

Memorandum by Rev. Principal Cairns D.D. Aberdeen
in reference to article by me in
Expository Times on "Natural Religion or Revelation?"

How do we know the Gospel? Answer. The Holy Spirit witnesses to its truth. But how do I know that it is the Holy Spirit? Answer. I know the Gospel. But is not this a clear case of circular reasoning?

feel

Might it not be argued that when I say I know the Gospel to be true, I mean that I, that if it were true that it would meet my deepest needs. I feel that these deepest needs are of a kind that they need to be satisfied, and so I conclude that that which satisfies them is true. But is that not to presuppose that the universe is a moral order which is the very point to be proved.

Another side.
I do not see how theology today is to ignore these points for the prevalent modern attack (see the Humanist literature, passim) is that faith is simply "wistful thinking." "Nor does the being hungry prove that we have bread," as Matthew Arnold says.

But to meet this attack we must have inevitably "Natural theology" of an epistemological kind at least.
Might I put it this way?

The Reformers were perfectly right in their use of the "Testimonium Spiritus Sancti" because in their age, the Existence of God and of His Spirit was admitted by all parties. They all accepted, more or less, some form of the Scholastic Philosophy which, of course, had a natural theology. There was a quarrel within Theism. But today, unbelief has gone deeper. It questions and denies God. It reduces all religious conviction to "wistful thinking," and demands utterly impartial scientific thinking.

Barth's repudiation of all natural theology and all epistemology and endeavour to ground everything on the Testimonium Spiritus Sancti is illegitimate, and irrelevant to the real difficulties today.

Brunner in a measure sees this, and has left Barth on this point. See his article on the Anknüpfungspunkt in Zwischen den Zeiten.

Query? Does Barth really succeed in getting rid of all philosophy in theological thought? I should have thought his theory of time and eternity was a philosophical position.

L. P. Jacks, Editor of Hibbert Journal, speaking of the mass of criticism which two articles on Barthian theology had evoked writes "It may be summed up as follows. Barth

represents man as not only spiritually in the dark but as spiritually blind, blind in the sense of having no spiritual eyes, so that the "event" of revelation, when it happened would find him not only unable to apprehend it, but unaware that it was happening. One critic uses the word "deaf", instead of "blind", and says the thunders of Sinai would be thrown away on such a being. He then goes on to ask how a race of beings with no spiritual ears (or eyes) have managed to discover they have none, and to be conscious of their deficiency-or how Barth himself has found it out. There are other criticisms but all turning on the same point."