Thou not already found me," and may see in their toil and suffering and endurance, not only marks of human sin and failure, but also the marks of One who Himself toiled and suffered and endured to bring salvation and victory to all mankind.

IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MAN AS RATIONAL.

In his book, *Science and the Modern World*, Professor A. N. Whitehead points out that one of the antecedents of our modern approach to the investigation of nature is "a widespread instinctive conviction in the existence of an order of things."³¹ Just as man's religious intuitions and activities arise out of an obscure awareness of transcendent being, so his rational intuitions and activities arise out of an obscure awareness that this transcendent Reality is one, not of confusion but of order, and that Reality has stamped this order on the multiplicity of things in nature. Man acts rationally when he apprehends that objective meaning, or coherence amidst manifoldness, in external and human nature alike which has its creative source in a transcendent Unity. If, therefore, the activity of the Holy Spirit bears in any wise positive relation to the life of man, it must be the ground of his rational capacity no less than of his religious.

We do well to note, however, as Dr. H. H. Farmer bids us note,³² the ambiguity in the word reason as commonly used. Sometimes, we mean by reason man's whole personality acting so as to integrate its own life in relation to its environment in such a way that its final interests and values are affirmed and pursued. This work of integration is intuitional, that is, it is not under the conscious control of the will of the empirical *ego*, but belongs to that "moment" when the ordinary distinctions of our consciousness are transcended. At other times, we mean by reason intellect as distinct from feeling and will, acting in such a way as to analyse or break up the significant wholes presented by the intuitive reason, and fit the parts so disconnected into an abstract pattern of logical or cause-effect relationships. This work of analysis or disintegration is under the control of the will of the empirical *ego*. Thus, in the intuitive reason, man is confronted with the claim of unconditional values which impose themselves on his whole personality, whereas in the analytical or discursive reason, he himself imposes a logical pattern on the abstractions which he, as it were, has himself created. The claim of unconditional values gives rise to the idea of a moral Law of Nature whereas the logical pattern results in the formulation of scientific laws, devoid of any moral claim upon man's conscience.

Let us first of all consider the significance of this *Lex Natura* or Law of Nature which has played such a prominent part throughout the centuries in the life of western man. When it was originally conceived, it was the product of Greek, that is to say, Stoic ontology. "In Stoic philosophy," writes Dr. E. Barker,³³ "the whole universe is conceived as a single intelligible unity, pervaded by reason. The whole universe was only one Substance, or *Physis*, in various states, and that one Substance was Reason, was God. Reason, God, Nature

were all synonyms . . . In God, this essential Reason was whole and pure : in man, it was a fragment . . . By it . . . (man) was knit to God, and knit to his fellows . . . From it . . . he derived the law of the one universal society." Thus, to the Stoic, Nature was self-existent Being expressing in one universal society its own Law. It provided an ethical basis for the legal order, But, of course, the *Lex Natura* as formulated by Reason and as embodied in the legal order were two different things, and so a distinction had to be drawn between the original Law of Nature and that form of it which was adapted to prevailing conditions.

Christian theology eventually took over the idea of the Law of Nature in order, writes Dr. Werner Wiesner³⁴, "to defend the earthly sphere as God's creation against any dualistic devaluation of the natural order." It could do this without difficulty, since "the Stoic theory of a fall from the original state of mankind could be connected without difficulty with the Biblical thought of the Fall." In Scholasticism a further development took place. "The Stoic conception of the Law of Nature established a connection with the Aristotelian view of the cosmos as a series of grades of being interrelated teleologically." Thus, the Law of Nature, as finally conceived in Christian tradition, is the offspring both of Stoic ontology and of Aristotelian teleology. It stands not only for the original Law of the universe in contrast to the one which has been vitiated by human guilt, but also for the world-law immanent in the grade of being characteristic of the earthly in contrast to the law in the grade of being characteristic of the heavenly. And, of course, this Stoic-Aristotelian *Lex Natura* was interpreted, or at any rate meant to be interpreted, in the light of what is meant by the law in the Bible.

The Reformers, according to Dr. Wiesner, in asserting the Biblical doctrines of Creation and Eschatology, rejected alike the Stoic ontological and Aristotelian presuppositions of the Law of Nature, and made this *Lex Natura* solely identical with the revealed Law of God, that is, the Decalogue. They rejected the notion of two laws, one of Nature and the other of Supernature by which the first was completed, and retained only one divine Law, the full knowledge of which was derived, not from the intuitive reason as such, but from Biblical Revelation. "They called it the Law of Nature, however, because the knowledge of it was implanted in human nature, and though this knowledge had been darkened by sin, there were still traces of it remaining . . . sufficient to leave a man without excuse. This view obviously arose under the influence of Augustine, and seemed to have the support of Romans ii. 14ff."

