

# Christian faith and science: Efforts to encounter the Christian faith and science in the work of Alister E. McGrath



## Authors:

Tumpal Pandiangan<sup>1,2</sup>   
 Pujiastuti Liza Sindoro<sup>2</sup>   
 Agus Santoso<sup>3</sup>   
 Juli Santoso<sup>4</sup>   
 Bobby Kurnia Putrawan<sup>4</sup> 

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Science, Technology, and Mathematics, Faculty of Physics, Matana University, Tangerang Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Department of Theology, Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Moriah, Tangerang, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Department of Theology, Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Reformed Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup>Department of Theology, Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Moriah, Jakarta, Indonesia

## Corresponding author:

Bobby Kurnia Putrawan, bkputrawan@gmail.com

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This study aims to present an effort for an encounter between Christian faith and science in Alister E. McGrath's thinking. The process of encountering both Christian faith and science is mediated by Christian natural theology. Christian natural theology is the result of rethinking conventional natural theology by McGrath. This is carried out because the meaning of conventional natural theology as an interface of Christian faith and science is not in accordance with Christian faith. The efforts to encounter Christian faith and science through conventional natural theology are something that is not possible, because conventional natural theology is denoted as pure theology centred on the rationality of scientific thought alone. In this article, we will show how Christian natural theology as a result of thinking by McGrath can be a medium for an encounter between Christian faith and science. The analysis of this article is generally based on the writings of McGrath, which are only partially reconciled with the views of several other theologies. Data collection was carried out through a literature study and described descriptively. The result of the research is a description of the encounter between Christian faith and science mediated by Christian natural theology. McGrath established Christian natural theology on observations in critical reality, Christian history and the word of God (Gn 1 and 2), allowing the human intellect to have a strong relationship with the order and beauty of nature that God created. This is the reason why the encounter between Christian faith and science based on McGrath's concept of thought is more likely to reveal the truth in the reality of the Christian faith's life.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This study recommends that efforts be made to identify faith, science and natural theology in the work of Alister E. McGrath. This article has contributed to highlighting natural theology, which is still under long discussion, especially in the context of the Christian faith and the ambiguity of nature, which is also important in various disciplines, including theology, natural science and science.

**Keywords:** natural theology; Alister McGrath; faith and science; faith integration; Christian theology.

## Introduction

God, man and nature have become an endless discussion, started by Jeremiah in the Old Testament era (50sM). The existence and characteristics of God form the subject of natural theology, which seeks divine knowledge based on reason and world experience. The discussion of natural theology is primarily based on intuition and reasoning that looks natural to us and occurs spontaneously. Perhaps even for non-philosophy, seeing beautiful landscapes or being amazed by the complexity of the universe. However, a few Christians do not comment, they remain silent because they do not have adequate knowledge about science, understanding of natural theology, Christian theology and Christian faith relations and science. But the problem is what is the magnitude of natural theology like? So as to mediate the encounter between Christian faith and science.

In the Age of Enlightenment, where truth was centred on the rationality of science, natural theology was understood as something autonomous with pure science, without the need for the word of God (McGrath 2008:140, 2010c:30). But history proves that such an understanding cannot develop and has been criticised by Christian theologians, such as McGrath. McGrath argued that through Christian natural theology we can reconsider nature (McGrath 2010c:110–117, 2017:8).

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This article aims to present an effort to encounter Christian faith and science through Christian natural theology based on McGrath's concept of thought.

Efforts to encounter Christian faith and science become something that is impossible if it is based on conventional natural theology because the understanding of conventional natural theology is not in accordance with Christian faith. Conventional natural theology (Belgic Confession 1561, Art 2) arose from the enlightenment assumption that nature can be deciphered without problems by subconsciously using the human mind to reveal reliable knowledge of God. There are no 'secrets' or 'hidden' meanings in nature where the human mind can reveal true social meaning (McGrath 2008:140). The term 'Enlightenment' is widely used to refer to a large intellectual and cultural movement that began in the 18th century and swept through much of Europe and North America (McGrath 2008:140).

Natural Christian theology was built by McGrath based on observations in critical reality, Christian history, God's word (Gn 1 and 2) and Jesus Christ who was incarnated in human nature. God created man in the image of God, so that allows the human mind to have a strong relationship with the order and beauty of nature that God has created. This is the reason why the encounter between Christian faith and science based on the concept of McGrath's thinking is considered to reveal things that are true in the reality of the Christian faith life. This is something that is relevant to understand in our current era, given that so many natural events have occurred in both past and present, including in Indonesia.

## Methods

This article will explore Alister E. McGrath's writings, which the authors consider the most adequate in discussing McGrath's natural theology itself in discussing efforts to encounter Christian faith and science. Data were collected through literature study and described descriptively. The stages of the discussion are as follows: (1) Briefly describe McGrath's identity and scientific work. (2) What conventional natural theology assumes of enlightenment looks like? (3) What is the natural theology according to McGrath? (4) What is Christianity's approach to natural theology? (5) How is Christian natural theology concerned with the Christian God? (6) How is the Christian faith in the ambiguity of nature? (7) Draw conclusions.

