SUMMARY

Reason and Revelation

This study is a theological-critical investigation of the argument for the existence of God and the doctrine of God from the human reason and the relation between natural theology and revealed theology in the works of some Dutch professors of theology or philosophy from 1650 to 1750. In this period of rationalism and enlightenment the Cartesianism had much influence on the Dutch theological world, but there was also put up a vigorous fight against it. Generally speaking it can be ascertained, that before Descartes the schooling in logic and ideology was dominated bij the relevant theses of Aristotle; also concerning natural theology the aristotelean-scholastic method was in force. In accordance with the investigation above-mentioned in this study is inquired what philosophical system can be found in eight books of different authors on natural theology. These are the names of the authors, the relevant books and the results of the investigation:

GERHARDUS DE VRIES 1648-1705; lecturer and later on professor of logic and metaphysics at the Utrecht University.
De natura Dei et humanae mentis determinationes pneumatologicae, Utrecht, 1690.

He is passionately anti-Descartes. His philosophical position can be qualified as a not quite orthodox disciple of Aristotle. He considers natural theology necessary to expound, to confirm and to maintain the revelation of the faith, especially in a disputation with someone, who is deprived of the grace of the revelation.

CHRISTOPHORUS WITTICHIUS 1625-1687; professor of theology in Duisburg, Herborn, Nijmegen and Leyden.
Verhandelinge van God en desselfs natuur en weezendheid, Amsterdam, 1695.

His philosophical reasoning and his argument for the existence of God are based on the relevant theses of Descartes. In this book he is practically completely silent about the relation between natural and revealed theology; from the little he gives can be deduced, that he attributes to revealed theology a content, which natural theology does not give and is not able to give.
Salomon van Til 1644-1713; professor of theology in Leyden.
Theologiae utriusque compendium cum naturalis tum revelatae, Leyden, 1704.
His philosophical way of thinking is strongly Cartesian. The argument for the existence of God is based on the views of Descartes. He states, that natural and revealed theology have not the same evidence, but that both of them give truth and that from the same source namely God. Van Til maintains, that natural theology is concerned with the sinner seeking God to find reconciliation and that it makes historical inquiries into the true religion by removing the false one. Besides, natural theology demonstrates that only the Christian religion contains all that is necessary for the right reconciliation with God.

Herman Alexander Roëll 1653-1718; professor of philosophy in Franeker, professor of theology in Utrecht.
Rede door den heer Herman Alexander Roëll over de Godgeleertheid en de voortreffelijkheid der overnatuurlijke Godgeleertheid boven de natuurlijke, Utrecht, 1704.
His thesis concerning the argument for the existence of God is a Cartesian one. He means, that revealed theology can elucidate the neglected or by errors darkened light of reason by a new light. Besides, he sees a great difference between both kinds of theology. Revealed theology teaches the Trinity, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the justification through the faith in the Mediator; reason does not teach any of these.

Ruardus Andala 1665-1727; professor of logic, physics, philosophy and theology in Franeker.
Compendium theologiae naturalis, Franeker, 1711.
His ideas are very much influenced by Descartes' point of view, e.g. concerning the argument for the existence of God. He says that natural theology is fundamental for revealed theology, besides, that with the help of natural theology the divinity of the Holy Scripture can be proved. Moreover in his opinion natural theology is able to explain the nature of God and his perfections. Finally he considers natural theology quite insufficient towards the salvation of the sinner, it does not teach the Names by which God has revealed Himself for the salvation of the sinner, neither, that the Trinity has to be worshipped, nor that Jesus Christ has to be adored, without which there is no salvation at all.

Jacob Wittich 1677-1739; professor of philosophy, mathematics and metaphysics.
Disputatio philosophica de nature et causis rerum, Utrecht, 1709.
His considerations concerning the argument for the existence of God are Cartesian too. His doctrine of an almighty spirit and that the infinite lies, viz in the all-knowing intellect, is posed of absolute infinite ideas. He is not a Cartesian in his conception of the Word of God against Spinoza, because he does not hold the Holy Scripture at all. In this book he considers natural and revealed theology.

Campegius Vrtinga Jr. 1693-1723; professor of natural theology.
Epitome theologiae naturalis, 1720.
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Johannes Lulofs 1711-1768; professor of philosophy and later on professor of metaphysics.
Primae lineae theologiae naturalis, Franeker, 1760.
In this book Cartesian traits can be seen in the relation between natural and revealed theology. He does not adopt it, seeing that the conception of infinity in our mind is not what is represented by that being himself. Besides, he does not consider the relation of innate ideas and the innate ideas of the Holy Scripture as of vital importance. In this book he considers natural and revealed theology.