In the modern era, the idea of the Law of Nature has undergone further change, owing to the influence of the Enlightenment. On the one hand the idea either of a Supernatural in contrast to a Natural Law or of a Revealed Law, the knowledge of which was originally implanted in human nature, has been discarded. On the other hand, reason itself has become the ultimate standard for man, and not a divine law implanted in reason. "It is believed that the 'rational' organisation of human society can be discovered purely out of general ideas of reason." Thus, the modern rationalist idea of a Law of Nature is that of a law of human nature devoid of any theological

or objective content. Modern ideological movements are a protest against the claims of reason thus conceived "to be the organising and forming principle of human life,"³⁵ as Dr. R. Niebuhr points out.

Can we relate the authority of the Spirit to the claims of the Law of Nature as set forth by the Scholastics, the Reformers and the Rationalists respectively? In the modern rationalist view of reason, and the romantic protest against it, we can at least see, howbeit only from the standpoint of the Christian faith, an unconscious testimony to the truth that God is, in the words of Dr. Niebuhr, "the source of vitality as well as of order. Order and vitality are a unity in Him."³⁶

What of the Scholastic view of *Lex Natura*? Can we really align Stoic ontology with the Biblical doctrine of Creation and Aristotelian teleology with the Biblical doctrine of Eschatology? Dr. Werner Weisner maintains that we cannot. They are, he writes, "mutually exclusive . . . The world does not reach its goal in virtue of its immanent laws but by God's free gift. . . God has not abrogated His Providence in favour of an immanent world-order." He further writes, "This combination of natural law with God's law of Love to Him and to one's neighbour can only be brought about as the Love of God is re-interpreted in the sense of mysticism. Love to God is then an act of union with the divine being . . . not a new relation to God as a person in which all action is rooted . . . The Bible (however) knows no mystical love of God which leaves the world behind it, but only a love of God which issues in confidence in Him, in obedience to His will, and in the service of one's neighbour amid earthly circumstances."

Dr. Wiesner not only rejects the mediaeval doctrine of Natural Law as inconsistent with the Biblical doctrine, but also affirms that the "subjective" idea of the Law of Nature as held by the reformers, that is, the idea that the Biblical Law is implanted, howbeit in distorted and fragmentary form, in human nature, is really untenable. He allows, of course, that man has a vitiated knowledge of that law of love which issues in the service of one's neighbour. He contends, however, that "man relates the ethical requirements (of this law) no longer to God but to his idols" with the result that it is of service to man only so far as his preservation is concerned. In other words, of the Law of God as embodying the saving no less than the sustaining grace of God towards man, there is, according to Dr. Weisner, no knowledge implanted in fallen man at all.

What are we to say to all this? In rejecting the distinction, made by the Scholastics, between the Law of Nature discoverable by reason (howbeit only imperfectly, owing to human sin, and so needing to be clearly defined by reference to revelation) and the Law of Supernature or Grace revealed by God, and asserting instead that there is only one Law of God, revealed indirectly, that is, in distorted fashion, to fallen man, and revealed directly and clearly to redeemed man, Dr. Wiesner is undoubtedly true to the message of the Bible. When, however, Dr. Wiesner goes on to deny any saving value to "general" revelation, he is really making absolute that distinction between "form" and "content," between "reasonableness" and "goodness" which once it is made absolute, becomes wholly meaningless. In this regard, Dr. Barth's criticism of Dr. Brunner's conception of a knowledge

of God which is sustaining but not gracious may be quoted. "With what right," asks Dr. Barth, "can Brunner affirm that a genuine knowledge of the true God, however incomplete . . . is nevertheless not a saving knowledge?"³⁷ The answer is, of course, with no right at all. In like manner, if we admit, as does Dr. Wiesner, that man has a knowledge of God's Law, then that knowledge, however vitiated it may be, must somehow be related to God and not merely to idols. Otherwise, Nature is "nothing but the kingdom of death and the Law of Nature . . . a law of wrath and punishment".³⁸