## Alister McGrath's identity and scientific work

British theologian Alister McGrath began his academic studies in 1971 with a double PhD from Oxford University, both in Molecular Biophysics and Theology. He continued his scientific research at Oxford under the supervision of Professor Sir George Radda, working on the biophysical properties of biological membranes. Simultaneously, he began studying Christian theology, and in 1978, he was

granted the Denyer and Johnson Prize by the University of Oxford for highest achievement in the Final Honours School of Theology. McGrath was then transferred to the University of Cambridge, where he researched historical theology, in preparation for a further engagement in more detail with the fields of science and religion. He returned to the University of Oxford in 1983 and remained there until 2008. After a series of publications related to the development of Christian doctrine, particularly in the 16th century, McGrath became involved in the fields of science and religion. His first publication in this area, *The Foundations of Dialogue in Science and Religion* (1998), was followed by Thomas F. Torrance: *An Intellectual Biography* (1999), a detailed study of methods and approaches, Thomas F. Torrance (1913–2007), one of the pioneers of the dialogue between the natural sciences and Christian theology. In the period (2001–2020) ('Biography' n.d.), McGrath published a work entitled 'A Scientific Theology', 'Science and Religion', 'Christian Theology', 'Dawkins' God: From The Selfish Gene to The God Delusion', 'A Theory of Everything (That Matters): A Brief Guide to Einstein, Relativity, and His Surprising Thoughts on God', 'The Territories of Human Reason', 'Through a Glass Darkly: Journeys Through Science, Faith and Doubt: A Memoir' etc. This volume is intended to explore how the methods and working assumptions of the natural sciences can enrich and sustain systematic Christian theology (McGrath 2001, 2015c, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2020).

## Conventional natural theology assumptions of enlightenment

McGrath argues that the parable of Jesus from Nazareth insists that nature, when interpreted correctly, has the capacity to express God. The parable is truly a completely critical perception for natural theology, for it appears to mean that nature holds the important thing to God's knowledge. However, the myth of Jesus of Nazareth additionally shows that despite a fact that the natural world is accessible to the public, it's actual that means can be hidden (McGrath 2008:140).

So how can we say that nature 'speaks'? Or do you 'discover' the presence of God and the natural world? We explore alternative answers that are so influential to this question that, to some extent, have shaped the modern approach to natural theology. A discussion of natural theology arose during this period, shaped by the means of it is to postulate an Enlightenment in which nature will rest in trouble, through the unreasonable use of the human mind to reveal reliable information about God. There is nothing 'secret' or 'hidden' in natural, that is, human thought is prepared to reveal its true masses (McGrath 2008:140).

The word 'enlightenment' is widely used to refer to a major intellectual and cultural movement, dating back to the 18th century, which later swept away much of Europe and North America (McGrath 2008:140). It is frequently visible to have shaped the cutting-edge world, typically through

its perception within the strength of the human mind, its dedication to personal freedom of expression towards ecclesiastical or royal tyranny and its assumption that those values will enhance the human situation everywhere. This motion is frequently taken into consideration to have stimulated and justified the essential achievements of industrialisation, liberalism and democracy of the 19th and 20th centuries (McGrath 2008:141). Western theology has been influenced by the ideas of enlightenment, namely emphasis on the competence of motive and the feasible judgement objectivity and his appalling critique of the concept of supernatural revelation and the Bible's ability to expose presumed truths with past motives (McGrath 2008:141).

The use of the term 'enlightenment' becomes problematic, when academics now have suggested that major movements in Western thinking are better understood as 'enlightenment groups,' sharing a not unusual place dedicated to middle thoughts and values, but displaying diversity. At different points, the concept that the enlightenment is characterised with the aid of using an exact set of thoughts has proved very tough to protect historically; better understood as 'an attitude of mind, rather than a coherent set of beliefs' (McGrath 2008:142). This historical observation suggests that it is necessary to discuss the natural theological group of enlightenment, given the highbrow and social range of the motion itself and especially the numerous attitudes in the direction of nature it developed. No single narrative controls the 'natural theology of the enlightenment', even though some of the subject matters and issues may be visible as massive catalysts for the improvement and shaping of this type of theology (McGrath 2008:142).

## Alister McGrath's natural theological view

McGrath argues that any attempt to discover and propose natural theology increases essential questions on the definition. How is natural theology understood? And who has the right to make such normative decisions? Any dialogue of whether or not natural theology is beneficial or destructive, worth or inappropriate, clever or foolish, actual Christian or pagan, relies upon an awful lot on how that know how is defined and the idealistic paintings wherein it stands (McGrath 2010c:118, 2017:10). Orthodox theologians, for example, had been critical of the Western inclination to impose a meaningless and ambiguous distinction between nature and divine revelation. Orthodoxy believes that 'natural revelation is completely understood in the light of supernatural revelation' and rejects the scholastic or modernist tendency to ignore divine influence on the human theological mirrored image within the world, seeing man as the 'only active agent' on this way of mirrored image (McGrath 2017b:10).

So, what does McGrath mean by Christian natural theology? McGrath argues that through Christian natural theology we can reconsider nature.