John van Olije 1634-1706; professor of theology in Franeker.
Theologiae et physicae compendium, Franeker, 1704.
His considerations concerning the argument for the existence of God are Cartesian too. His doctrine of an almighty spirit and that the infinite lies, viz in the all-knowing intellect, is posed of absolute infinite ideas. He is not a Cartesian in his conception of the Word of God against Spinoza, because he does not hold the Holy Scripture at all. In this book he considers natural and revealed theology.

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JACOB WITTICH 1677-1739; professor of philosophy in Duisburg, professor of philosophy, mathematics and astronomy in Leyden.
*Disputatio philosophica de natura Dei*, Leyden, 1719.

His considerations concerning the argument for the existence of God are Cartesian too. His doctrine of God is that God is an infinite and almighty spirit and that the infinite thinking (in which God's Nature lies, viz in the all-knowing intellect and in the almighty will) is composed of absolute infinite ideas. He does not want to bring forward the Word of God against Spinoza, because the latter does not believe in the Holy Scripture at all. In this book he does not give his opinion upon the relation between natural and revealed theology.

CAMPEGIUS VITRINGA JR. 1693-1723; professor of theology in Franeker.
*Epitome theologiae naturalis*, 1720.

He deviates from Descartes, he does not accept the Cartesian view concerning the innate ideas. Regarding the argument for the existence of God he gives the argumentation of the prima causa. From the connection of body and mind and by the reason of each of both parts he decides on a Creator. Yet there are reminiscences of fundamental Cartesian rules (Discours de la Méthode II, 7, 8 and 9). In this book he does not write about the relation of natural and revealed theology. He was a follower of Coccejus and on that ground it may be stated, that he considers natural theology insufficient to the salvation of the sinner.

JOHANNES LULOFS 1711-1768; professor of mathematics, astronomy and later on professor of metaphysics and ethics in Leyden.
*Prima lineae theologiae naturalis theoreticae*, Leyden, 1768.

In this book Cartesian traits can be found here and there, but there is an important difference too. He discusses the Cartesian argument for the existence of God (Meditationes de prima philosophia V, 8 and 10), but he does not adopt it, seeing that our being and the real existence of what is represented by that being have no connection at all. He gives the theory of primum movens too. He rejects the Cartesian premiss of the conception of infinity in our minds. Concerning the relation between natural and revealed theology he considers nothing to be true in natural theology and untrue in revealed theology and reversed. He maintains, that natural theology proves the truth of the Christian religion by determining the holiness and divine origin of the Holy Scripture. In his opinion natural theology often traces the signification of the divine revelation and distinguishes the truth from the untruth.
The inquiry also analyses the arguments for the existence of God. Concerning the quinque viae of Thomas Aquinas the investigator first points out the relevant criticism of Kant. In the opinion of the investigator these ways lead to noetic abstractions, which by Thomas are wrongly identified with the God of the Holy Scripture, they only are personified hypostases. In this connection there is a discussion between G. Ebeling and H. Ott. Ebeling points out the difference between Thomas and Luther; according to Thomas man exists between God as praecondition and God as finis; according to Luther man lives between the Deus absconditus and the Deus revelatus. Ebeling’s objection is that according to Thomas the knowledge of the existence of God is a soteriologically neutral base, on which the revealed knowledge of God is built. For Luther there is no bridge from the God and idol enclosing knowledge that God is to the knowledge what or who God is. In his opinion one can not speak about God but from the disastrous situation of man. Ebeling prefers the latter view, his objection to Thomas and the traditional doctrine of God is, that it forgets the human situation.

H. Ott wants to interpret Thomas by introducing the dimension of the hermeneutics. So the reality from which Thomas’ viae rise is seen as a reality pervaded by God. Ott wants to understand the proof of the existence of God as a train of thought of the faith. K. Rahner asserts, that the proof of the existence of God is a transcendental, fundamental experience, which man can not obtain without the grace of God. G. Muschalek states, that Thomas’ preambula fidei do not mean a basis to the faith, but integration and illumination of the faith. Moreover that the faith according to Thomas is no superstructure, which has to be affirmed by a philosophic base, but in certain circumstances even is annulment of the natural knowledge.

Descartes’ proofs for the existence of God are rejected as such, they are not stringent in the opinion of the investigator. Herewith the stringence of the doctrines of the authors, which are based on Thomas’ viae and the Cartesian theses also becomes invalid. Concerning the doctrine of God (God’s being and attributes) most authors are in the Cartesian way in determining the being of God as ‘Thinking. Besides, they in general use the category of the perfect being of God to be able to deduce God’s attributes in this way: ‘the perfect being has to be almighty, for if this being was not almighty, it would not be perfect’. Moreover they use the attributes obtained to be able to prove other ones. Generally speaking these attributes are identical with the biblical qualities of God. We can hardly rid ourselves of the impression that the authors, already knowing these biblical qualities from the Holy Scripture, in their books on natural theology take care to reasoning. These considerations are not all.