The fact is that the Law of Nature, that is, the Law of God as apprehended by fallen man, and the Biblical presentation of the Law of God, that is, the Law of God as witnessed by redeemed man, just because they are one and the same in source but not in apprehension, cannot be set in complementary relation the one to the other, as in scholasticism, nor yet in diametrical opposition the one to the other, as is the tendency among many Lutherans, but only in dialectical or paradoxical relation to one another. In the Biblical formulation of Divine Law, the human formulations are both confirmed and denied, just as an amateur conductor's rendering of one of Beethoven's Symphonies is both confirmed and denied by that of a master-conductor. In consequence, for Evangelical Christianity, the Law of Nature can not be regarded merely as a divine norm for secular as distinct from sacred institutions, providing a basis for a Sociology which can receive the *Imprimatur* of the Church. Rather is the Law of Nature in its purity that Law of Love which provides man with his norm in the totality of his personal dealings with his Maker which are inclusive of, although transcending, his dealings with his neighbours. The demands of such a "law of liberty," however, necessitate for the life of fallen man a law which limits his rejection of that "law of liberty," that is, a law which limits man in, rather than from, his sin ("for the hardness of your hearts," as our Lord put it) with the precise object of preserving for him the possibility of redemption. It can point to, but never provide, that redemption. It can keep in view, but never guarantee "personal fellowship in *agape*." Strictly speaking, therefore, there can be no "Christian sociology," if by that is meant a norm for secular institutions. There can, however, be such, if by it we mean a *preparatio evangelii*, that is, an order or dispensation which reflects, however imperfectly, not an immanent world-order, but that activity of the Spirit of God in the world which, because it is gracious no less than sustaining, sets a limit to human sin precisely in order that it may plant in the human heart first the need and then the message of redemption.

So far, the significance of the claims of the Law of Nature as witnessed by the intuitive reason has been discussed, and it has been suggested that this significance is to be interpreted in terms of the will of the Holy Spirit, as He bears witness in life to the objective Word of the Living God, and not in terms of an immanent Law of Nature, with Nature herself regarded as Self-existent Being. What are we to say, however, of those modern scientific "laws of nature" in which nature is mirrored as a vast machine, the parts of which consist solely of "matter" and "motion", and the behaviour or working of which expresses an ultimate immanent "law of causation"? These

“ laws of nature ”, and the “ law of causation ” which they presuppose, have been formulated, not by the intuitive but by the discursive reason, and, of course, they are couched in the indicative mood and not in the imperative.

It is well to remember that the modern scientific movement, no less than the work of the Reformers, represents, as Professor Whitehead observes, “ a recoil from the inflexible rationality of mediaeval thought.”³⁹ Only, whereas the Reformers were concerned primarily with listening to the Word of God in the Bible as verified by the *internum testimonium* of the Holy Spirit, the scientists were concerned primarily with speaking the word of man to nature, causing her to deliver up her secrets and put herself under the power of man’s will. Greek thinkers, notably Aristotle, in interpreting Nature in terms of the intuitive reason, formulated a doctrine of cause which envisaged a *permanent*⁴⁰ determinant for both “ matter ” and “ change ” or “ motion.” For them, therefore, “ matter ” was the vehicle of a conceptual determinant or Form, while “ change ” or “ motion ” is the vehicle of a similar determinant, which viewed from behind appears as an Efficient Cause and from before as Final Cause. For the modern scientists, however, there is no such permanent determinant of “ matter ” or “ motion.” Hobbes repudiated the idea of Formal Cause or determinant and Descartes of Final Cause. Thereby, the universe came to be regarded as composed of two ultimates “ matter ” and “ motion ” neither of which was the vehicle of any conceptual determinant. All that thought can do in regard to them is, as John MacMurray has indicated in his book, *The Boundaries of Science*, to construct imaginative devices for anticipating, and so controlling their observable behaviour. What, moreover, the physicist means by “ cause ” to-day is not really cause at all, but only blind sequence, since he treats the universe as if it were devoid both of cause, that is to say, Formal Cause, and purpose, that is to say, Final Cause.

Modern man, then, has addressed his word to Nature, as if she were his toy, to play with as seemeth him good. He has analysed her “ stuff ” into “ matter ” and “ motion ”, he has observed, either directly or with the aid of instruments, the “ communal customs ” of these abstractions, and he is able, in consequence to put her to his own use. He has even, in the science of psychology, put into this “ nature ” and its observable behaviour his own empirical *ego*, and in doing so, almost forgotten that self-transcendent *ego* which, in the very act of observing the empirical self as part of Nature, bears witness that it remains outside the field of observation. It is in relation to that witness, that having, as it were, possessed the universe, he faces the question, “ So what ? ” (to use a very expressive Americanism), and that we must look for the authority of the Holy Spirit, since, as Dr. H. H. Farmer indicates, scientific results, to be of value for the personal situation of man, have to be taken back into that situation. The scientific observer may contend that around the observed self there is to be noted only the determinism of impersonal sequence, but around the observer himself there gathers what Dr. Farmer calls “ the spontaneity of personal purpose.”⁴¹ Here, the results of science are taken back into man’s situation in the world, and enable man to obtain a truer grasp of the total significance of life. Here he ceases to

