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JOHAN MELCHIOR GOEZE ON FAITH AND REASON

1. Reason vs. revelation. 2. Physico-theology. 3. Self-knowledge. 4. Non-Christians and the afterlife. 5. Theodicy

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Johan/Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–1786)¹ was a German pastor and theologian. Since 1734, he had studied theology in Jena and then in Halle. In 1741–1750, he was a preacher and deacon in Aschersleben, in 1750–1755, he was a pastor in Magdeburg, and since 1755, a pastor in Hamburg where he became one of the leading spiritual leaders². He was a fierce defender of orthodox Lutheranism as expressed in numerous published debates with his coreligionists, but he is known today primarily through his disputes with Lessing. He was strenuously opposed to the impact of new philosophical trends of the enlightenment age, particularly to giving too much prominence to human reason in theological and religious matters. However, it seems that he was not altogether untouched by these trends.

1. REASON VS. REVELATION

In one of his sparrings with Lessing, Goeze categorically rejected Lessing's contention that Christianity would be possible if there were no Bible³, considering all of Lessing's reasoning to be some Theaterlogik, which is contrary to sound logic, even sound and right logic (64, 78, 134)⁴. According to Goeze, the holy Scripture

¹ Only in his early publications Goeze spelled his first name as Johann.

² Paul Bertheau, *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Leipzig 1899, vol. 6, 757–761; Ernst-Peter Wieckenberg, *Johan Melchior Goeze*, Hamburg: Ellert & Richter Verlag 2007.

³ Johan Melchior Goeze, *Lessings Schwächen*, Hamburg: D.A. Harmsen 1778, 66.

⁴ Cf. Klaus Bohnen, *Leidens-Bewältigungen. Der Lessing-Goeze-Disput im Horizont der Hermeneutik von 'Geist' und 'Buchstabe'*, in: H. Reinitzer, W. Sparr (eds.), *Verspätete Orthodoxie: über D. Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–1786)*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz 1989, 186.

is the only basis of the Christian religion (87). Lessing stated that his reason resisted against the doctrine that God has a Son who has the same essence (69, 115, 123, 143)⁵. Never mind Lessing's power of reasoning, Goeze effectively stated, "the Bible is the only basis of the Christian religion, without which this [doctrine] cannot be proven, cannot be propagated, cannot stand" (128). Also, without the NT there would be no trace of the deeds of Christ (141). "In the matter of the teaching and deeds of Christ and the mysteries of the Christian religion, the writings of the NT are the only way to illuminate and to improve people" (145). If the Bible is rejected as a necessary foundation of Christianity, so are the proofs given there. Which proofs will remain? Only rational. But can reason prove the mysteries of Christianity? Reason can only prove truths of natural religion (80). This means that human reason has to know its place. It does have some role to play in life, but in religious matters it takes distant second place after the revelation, at least in respect to the main tenets of the Christian religion, which surely are most important for a theologian from the Christian tradition. So, what exactly is the role of reason in theological matters? Should it have any? Even the strong pro-sola-scriptura statement of Goeze makes an allowance for sound reason (142 (Vernunft), 146 (Verstand)), sound logic (134), and contrasts Lessing's claims with the beliefs of rational Christians (128, 145) and, more generally, rational people (130).

There appears to be some measure of rationality present in all people; after all, God created them as rational beings. Although this rationality was negatively affected by the fall, it is still present and to a large extent reliable. First, reason (Verstand) is the faculty of the soul which can create clear (deutliche), full representations about itself and outside objects (B 1)⁶. Second, there are some principles which

⁵ This kind of statement justifies the opinion that in the Goeze-Lessing dispute, "Goeze comes to us who found in Christ the way, the truth, and the life, and in Lessing a doubter, who considers the claim for truth as foolish presumption and human arrogance," [Wilhelm] Becker, Johann Melchior Goeze und Lessing, Flensburg: Huwald'sche Buchhandlung, O. Hollesen 1887, 27.

⁶ The following references to Goeze's works are used:

A – Annual summaries of sermons first entitled *Auszüge aus derselbe über die Sonn- und Festtags-Evangelia, wie auch über einige Paßions- und einen Buß-Text, an die Gemeinde des HErrn in der Hauptkirche zu St. Catharinen in Hamburg im Jahre 1756 unter Gottlichem Beystande gehalten hat, etc.*, for each year, and then *Auszüge aus seinen Sontags- Fest- und verschiedenen Wochen-Predigen des 1761 Jahres, etc.*, for each year until 1786.

AMS – *Abfertigung der moldenhawerschen Schrift: Von der Seligkeit derer, die von Christo nichts wissen, und ihren Umständen nach nichts wissen können, und der darin enthaltenen beleidigenden Angriffe*, Hamburg: Dietrich Anton Harmsen 1784.

