THEOLOGY.

The word theology, in its most restricted sense, signifies a discourse concerning God, (*λoγoς* *περι τov θεoυ)* ; but it is commonly employed to designate that science which treats not only of the divine existence and attributes, but also of the relations which subsist between God and his intelli­gent creatures, the duties which consequently devolve upon the latter, and the arrangements which He has entered into for their government and benefit. More particularly it is used to designate the scientific development of the doc­trines upon these points embraced by Christianity.

***Obs.*** The word ***θεoλoyειv*** and its cognates were first used to denote the fables of those poets and philosophers who wrote of the gene­alogy and exploits of the gods of Greece. They were afterwards adopted by the earliest writers of the Christian church, who styled the author of the Apocalypse, by way of eminence, *ὁ θεολογος*, ***the Divine.***

Having already, under the article Polytheism, treated of the origin and characteristics of *idolatry,* we are happily relieved from the necessity of here examining the theology of paganism ; for although every pagan nation of antiquity had some tutelary deities peculiar to itself, they may yet be considered as having all had the same theology, since an intercommunity of gods was universally admitted, and the heavenly bodies were adored as the *dii majorum gentium* over the whole earth. The absurdities and inconsistency of the pretended revelation of the Arabian impostor, have also been sufficiently exposed under the words Alcoran and Mahometanism ; so that the only theology of which we have to treat at present is the *Christian* theology. This comprises a body of science so important, that in compari­son with it all other sciences sink into insignificance ; for without a competent knowledge of the attributes of God, of the several relations in which he stands to us, and of the ends for which we were created, it is obvious that we must wander through life like men groping in the dark, strangers to the road on which we are travelling, as well as to the fate awaiting us at the end of our journey.

The Christian theology embraces both what has been called Natural Theology, and that which is peculiar to the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The distinc­tion between these two is clear and well-founded.a At the same time, it is not of that kind which renders it necessary that the two should be treated separately ; for as Christi­anity is no less a republication of the religion of nature, (see Hill’s Divinity, b. ii. c. 3, 1), than an announce­ment of truths, of which the volume of nature bears no traces, the attempt to present the entire body of its the­ology in one continuous whole, necessarily involves the statement both of the doctrines of natural, and those of Biblical theology.

a Concerning the extent of natural theology many opinions have been formed, while some have contended that there is no such thing. Into these disputes we mean not at present to enter. We believe that one of them could have had no existence among sober and enlightened men, bad the contending parties been at due pains to define with accuracy the terms which they used. Whatever be the origin of religion, it is obvious, that no man can receive a written book as the word of God, till he be convinced by some other means that God exists, and that he is a Being of power, wis­dom, and goodness, who watches over the conduct of his creature man. If the progenitor of the human race was instructed in the principles of religion by the Author of his being, (a fact of which it is difficult to conceive how a consistent theist can entertain a doubt), he might communicate to bis children, by natural means, much of that knowledge which he himself could not have discovered had he not been supernatnrally enlightened. Between illustrating or prov­ing a truth which is already spoken of, and making a discovery of what is wholly unknown, every one perceives that there is an im­mense difference.@@1

To beings whose natural knowledge originates wholly from sen­sation, and whose minds cannot, but by much discipline, advance from sense to science, a long series of revelations might be neces­sary to give them at first just notions of God and his attributes, and to enable them to perceive the relation between the effect and its cause, so as to infer by the powers of their own reason, the existence of the Creator from the presence of his creatures. Such revela­tions, however, could be satisfactory only to those who immediately received them. Whenever the Deity has been pleased by super­natural means to communicate any information to man, we may be sure that he has taken effectual care to satisfy the person so highly favoured, that bis understanding was not under the influence of any illusion ; but such a person could not communicate to another the knowledge which be bad thus received, by any other means than an address to his rational faculties. No man can be required to believe, no man indeed can believe, without proof, that another, who has no more faculties, either of sensation or intellect, than himself, has ob­tained information from a source to which he has no possible access. An appeal to miracles would in this case serve no purpose ; for we must believe in the existence, power, wisdom, and justice of God, before a miracle can be admitted as evidence of any thing but the power of him by whom it is performed. See **Miracle.**

It is therefore undeniable that there are some principles of the­ology which may be called ***natural;*** for though it is in the highest degree probable that the parents of mankind received all their theo­logical knowledge by ***supernatural*** means, it is yet obvious that some parts of that knowledge must have been capable of a proof purely rational, otherwise not a single religious truth could have been conveyed through the succeeding generations of the human race, but by the immediate inspiration of each individual. We in­deed admit many propositions as certainly true, upon the sole autho­rity of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, and we receive these scriptures with gratitude as the lively oracles of God ; but it is self- evident that we could not do either the one or the other, were we not convinced by natural means that God exists, that he is a being of goodness, justice, and power, and that he inspired with divine wisdom the penmen of these sacred volumes. Now, though it is possible that no man, or body of men, left to themselves from in. fancy in a desert world, would ever have made a theological dis­covery, yet whatever propositions relating to the being and attri­butes of the first cause and the duty of man, can be demonstrated

@@@1 The discriminating powers of Aristotle will not be questioned ; and in the following extract made by Cicero from some of bis works which are now lost, he expresses our sentiments on this important subject with his usual precision “ Praeclare ergo Aristoteles, si essent, inquit, qui sub terra semper habitavissent, bonis, et illustribus domiciliis, quae essent ornata signis atque picturis, instructaque rebus iis omnibus, quibus abundant ii, qui beati putantur, nec tamen exissent unquam supra terram : **accepissent autem fama et auditione, esse quoddam numen,** **et vim deorum**; deinde aliquo tempore, patefactis terrae faucibus, ex illis abditis sedibus evadere in bæc loca, quae nos incolimus, atque exire potuissent ; cum repente terram, et maria, cœlumque vidissent ; nubium magnitudinem, ventonimque vim cog­novissent, adspexissentque solem, ejusque tum magnitudinem, pulchritudinemque, tum etiam efficientiam cognovissent, quod is diem effice­ret, toto coelo luce diffusa : cum autem terras nox opacasset, tum coelum totum cernerent astris distinctum et ornatum, lunaeque luminum varietatem tum crescentis, tum senescentis, eorumque omnium ortus et occasus, atque in omni ætemitate ratos, immutabilesque cursus ; hæc cum viderent, **profecto et esse deos,** et **hæc tanta opeba deobum esse** arbitrarentur."—***De Nat. Deorum,*** lib. ii. § 37.

From this passage it is evident, that the Stagyrite. though he considered the motions of the heavenly bodies, the ebbing and flowing of the sea, and the other phenomena of nature, as affording a complete ***proof*** of the being and providence of God, did not however suppose that from these phenomena an untaught barbarian would ***discover*** this fundamental principle of religion. On the contrary, he expressly affirms, that before a man can feel the force of the evidence which they give of this important truth, he must have **heard** of the existence. and power of God.