What is then meant by McGrath with Christian Natural Theology? McGrath argues that a Christian natural theology allows us to reimagine nature. In talking about such intellectual permissive actions, McGrath does not mean that it encourages false inflation of our understanding of nature, or falls into intellectual vacuum or irrationality (McGrath, 2015a:25, 2017:8). Instead, McGrath means that we are given intellectual and imaginative abilities that provide information on a framework that guarantees and allows us to visualise the everyday natural world in a new way (McGrath 2017b:8-9, 2019b:116), as if the intellectual sun hit it so we can look at colour, texture, and details in a way that until now has escaped our attention.

McGrath states a theological rearrangement of nature, such a rethinking prompts us to develop principled attention to the details of the natural world that enables us to see what may have been overlooked, to appreciate more complete beauty and wonder and to understand their underlying interrelationships. According to McGrath, the Western theological tradition has six fundamental understandings of natural theology, each of which can be regarded as a construction or interpretation of a broader and richer underlying notion, reflecting the demands or opportunities of the unique environment in which it is anchored (McGrath 2017b:18-21, 2019c:44, 219). These approaches are as follows:

Firstly, natural theology is 'the branch of philosophy that investigates what the unrevealed human mind can say about God'. It is interpreted in this context as an attempt to demonstrate God's existence or qualities without the aid of supernatural revelation. This is now largely regarded as the established view of natural theology. This technique has tremendous apologetic appeal in the setting of secular culture because it does not rely on or express any distinctive Christian principles. It's not interesting for the natural world in its entirety but rather to a priori conceptions that could be termed 'natural', and it analyses their theistic significance. As a result, natural theology refers to theology that emerges 'naturally' in the human mind.

Secondly, natural theology is the demonstration or confirmation of God's existence based on the natural world's order and complexity. For apologetic reasons, this particular version of natural theology appears to have originated in the Protestant environment throughout the early modern period. It is commonly referred to as 'physico-theology' because of its application to a posteriori observation of order. Concerning nature, which is considered to suggest divine existence, rather than a priori notions about God, which is thought to underpin ontological reasoning. This method avoids the 'scandal' of specificity, which came from modernism's insistence that heavenly truth be universally accessible rather than historically or culturally distinctive. When secularism became a pressing worry in Western Europe in the 19th century, this approach to the theology of nature within Catholicism became increasingly relevant. The First

Vatican Council's Decree (1870) acknowledged this transition, stating that God 'may be known with certainty by reason, things produced in the natural light of human reason' (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2014). We can leave the question of whether a natural theology uses deductive or inferential reasoning to defend a theistic position open for the purposes of this classification. While there are obvious parallels between this approach and the preceding one, their starting points are quite different: One is the result of pure reason, while the other is the result of interaction with the natural world.

Thirdly, natural theology is the intellectual product of the human mind's natural inclination to desire or incline to God. This approach has traditionally appealed to Thomas Aquinas's 'natural desire to see God', but recent advances in the cognitive science of religion have opened up new options for further exploration of this issue. Other theologians have significantly elaborated on this thesis, most notably in Bernard Lonergan's reformulation of this premise as an innate human intelligence tendency, equivalent to an infinite desire to understand existence.

Fourthly, the study of the analogy or conceptual resonance that occurs between the human experience of nature on the one hand and the Christian gospel on the other is known as natural theology. This natural theology method typically confines itself to showing the possibility of coherence or compatibility between specific claims of Christian faith and world knowledge drawn from other disciplines or spheres of life. Thus, natural theology articulates and expands on the concept of 'isomorphism between our reason and the structure of reality'. Variations on this theme can be found in the works of Joseph Butler and John Polkinghorne (McGrath 2015a:105, 2017:20). Those who regard natural theology as strengthening the rationality of current faith rather than showing the necessity of that faith in the first place can also be included in this category, thus providing an 'intellectual framework for articulating existing traditional beliefs about ultimatum in a reasonable way and keeping faith'.

Fifthly, natural theology is an attempt to show that the 'naturalistic' explanations of nature and the outcomes of the natural sciences themselves are appropriate and that a theological approach is needed to provide a comprehensive and coherent interpretation of the natural order. This approach relies on today's predominant cultural belief that today's intellectual thinking about nature leads to 'natural theology' rather than 'Natural Theology', while avoiding the theologically questionable notion of 'the God of inequality'. This approach to natural theology is particularly important in modern discussions of the metaphysical meaning of science, as it challenges the notion that the naturalistic explanation of privilege is epistemological or 'neutral'. While speaking openly about his own metaphysical assumptions and narrative missions, he challenges naturalism and admits its own implicit foundations and assumptions. In particular, this approach to natural theology argues that the 'scientific'

record of reality essentially reduces 'reality' to reality. A single layer or perspective is not enough to explain the complexity of the human experience of the world. In the second half of this work, we will return to the problem of such a flat world view (McGrath 2010c:78, 2015a:66, 2019b:161–163).