B – *Beweis daß der Satz: Ein Sandkorn, ein Wassertropf, ein Blumenblat, ein Würmchen ist weit größer, als der aufgeklärteste Verstand der geübtesten Weltweisen, wahr und vernünftig sey: Gegen den Verfasser der Anmerkungen über die Vorstellung des Ehrw. Ministerii in Hamburg, gegen die öffentliche Religions-Uebung der Reformirten in Hamburg; Nebst vorläufigen Erinnerungenüber diese Anmerkungen selbst*, Hamburg: Dietrich Anton Harmsen 1774.

BG – *Betrachtungen über die Grundwahrheit der christl[ichen] Religion, von der Auferstehung der Todten. In einigen heiligen Reden vorgetragen*, Magdeburg: Seidel- und Scheidhauersche Buchhandlung 1754.

GL – *Die grosse Lehre von dem jüngsten Gerichte, in einigen Reden abgehandelt*. Breslau u. Leipzig: Johann Jacob Korn 1751.

reason uses. In his discussion of the resurrection, Goeze first spoke at length of the dissipation of the human body after death and considered it as acceptable to a rational person that the particles of the dead body return to earth whence they came (cf. Eccl. 12:7) (BG 66). This statement is based on a more general principle, which appears to hold for all of nature and, in this way, it is rational: something does not come from nothing, and something does not turn into nothing, more succinctly: nothing comes from nothing, and nothing turns into nothing (90). He certainly considered the principle of noncontradiction as rational since he frequently pointed to contradictions in Lessing's statements. He also considered the statement *vox audita perit, littera scripta manet* as a general principle of all rational people (146), which can be paraphrased as: written word trumps oral testimony, which was important for Goeze to show that the NT must have been written and oral traditions are not good enough.

Some truths are not accessible to human reason; reason is weaker than revelation, but it should not be neglected, if only because it has such a high value for humans. And thus, reason cannot say anything about the last judgment, but the idea of the last judgment is rational since it agrees with all truths detected by reason (GL 97). An additional confirmation of the truth of the revelation comes from the fact that there is nothing in it which would contradict reason. The truths of revelation go beyond reason, but are not against reason. More generally, experience fully agrees with the word of God (BG 18). Therefore, wrong are people who claim that "a deep insight into the general truths of reason and a thorough conviction in the truths of revelation cannot stand together in one person" (LG Dedication [1–2]).

The need to establish the noncontradictory nature of truths of reason and revelation stems from the fact that human beings are the highest creations of God. God created rational beings to appreciate His creation and thereby to appreciate and thus glorify Him (LG 362, 492). God does nothing in vain (506) – "no drop of rain falls in vain onto the ground, no cloud floats above our heads without reason" (507) – and God is directed by His perfect wisdom. What kind of perfection would it be if human reason could not agree with revelation?

LG – Betrachtungen über die Lehre von Gott und seinen Eigenschaften, in einigen heiligen Reden vorgetragen, Hamburg: Christian Wilhelm Brandt 1757.

NM – Ueber die neue Meynung von der Seligkeit der angeblich guten und redlichen Seelen unter den Juden, Heyden und Türken, durch Christum, ohne daß sie an Ihn glauben. Eine pflichtmäßige Anfrage an E. Hochehrwürdiges Ministerium in Hamburg, nebst geziemender Bitte um gütige Belehrung, Hamburg: Dietrich Anton Harmsen 1784.

WA – Die wichtigsten Abschnitte der Lehre vom Tode. In einigen heiligen Reden abgehandelt, Breslau und Leipzig: Johann Jacob Korn 1749.

Z – Betrachtungen über den Zustand der Welt, und der Menschen, nach dem jüngsten Gerichte, in einigen heiligen Reden vorgetragen, Breslau und Leipzig: Wilhelm Gottlieb Korn 1765 [1753].

Zwo – Zwo Predigten, welche durch das fürchterliche, und so weit ausgebreitete Gericht Gottes im Erdbeben, veranlassen worden, Wovon die erste am 2ten Sontage des Advents, 1755, die zweite am ausserordentlichen Buß-Tage, den 11 März 1756 gehalten, Hamburg: D[iedrich] A[nton] Harmsen 1756.

2. PHYSICO-THEOLOGY

Purely theological investigations, powerful as they can be, are not always most convincing, at least, not to everyone. They have to be convincing to everyone, and stepping down from the pedestal of theology can be the way to accomplish it. For instance, by investigating the essence and perfections of God people may have some idea about God's omnipotence, but they recognize it most vividly (*am lebhaftesten*) from the works of God (A 1758, 333). That is, on the theoretical level, purely theological reasoning may end up with cut and dry results, but on the human level, it becomes more convincing when associated with what all people know: the environment around them, the experience with their interaction with nature, the observations of the natural world. This investigation should lead to the conclusion that nature is an expression of the wisdom of God and His power. This is a strong claim made by physico-theology of Goeze's times and Goeze was not immune to its influence.