be a spectator and becomes an actor. Here he must act, and act decisively. Here he either lays his possession "at the apostles' feet," that is, he responds to the authority of the Creator-Spirit, or retains it for his own use. In short, the scientific "laws of nature," being, as they are, human devices for anticipating and so controlling the behaviour of Nature on its physical side, express only the authority of man, and exhibit the authority of the Spirit only at the point where man must decide what use he will make of them, although, of course, even man's very desire and power to use Nature is itself dependent upon the activity of the same Creator-Spirit.

IV. CONCLUSION.

We have reflected briefly on the life of fallen man in the faith that, in its religious and rational expressions, it bears positive relation to that authority of the Holy Spirit which is exhibited in the faith and life of the Christian Church. There have been periods in the history of man when quite obviously religion was "not simply," to quote some words of Dr. Niebuhr, "an inherently virtuous quest for God," but "merely a final battle-ground between God and man's self-esteem."⁴² In like manner, there have been periods when reason was not an inherently sincere quest for an ultimate unity which has its centre and basis in Truth, but was merely an attempt to establish false unities, centring round man's idols. In such periods, the authority of the Holy Spirit has been manifest in that prophetic witness to the Word of the Living God as bringing judgment upon the hypocrisy of religious man and the self-deceit of rational man. At the Reformation, the chosen vessel of this witness was Martin Luther. He proclaimed to the religiously-minded of his day that "apart from Christ, there is nothing but idolatry and vain fabrications of God."⁴³ Likewise, he proclaimed to the philosophically-minded of his day that "the whole of Aristotle is to theology as the darkness to the light."⁴³ In short, Luther bore witness that, in relation to the pretensions of religious and rational man, God is *Deus Absconditus*, the hidden God. To-day, the same witness is being borne by the great Swiss prophet-theologian, Dr. Karl Barth, and we do well to give careful heed to it.

At the same time, we need always to remember that man's religion has never been merely a form of hypocrisy and that his reasoning has never been merely a form of self-deceit, even in the times of his greatest apostasy. Both without and within the Church, the living God has never left Himself wholly without witness. Hence, attacks on man's religion and reasoning alike have never been made only by the messengers of the prophetic Word. They have also been made by its opponents. Thus, if Luther denounced the religion and philosophy of his day, so did "Hobbes the atheist." It was Hobbes who wrote that "the Papacy is no other, than the Ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof."⁴⁴ It was Hobbes who wrote that "scarce anything can be more absurdly said in natural Philosophy, than that which is now called Aristotle's *Metaphisiques*."⁴⁵ Similarly, it is not only Dr. Barth who denounces human religion and rationality to-day, but also the opponents of the prophetic and apostolic Word, both romanticist and materialist. If the attacks of Dr. Barth are a warning against the pretensions of religious and

rational man, those of unbelievers are likewise a warning that attacks on religion and reason as such are really attacks on man as made in the image of God. Hence, as Professor L. Hodgson indicates in his book, *Towards a Christian Philosophy*,⁴⁶ it is unfortunate, to say the least, that Dr. Brunner, for example, speaks again and again of reason being proud. Man may be proud, but not his reason as such. Man is only man in so far as he is both religious and rational, so that, in being confronted by the truth as it is in Jesus, he does not become less religious and less rational but more. His past religious and rational activities will come under condemnation, and yet, at the same time, he will know that, though he has resorted to false gods, he has also, even in his ignorance, resorted also unto the true God, and that while he himself was the seeker after the idols, it was not so much he who sought the true God as the true God who sought him. This being so, the religious and rational history of man is no mere melancholy record of illusion and error, although, of course, it has been so distorted by illusion and error that the truth has then seemed completely hidden. Rather is that history a record also that God, by the activity of His Spirit, has ever confronted man down the ages with the authority of His Word, and has ever sought man, even in the times and places when and where He seemed most absent.