All authors operate with ‘reason’, which defines the latter one as ‘objective reason’ and axioms, that is imprinted on a man. Concerning the ‘objective reason’ it rests on him, who states its existence as an axiom, which is evident for the man unproved presupposition. When in mind of mankind, it is phenomenonall complex inherent to all men, which connect all men.

Some historical notions from the mentioned, e.g. Plato, Cicero, Augusti estimation of the function of reason, that is shown by E. Brunner in his ‘Vernunft, Zürich, 1941, S. 378 f.’ that comes forward from the books over again contrary to the biblical accept the biblical revelation it is part of the conception of God in the above conception of God. In these authors’ theology and philosophy comes forward about natural theology here reviewed dogmatics arising from ontology. They are known legitimately only from De Vries, Andala and Lulofs allude creation according to the Epistle to humans rationis lumine e rebus creaturae. It is the opinion of M. Schmaus, that was never a situation absolutely with the conception of God. In these authors’ estimation of doctrine concerning this question Catholic and Protestant dogmatists point of view is a statement of the first humanae rationis lumine e rebus creaturae, which he, like Althaus, deduces from...
on natural theology take care to reach these qualities by way of reasoning. These considerations are not satisfying.

All authors operate with 'reason' or 'the light of the reason'. Van Til defines the latter one as 'objective reason', a 'complex of notions, ideas and axioms, that is imprinted on and innate in the mind of mankind'. Concerning the 'objective reason' it may be said, that the onus probandi rests on him, who states its existence. But there is no proof, because it is an axiom, which is evident for the adepts and by virtue of its nature an unproved presupposition. When it is a question of innate ideas in the mind of mankind, it is phenomenally unacceptable that there should be a complex inherent to all men, which would form a unity, that would connect all men.

Some historical notions from the doctrine of innate ideas are mentioned, e.g. Plato, Cicero, Augustine and Descartes. Concerning the estimation of the function of reason, the investigator considers the direction shown by E. Brunner in his 'Proportionalsatz' (Offenbarung und Vernunft, Zürich, 1941, S. 378 f.) as correct. The conception of God, that comes forward from the books above-mentioned appears over and over again contrary to the biblical conception of God. As all authors accept the biblical revelation it is permissible for that reason to compare the conception of God in the above-mentioned books with the biblical conception of God. In these authors a disastrous contamination of theology and philosophy comes forward. It is evident that in the books about natural theology here reviewed many of the authors give a kind of dogmatics arising from ontology. The being of God and his attributes are known legitimately only from his revelation. The authors Roell, De Vries, Andala and Lulofs allude to the knowledge of God from the creation according to the Epistle to the Romans chapter 1. The evolution of doctrine concerning this question is traced in writings of Roman-Catholic and Protestant dogmatists. For the former the fundamental point of view is a statement of the first Vaticanum, that God... naturali humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certo cognosci posse. H. Urs von Balthasar considers the quaestio facti in this case to be left open. It is the opinion of M. Schmaus, that in the history of mankind there was never a situation absolutely without grace. H. Bouillard's opinion on the subject of chapter 1 of the Epistle to the Romans is, that man would not be able to deify the creatures and for that reason would not be guilty, unless he had a certain knowledge of God.

Concerning the Protestant theologians: P. Althaus teaches an original revelation in creation. E. Brunner also teaches a revelation in creation, which he, like Althaus, deduces from the testimony of Holy Scripture.
Both of them mean to say, that the revelation in creation is a revelation of God.

In Kirchliche Dogmatik I, 2, S. 335 K. Barth explains, that there is a revelation of God extra muros ecclesiae inspired by Christ, to whom God has delivered up all things. The revelation of the creation is not revelation of God, but revelation of its own laws e.g. rhythm, seasons and mutual existence. When God speaks his definite Word in the universe the own truth of creation is made relative, but also integrated and renewed. Then the own testimony of creature can speak of that, which God says and so of God Himself, the heavens receive the power to declare the glory of God. G. Koch tries to demonstrate similarities in the standpoints of Barth and Althaus, but in the opinion of the investigator he does not succeed in this as regards the principle. On the one side Barth states, that man knows God very well from creation. On the other hand creation is not able to reveal God. Only after the integration of the lights of the creation by Christ the Light they receive the power for the task mentioned in Psalm 19:2. This is not satisfying. Against this view the Epistle to the Romans chapter 1:20 can be put forward, but Barth thinks, that here God's revelation in man in the universe is "hineingelesen" in the universe with the sovereignty of the prophetic-apostolic authority.

In accordance with E. Brunner the investigator maintains, that Holy Scripture teaches, that God obviously makes use of the means of creation to reveal Himself and that the knowledge of this is not attached to nor happens from the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For a statement of the writings in question of the authors named in this chapter see Literatuuropgave.