Sixthly, natural theology must be regarded principally as 'natural theology', that is, as a specific Christian view of the natural world that reflects the essential assumptions of the Christian faith, as opposed to secular or naturalistic accounts of nature. The progress of thought in this case is from inside the Christian tradition towards nature, rather than from nature towards faith (as in the second approach, mentioned here). Natural theology is frequently framed in this way, particularly in the case of the doctrine of creation.

With this plurality of interpretations, some may be tempted to conclude that the concept of 'natural theology' is incoherent, open to multiple interpretations and thus no longer valid or meaningful. Thus, natural theology is understood as the act of 'seeing' nature from a certain Christian point of view. This involves rejecting the natural version of the enlightenment theology as a generic attempt to demonstrate the existence and attributes of God that are supposed to be of attraction to the natural world. Instead, nature is seen from the perspective of the Christian tradition, with different views on God, nature and human agency. McGrath argues that a significant level of resonance or consonance is observed between theory and observation. In other words, there is a high empirical level between the vision of the reality of the Trinity and what is actually observed. This is not considered as 'proof' of the Christian belief in God. His point is that what is observed is in line with the Christian vision of God, which is believed to be true for another reason because it offers a significant degree of intellectual resonance at important points. Natural theology is defined as the capacity of the Christian faith to grasp what is observed, rather than as an attempt to deduce the existence of God from observations of nature. Natural theology emphasises the resonance between faith's conceptual framework and Christian observation, rather than attempting to prove the essential principles of faith by an appeal to nature.

In contrast to the effort to enlighten universal natural theology through human reason and natural experience, Christian natural theology is clearly founded on and inspired by Christian theology. We insist that understanding Christianity in nature is an intellectual precondition for natural theology that reveals the god of Christianity. The understanding of Christianity in nature is an intellectual premise of natural theology, which reveals the God of Christianity (McGrath 2008:4, 2019b:23, 116–117, 2019c:128, 154). In natural theology, it involves the nature of 'seeing'. The empirical topic of how human perception happens is regarded as having significant religious implications. As a result, natural theology necessitates a thorough understanding of the psychology of human experience, particularly the recognition that perception entails thinking

about, responding to and actively interacting with the universe. Thus, open secrets are of interest to contemporary theories of psychological perception to illuminate how humans make sense of things. This requires moving away from the inadequate and misleading understanding of enlightenment about how the process of understanding nature occurs. Furthermore, the enlightenment regarded natural theology as fundamentally a reasonable exercise. In exchange for this inadequate perceptual record, McGrath argues that the so-called 'the Platonic triad of truth, beauty and goodness offers a useful heuristic framework for natural theology. It takes into account the rational, aesthetic and moral dimensions of human engagement with nature (McGrath 2019b:111, 2019c:109, 218).

## Natural science and theology

McGrath argues as follows: Can the existence of God be known from science? If anything about God could be known from science, it would become clear that religion and science would share some significant common features (McGrath 2010c:110, 2019c:145–146). The important issue here concerns 'nature' itself and whether it should be regarded as something that has, in some way, been created by God (and thus reflects God's nature, somehow indirectly).

Alston defines natural theology as 'an effort to provide support for religious beliefs by starting from premises that neither exist nor do they presuppose any religious belief' (Alston 1991:289; McGrath 2010c:110). Alston acknowledges that it is impossible to build demonstrative evidence for the existence of God evading religious places. He also argues that this is not the right approach to natural theology. In fact, natural theology starts from a starting point such as the existence of God and shows that this starting point leads us to recognise the existence of a being who will be accepted as God (McGrath 2010:110, 2010c:110–111, 2019b:116, 2019c:145–146, 168, 173). Thus, Alston's view has a strong degree of convergence between traditional natural theological arguments about the existence of God, particularly those of Thomas Aquinas. But his conception of natural theology went beyond such narrow evidence and encouraged engagement with other areas of human life and concern, among which he explicitly included science. Natural theology thus offers 'a metaphysical rationale for the truth of theism as a general worldview' (Alston 1991:270) and allows us to build bridges to other disciplines. Thus, McGrath tries to explore several aspects of what is known as 'natural theology', namely religious belief, which is based on the doctrine of creation and has traditionally asserted that at least something about God can be known from the study of nature (McGrath 2010c:111, 2010c:111, 2019b:115, 2019c:154).

Within Christianity, three general approaches have emerged to the question, can and to what extent, God can be known through nature? It is an appeal to reason, to the order of the world and to the beauty of nature. Let us briefly discuss each of these three approaches, noting that the second and third are of particular importance to the relationship between

science and religion. The appeal to human reason is one of the most commonly encountered methods to natural knowledge of God. Augustine of Hippo's works are a good illustration of this method (354–430), particularly in his major work, *De Trinitate* (McGrath 2010:111, 2010c:111). The general line of argument developed by Augustine can be summed up as follows. If indeed God is to be seen in His creation, we should hope to find him at the apex of that creation. Augustine's reasoning (basing his argument on Gn 1 and 2) is human in nature. And, based on the neo-Platonic presuppositions he inherited from his cultural environment, Augustine further argues that the greatness of human nature is the human capacity to think. Therefore, he concludes, one should expect to find traces of God (or, more precisely, 'Trinity remnants') in the human reasoning process (McGrath 2010c:111, 2010:112, 2019c:149). On the basis of this belief, Augustine developed what came to be known as the 'psychological analogy of the Trinity'.