"There come epochs," writes John Buchan in his biography of Montrose, "when a nation seems to move from the sun into the twilight."⁴⁷ The post-Elizabethan age was such an epoch. The post-Victorian age is also such an epoch. Britain, and indeed the whole of Europe, has moved out of the sun into the twilight. There has been a change of temper or mood. Optimism has given way to pessimism. In the Victorian era, men felt that, in moving from its old anchorage, civilisation was following in the wake of what Professor Whitehead has called "formulated aspirations," whereas in our own day men feel that civilisation is being driven, none knows whither, by "senseless agencies." "Evolution," that magical word in the vocabulary of nineteenth century speech, from connoting that kind of change in life which men felt could only be described as "Progress" with a capital "P", now has come to mean for many little more than a scavenging process by which the whole of man's past cultural achievements and ideals is being swept away, to make room for we know not what. Behind this change of temper or mood there lies a transposition of key, a change of climate, a shift of interests in life, and it seems impossible at present to assess the nature and meaning of this deeper change. Men's eyes, in consequence, are naturally fixed upon the tidal ebb of human life, and men's thoughts are of what appears to be the total wreck of life, stranded, as it were, in the quicksands of irreligion and irrationalism. When, however, the tidal flow of life returns, the wreck will not appear to be so total as it once seemed to be, though doubtless the re-floated vessel will in many ways be different from the old. Yet in that ship—such has been our contention—and not in those quicksands, is to be met the Lord of the winds and the waves of life's sea. He has seemingly been asleep while man has been perishing. Why He has slept, we cannot say. This, however, is our faith, that through the preaching of apostolic Gospel, He will awake in the life of man, and His Spirit will enable those in the

ship to articulate that cry which, though they knew it not before, is the inarticulate cry behind the whole religious and rational life of man, yea, even of fallen man, and which when articulated runs thus: "Of a truth, Thou art the Son of God."

- ¹ H. Rashdall, *Philosophy and Religion*, p. 108.
- ² J. Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, p. 250
- ³ J. A. Mackay, *A Preface to Christian Theology*, p. 142.
- ⁴ K. Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*, p. 48.
- ⁵ K. Barth, *The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life*, p. 23
- ⁶ E. Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 33.
- ⁷ J. Baillie, p. 48.
- ⁸ J. Baillie, p. 43.
- ⁹ H. H. Farmer, *The World and God*, p. 85.
- ¹⁰ E. L. Wenger, in *Studies in History and Religion*, p. 164.
- ¹¹ *Apology of Socrates*, p. 28A.
- ¹² J. Oman, *The Natural and the Supernatural*, p. 85.
- ¹³ R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. 1. p. 14
- ¹⁴ H. H. Farmer, p. 33f.
- ¹⁵ C. Dawson, *Progress and Religion*, p. 90.
- ¹⁶ G. A. Smith, *Isaiah*, Vol. I. p. 98.
- ¹⁷ G. Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, p. 46. (Thinker's Library)
- ¹⁸ R. Niebuhr, Vol. I. p. 178.
- ¹⁹ E. O. James, *In the Fullness of Time*, p. 20
- ²⁰ J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 178.
- ²¹ J. A. Mackay, p. 110.
- ²² Vol. IV., *Church, Community and State*.
- ²³ E. Barker, *The Values of Life*, p. 2.
- ²⁴ B. Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background*, p. 5.
- ²⁵ J. A. Chapman, *An Introduction to Schleiermacher*, p. 98
- ²⁶ B. H. Streeter, *The Buddha and the Christ*, p. 314.
- ²⁷ O. C. Quick, *The Gospel of Divine Action*, p. 135.
- ²⁸ J. A. Chapman, p. 150.
- ²⁹ J. Oman, p. 386.
- ³⁰ G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, p. 101.
- ³¹ A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, p. 14 (Penguin).
- ³² H. H. Farmer, p. 86.
- ³³ E. Barker, *Church, State and Study*, p. 7.
- ³⁴ Art., *The Law of Nature and Social Institutions*, Vol. IV., *Church, Community and State*.
- ³⁵ R. Niebuhr, Vol. I. p. 38.
- ³⁶ R. Niebuhr, Vol. I. p. 29.
- ³⁷ J. Baillie, p. 31.
- ³⁸ C. Dawson, *The Judgement of the Nations*, p. 94.
- ³⁹ A. N. Whitehead, p. 14.
- ⁴⁰ J. L. Stocks, *Time, Cause and Eternity*, pp. 5-6.
- ⁴¹ H. H. Farmer, p. 220.
- ⁴² R. Niebuhr, Vol. I. p. 213.
- ⁴³ G. Hendry, *God the Creator*.
- ⁴⁴ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 381 (Everyman).
- ⁴⁵ T. Hobbes, p. 368.
- ⁴⁶ L. Hodgson, *Towards a Christian Philosophy*, p. 131.
- ⁴⁷ J. Buchan, *Montrose*, p. 17.