For Augustine, God created man in His image, thus establishing a correspondence between human reason and the 'deep structure of nature'. As a result, the human mind is 'fixed' to distinguish God in creation, either by reflecting on ideas or on the nature of the world (McGrath 2010:111, 2010c:111–112, 2019c:148). This 'tuning' is the result of the doctrine of creation, which rests specifically on the idea that God has created man in such a way as to give birth to the image of God. For Augustine, this particular characteristic of human nature leads man to pursue a quest for the transcendent (McGrath 2010:111). According to Augustine the image of the creator can be found in the rational or intellectual soul of mankind. Although reason and intelligence may be dormant at times or may appear weak at times and strong in others, the human soul cannot be anything other than rational and intellectual. It has been created in the image of God in order to use reason and intelligence to understand and see God (*De Trinitate* XVI. iv. 6; 2010c:112).

Augustine's vision was developed by other writers, including the great medieval writer, Thomas Aquinas. However, it is not clear, when comparing it with the human mind whether it has direct relevance to the dialogue between science and religion. Indeed, some would suggest that it really leads away from involvement with the natural world, where it implies that the human mind is capable of resolving the question of the existence of God without reference to the natural world. While the second and third approaches of the three considered here, this is more interesting, as both are based on reflections on the natural world itself (McGrath 2010:111, 2010c:111–112, 2019c:145).

The world is one of the most significant themes for our research, given its close relationship with scientific findings. Thomas Aquinas' argument for the existence of God, established in the 13th century is based on the perception that there is an order in nature, which needs to be explained. Likewise, the fact that the human mind can discern and investigate this natural order is very important. There seems to be something about human nature that prompts him to

ask questions about the world, just as there is something about the world that allows answers to those questions to be given. This is a recurring theme in the writings of the theoretical physicist and Christian theologian John Polkinghorne (McGrath 2010:112, 2010c:212–213, 2019c:167).

We are so familiar with the fact that we can understand the world that most of the time we take it for granted. This is what makes science possible. But it could be the other way around. The universe may be disorderly chaos rather than an orderly cosmos. Or it may have rationality that is inaccessible to us. There is a correspondence between our minds and the universe between natural rationality and unobservable rationality (Polkinghorne 1988:20–21; McGrath 2010c:112).

There is a strong correspondence between the rationality we have in mind and the order we observe it as it is in the real world. One of the most striking features of this order is the abstract structure of pure mathematics, a spontaneous creation of the human mind – which, as Polkinghorne notes, still provides significant clues for comprehending the universe (McGrath 2010a:112, 2010c:113). The English theoretical physicist Paul Dirac's, 1931 explanation of the perplexing aspects of the equations he got to explain electron behaviour is an example of this congruence between rationality and natural order.

Natural theology, which is focused on the sense of beauty that comes from examining the universe, has been established by a number of notable Christian theologians. In the 20th and 18th centuries, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) and Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) both presented such an approach, the former from a Roman Catholic and the later from a reformed perspective (McGrath 2010:113, 2010c:113). Things were created by the English physicist Robert Boyle (1627–1691) and their beauty was mirrored in them. The renowned medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas defined 'five ways' of inferring the truth of God from the order of the world; four of them are based on the observation of the existence of perfection in the world (McGrath 2010:113, 2010c:114). Although Aquinas does not explicitly name 'beauty' as one of these perfections at this time, it is evident that this identification is possible and is made elsewhere in Aquinas' work (McGrath 2010:113, 2010c:114). This basic line of argument was developed in the early 20th century by the eminent philosophical theologian F. R. Tennant (1886–1957), who maintained that the observation of beauty in the world is part of the cumulative case for the existence of God.

## Christian approach to natural theology

Natural theology states that it is important to re-understand nature through natural theology as a foundation that derives its legitimacy and delegation from the Christian tradition rather than some 'universal' common principles (McGrath 2008:171, 2010c:30). The dynamic mental structures Christians use to based on experience have evolved, in part, from

adaptations to certain ideas of the Christian tradition, which include diverse and often counterintuitive ideas of God nature and God's role in the world. It's possible that this naturally leads us to explore the forms of interaction with the natural order dictated by certain expressions of the Christian tradition (McGrath 2008:171, 2010c:185, 2019c:225). The natural theology approach developed in this study is that natural theology is a matrix of interconnected ideas that make up the web of Christian doctrine (McGrath 2008:171, 2010c:140). However, such natural theology cannot be understood as an autonomous discipline that can find God in the conditions of his choice. Rather, it is a theologically grounded discipline that draws an intellectual foundation and apparent success in the Christian tradition (McGrath 2008:171, 2010c:108). Christian tradition states that something which is true and reliable can be justified without the need to be proven, as McGrath said that 'I might have a good reason to believe something is true, but realize that I can't prove it. It's just the nature of everything' (McGrath 2010c:115, 227, 2011:109, 2015a:155, 2019c:225).

First of all, how the human quest for transcendence must be viewed as a general cultural phenomenon and not necessarily related to a specific religious tradition or agenda. However, it is clear that this universal quest has had some form and direction by the character of the Christian tradition (McGrath 2008:172, 2010c:114). The Christian faith allows for a certain way of 'seeing' the world, which allows it to be considered a creature created from divine glory and wisdom (McGrath 2008:172, 2010c:57). Both the parable of Jesus of Nazareth and contemporary understandings of cognition and perception emphasise that 'seeing' is not the same as 'perceiving'. The importance of 'seeing' properly is stated in the prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1–18), which needs to be read carefully and in totality with this particular agenda in mind (McGrath 2008:172, 2010c:56, 161).

John 1:1–18 explains God is the only Son, close to the heart of the Father, who has made him known. This prologue provides an intellectual foundation for an embodied approach to natural theology. It begins with the dissemination of the doctrine of creation with the greatest emphasis on the Logos, the word that brings all things into existence. There is no concept of 'natural theology' as a prior conceptual system. Instead, we find a vague, opaque and ambiguous conception of the Enlightenment of Creation through the 'Word', such as that 'the Word became flesh' when we first created creation. The prologue goes on to say that a man who has come to know God can enlighten our hearts so that we can see his reflection in creation. He 'gets into his place' so that he can feel his true meaning by inhabiting the physical space and cultural category of the nation of Israel (McGrath 2008:173, 2010c:195).

The divine light emanating from the logo allows us to 'see' the created order in an accurate way, allowing us to overcome human limitations in discerning the divine. But Christ, the incarnate Word, not only illuminates and interprets creation.

He is the one who indulges in this order and changes the ability to point to God. And that's not all. Christ Himself revealed the disposition and glory of God that had never been seen in man. The revelation of God's glory thus comes *through* nature, not *above* nature. The proven Word of God makes known God to mankind in and through the natural order. This theological richness and depth not only establishes the link between the doctrine of the creation of the world and the theology of nature; it provides a framework that connects creation, incarnation and revelation (McGrath 2008:174, 2010c:195).

'We saw his glory'. This word is in history and nature and you know how to see yourself in history and nature forms and make them famous. In essence, God cannot be invisible, and God enters the creative order visual and inexpensive orders. Terrible words enter the form of the natural order. Therefore, mankind can make everything to create a visible God through visible things. The word entering nature is a natural form and can be used in a natural awareness process. The word is not clearly distinguished, but there is no distinction that it is not clearly distinguished, but there is an important continuity among them (McGrath 2008:174, 2015b:195).

This theological framework allows us to explore how the undeniable God became available to human perception both in the natural world and in Jesus Christ. Revelation does not take place outside of nature and history, but within nature and history. When properly viewed and illuminated using the language of John's preface, nature and history have the power to reveal God. Nature, although limited, can serve as a conduit for God (McGrath 2008:173, 2015b:214).

## Natural theology of Christians gives attention to the Christian God

Does the search for the transcendent through nature lead to the Christian God as the Triune God incarnate in Jesus Christ? This is not an empty question (McGrath 2008:12). As we will see, the British philosopher Iris Murdoch argued for the role of a transcendental basis in all attempts to defend the idea of 'good' (McGrath 2008:291–292). We insist that Christian natural theology essentially explained the cultural phenomenon of desire to discover transcendentals but essentially that transcendental search seems to be not leading to Christian God. Instead, this study emphasises him in Christ to take a special Christian approach to natural theology, which emphasises him in Christ (McGrath 2008:13, 2010c:226). This book is about natural Christian theology, and this defines history in natural theology that is historically located in the life and death of Jesus Nazareth and is interpreted by theological Church (McGrath 2008:13, 2010c:161).

This theology puts common questions about nature and humanity in the specific context of the Jesus Christ gospel. As already mentioned, the main claim is that the events of Christ make all theology 'natural', as the natural order is

redeemed in it. The basis of 'natural Christian theology' is ultimately the dogma of incarnation (McGrath 2008:12, 2010c:189). Therefore, Christian theology is practiced on the basis of the Christian vision of God and nature, which is centred around the person of Christ (Koo 2021:87–89; McGrath 2008:13, 2010c:98, 227, 2011:809). This natural theological approach makes nature 'visible' in the light of Christian traditions. This tradition raises important questions about what happens with observers (McGrath 2008:14, 2010c:49, 88, 115, 227).

What if nature 'falls down', so that its capacity to express God is diminished or distorted? Or if human observers and natural interpreters share their fall, causing a double decline or distortion of God's glory? (McGrath 2008:12, 2019b:119). This point is unavoidable by selective reading of nature, which emphasizes its beauty and order (McGrath 2019c:154), while ignoring its uglier, chaotic aspects, especially those seen in the evils and sufferings of nature. A strong theological framework is essential if nature is to be involved in a coherent whole, rather than adopting a very eclectic, piecemeal approach to interpretation. If we want to gain a comprehensive understanding of our world, we have to find some way of bringing them all together. We might superimpose them, so that their information can be fully encountered. One map on its own cannot tell us everything we wish to know. It can help us understand part of a bigger picture – but to see the full picture we need multiple maps. Each map answers a different question – and each of those questions is important. Science maps our world at one level, explaining how it functions; religion maps our world at another level, explaining what it means (McGrath 2010c:15, 2019b:120–121).

## How is the Christian faith in nature's ambiguity

Natural theology William Paley praises the well-explained (albeit somewhat selective) natural order by shining an example of God's wisdom in building great creations. However, the dark side of nature cannot be ignored. While Wordsworth and other Romantics regarded nature as a moral educator, Tennyson argued that the only ethic proven in nature was the struggle for survival (McGrath 2008:300, 2015b:64, 2019c:173). Tennyson's claim is simple. Those who speak naive and emotionally about God's love expressed in nature must give a compelling explanation for the violent cycle of violence, pain and suffering. The changing view of John Ruskin on the beauty and moral goodness of nature is very important evidence of a growing awareness of the moral ambiguity of nature (McGrath 2008:301, 2019c:112).

Ruskin's concerns cannot be ignored and his changing attitude towards the natural order only reinforces the importance of his emphasis on the importance of 'seeing' nature, a characteristic that is highly ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations. This is evident in Ruskin's final volume of his *Modern Painter*, which treats Paley's natural theology as one of history's most powerful and arguably

one of the most powerful (McGrath 2008:303, 2010c:3134, 2019c:112). The tension caused by nature's apparent moral ambivalence was exacerbated by the rise of Darwinism. Darwin himself found the intellectual and moral burden of pain and suffering on this world unbearable, especially in the light of his chronic illness. It is clear that the death of his daughter Annie at the age of 10 only aggravates the outrage over this (McGrath 2008:303, 2015a:103).

The image of God that incarnates suffering along with creation emphasises that living beings' suffering is not alienated from divine eternity but is eternally and very redeemingly elevated into God's 'lifestyle' (McGrath 2008:304, 2010c:118, 2019c:141, 148–149). It is a wholly incarnational vision of God's trinity that provides Christians with a framework within which they can view and, to a lesser extent, perceive Darwin's complex picture of an emerging and suffering world (McGrath 2008:304, 2010c:118). The Christian tradition's eschatological aspects shed some light on the situation as well. As previously stated (McGrath 2008:198–209, 2010c:220), the concept of a 'salvation economy' challenges the implicit assumption that we can directly map the empirical world we observe around us to the concept of 'God's good creation'. The natural world as a trigger for the resonance of ambivalent faith or a feeling of a fight – not as immoral, but as morally multitudinous entities whose virtues are often opaque and hidden, sometimes overshadowed by darker and less comfortable insights, but illuminated by the hope of transformation (McGrath 2008:304; Panjaitan 2022:24–25).

This theme, according to McGrath, may be better explored liturgically rather than theologically or philosophically. The Adventist liturgy unites the great themes of Christology, soteriology and eschatology, with a focus on Christ's second 'coming' to free the world from its slavery to sin and corruption (McGrath 2008:305, 2010c:108). The church celebrates the first coming of Christ and looks forward to the second, affirming God's justice and presence despite the absence of justice and divine presence in the world. The environmental effects of sin were well recognised by the Old Testament prophets, who envisioned the messianic age as a period of ecological and social purity (McGrath 2008:305, 2010c:226). This hope was later extended to Christian eschatology, which asserts that signs of Christ's impending victory over natural decay and corruption marked his ministry (Lk 7:18–23, Jn 11:17–27) (McGrath 2008:305, 2010c:69–70).

In Advent, the church reflects on Christ's earthly ministry in this morally ambiguous world while also anticipating the full renewal of heaven and earth, the making of all things new and the divine presence to come, which will ultimately result in the restoration of goodness and the end of suffering and pain (Rv 21:1–5) (McGrath 2008:305, 2019c:152–153). The issue here, however, is not the intellectual difficulties raised by nature's moral ambiguity: it is about how we can 'see' nature in a way that broadens and improves our moral

vision, allowing us to act appropriately both in relation to nature and in the natural order (McGrath 2008:305, 2010c:118).

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) transformed biological hypotheses (such as survival of the fittest, natural selection and the struggle for existence) into prescriptions for human moral behaviour (McGrath 2008:305, 2010c:170–171). As a result, despite its initial popularity, social Darwinism is now considered intellectually untenable and ethically unacceptable. Spencer believed that nature expresses the 'good' by moving towards it, so that 'evolution is a process that, in and of itself, produces value' (McGrath 2008:304, 2010c:170–171, 2019c:122, 180). Similarly, Julian Huxley (1887–1975) attempted to create an ethical system based on the more progressive aspects of Darwin's evolution. Neither Spencer nor Huxley was able to avoid G.E. Moore's 'naturalistic fallacy', which asserted that moral values cannot be based on what is naturally observable (McGrath 2008:306). Nature must be 'seen' and interpreted in a specific way in order to function as a moral resource, as expressed and enforced by the Christian faith. As previously stated, Christians 'see' nature through a lens shaped by the central tenets of the Christian faith. The optimism of earlier thinkers, who believed that nature revealed a pattern of excellence and morality superior to anything devised by human legislators, has now been abandoned (McGrath 2008:306, 2019c:7, 191).

This, however, brings up a question that has pervaded this work: How can the natural order be interpreted in order to reveal identity for the better? Nature can be interpreted in a variety of ways, both morally and intellectually and aesthetically (McGrath 2008:307, 2010c:3–4, 228). Any attempt to construct or develop the concept of goodness solely by observing nature will result in a variety of inconsistent and confusing ideas. This is very clear from the eventually failed attempts to establish ethics based on Darwinism, in the mistaken belief that it represents an authentically natural moral system (McGrath 2008:307, 2010c:40, 171, 2019b:120).

In the book *The Big Question*, McGrath (2015a) asks whether moral values can be found in science, especially neuroscience. Nevertheless, three serious concerns arising from the flaws of Darwin's 'social' experiments from the past remain current issues and must be addressed. Firstly, many of the supposedly 'scientific' values derived from the theory of evolution are simply transpositions of what happens in nature to what ought to happen in human society. This all-too-easy transition from fact to value took place, and so it is rightly behind some of the more ominous social policies put forward by 'social Darwinism'. This is why we are right to be sceptical about any suggestion that value-laden policies and practices can be determined solely by empirical investigation. Secondly, as we have seen, scientific theories and any results based on them are provisional. What one generation might perceive as a 'scientific' response to a given situation the future generations may perceive that as having access to a better

understanding of science or to a broader base of empirical knowledge. If we define moral values as 'doing things that improve quality of life', we need to recognise that scientific understanding of what improves the quality of life has shifted over the years and will continue to shift. Thirdly, moral questions are treated as if they were scientific questions, which can be answered only by the appeal of empirical data. This can only be performed in two ways, both of which are intellectually unacceptable.

Firstly, moral values are tacitly smuggled into what is essentially a scientific narrative, for example, by presupposing certain ideas about what is good or moral and then showing how science helps us achieve that goal. Secondly, by identifying empirically observable qualities as representing or determining morality, the empirical study of these qualities can be equated with the scientific determination of moral values. But in 2010, Dawkins changed his mind about this very important thing. After reading Sam Harris's *Moral Landscape* (2010), he stated that he now realises that he 'accidentally bought into the hectoring myth that science can say nothing about morals' (McGrath 2010c:10, 86, 2015a:31, 2015c:183, 2019b:38, 196).

Nature can be 'read' in ways that appear to support morally ambiguous ideas such as oppression and violence. If morality is concerned with man's 'participation in the created order', then Christian morality is concerned with man's 'pleasant response to God's deeds', which have restored, proved and fulfilled that order (McGrath 2008:308, 2010c:30). 'However, the restoration process is ongoing and not finished'. Nature is not perfect, but the process is transformed in nature – a transformation that can be seen with faith-filled eyes (McGrath 2008:308). O'Donovan correctly observes that the Word's incarnation is presented as a 'restored and renewed creation', offering a moral way of 'seeing' nature (McGrath 2008:308, 2010c:89–90).

How is the attitude and Christian faith in dealing with natural events such as COVID-19? As already stated according to natural theology, this incident is not because God is not merciful, because this event has nothing to do with morals, good or bad but to understand this, we must see it with the eyes of the Christian faith. We await the complete renewal of heaven and earth, the making of all things new and the arrival of the divine presence, which will ultimately result in the restoration of good and the end of suffering and pain (Rv 21:1–5) (McGrath 2008:305, 2010c:118). We need not be afraid, God can protect and heal us from disasters, but He requires us to be wise and use all the resources He has given us, including medicines. Keeping physical distance is also not a form of selfishness but rather a form of love for fellow human beings to protect them. If we are going to be destroyed by the COVID-19, let it be when the virus comes, we are doing good humanitarian things praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing children, playing tennis, chatting with friends

while playing instead of cowering in fear such as a sheep while thinking about the virus (Lennox 2020).

## Conclusion

Through his observations, McGrath assesses that nature is in the category of creation according to the doctrine of creation in the Bible, so God's word is a very important basis for him. Nature is a creation from God and humans are no exception. With the same thought, Magna or McGrath's own definition of natural theology must be based on the revelation that is the Bible. This is what makes it different from other major natural theologies that are based on philosophy, the construction of human culture or modernist and postmodernist concepts.

Based on the Introduction and Method, McGrath's natural theology is in accordance with the 6th concept, namely Christian theology about the natural world, which reflects the core assumption of the Christian faith that must be contrasted with a naturalist. The movement of thought comes from within the Christian tradition towards nature, not from nature to the Christian faith, which is framed in terms of the doctrine of creation. Natural theology by McGrath named it as Christian natural theology. Through the meaning of Christian natural theology, McGrath has succeeded in making Christian natural theology act as a mediator in encountering Christian faith and science. So that Christian natural theology has been able to give us a great deal of regular and irregular natural events in accordance with the Christian faith.

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