Following the apostle Paul, Goeze acknowledged the fact that a rational person can know God from the investigation of the world (Rom. 1:20). People see the attributes of God reflected in the works of creation (A 1776, 205; A 1773, 259; Z 38). "It is the first and the most important duty of all rational people that they apply the knowledge of the great works of God in the realm of nature to the attainment of the knowledge of God and his splendor" (A 1776, 205). "In each creation of God, even the one which appears to be small and disdainful we see not only traces and footprints but also a bottomless sea of infinite wisdom [of God]" (Z 41). These traces can be found everywhere. Consider the fact that the earth was prepared as a comfortable and pleasant living space for humans (41). If it were just land, it would soon be dried out by the sun, so, there is water in seas properly delimited not to inundate the land (42). Consider the circulation of water through streams and rivers and through clouds (43): air carries clouds which are containers of water (44). Consider the bounty of plants (45). Consider fire without which the earth would be fruitless and covered with permanent ice (88). We admire the works of architecture, the works of Michelangelo and of Bernini with greater respect than the makeup of the human body, although the former are just child's play in comparison with the latter, which is the truth that should put to shame the blindness of all people (BG 20). Incidentally, the body that after the fall has to be considered as the prison of the soul was a palace before the fall (24) and this soul will leave the body after death (GL 581) to join afterward the resurrected perfect body (Z 288). And yet, consider human hands, which can be used in thousands of ways, the kinds of motions of hands (BG 29); animal feet are for walking, avian wings are for flying, but who can list all ways in which a hand can be used? God's wisdom foresaw all these ways when creating human hands accordingly (30). The human body is a gift received from the hands of God (39). God's power and wisdom are also shown in the individual traits of all people, in the difference of their faces and voices (40). What would be the world if all people looked the same? All thieves could get away with their deeds; murder and deception would be rampant (41). Also amazing is the mechanism of the maintenance of the body considering how weak it is and how easily it ends in death, and yet people

can often reach an old age (42). The dead body turns into earth; thus, it was made from earth. This is a probable conclusion of reason (WA 16), but the revelation states it with certainty (17). The fact that the wondrously intricate human body is made from ordinary earth testifies to God's wisdom and power (19): only God could form the living human body from earth by modifying and organizing particles of matter (LG 349).

The best people can do in this world as a mirror of God is to better and better recognize the majesty of the invisible God; this should be the duty, the priority, and the most pleasant animating occupation of all people (Z 53). This is because reason and the Scriptures teach people that God's main goal in creating the world has been for God to be recognized in His works (54). The highest goal in God's works is His glory and the revelation of His majesty before the eyes of rational beings, which is intertwined with the salvation of the world as God's highest goal, since the revelation of His majesty would be incomplete without His mercy while exercising stern justice toward millions of sinners without an attempt to come to their rescue (A 1769, 166).

Taking a serious interest in nature has direct theological consequences. In a very forceful physico-theological statement Goeze said that "a grain of sand, a drop of water, a flower petal, a little worm is far greater than the most enlightened mind of the most skillful wise men" (A 1774, 177; LG 512). In fact, he had to defend this statement, since in the view of some of his critics such preaching drives people away from the church (B ii). However, in Goeze's view, his statement should allow people to see that "the unmeasurable wisdom and power of God manifests itself in the cases in which we notice it the least" and is denied by those who do not want or are unable to see it (iv). The grains of sand, the drops of water, flower petals, and little worms testify about the greatest power and wisdom of God since being small they are composed of innumerable parts and the drops of water contain innumerable tiny organisms (2). Petals consist of wood-like small pipes that are the skeleton, nerves, and veins of petals and in-between are bubbles, the flesh of the petal; these bubbles are full of pipes for air to get in and moisture to get out (3).

There are innumerable millions of insects (B 3). If any mind could have a complete knowledge about insects, it would be a greater mind than these creatures. If there are many things unknown about insects, then they are greater than the most enlightened mind of the most skillful wise men (4). The four entities mentioned in Goeze's statement were used since they are usually treated with disdain; however, everything in nature, without exception, is greater than the most enlightened mind of the most skillful wise men (5). People are astonished by the size of an elephant and of a bull, but nature is nowhere more perfect than in the smallest creatures, so that the Christians say, *Deus in minimis, maximus* (7). All God's works are perfect reflections of His majesty, as much in a humble hyssop growing on a wall as in a grand cypress, as much in an ant as in an elephant. "The greatness of God manifests itself the clearest way in the smallest creatures" (BG 9; Z 55; LG 511).

Considering the view that the world is a mirror of God's attributes (Z 35), the necessity to investigate the world becomes indisputable. The better the world is known, the better God's attributes can be grasped, never perfectly considering the

limitations of the human mind, but sufficient to recognize God's powers and wisdom to acknowledge God as the Lord of nature, and thus, the Lord of humankind. Everything in nature preaches the omnipotence, omniscience, and supreme goodness of God. The recognition of the beauty on the earth will lead to the recognition of even greater beauty of the world to come (A 1773, 259).

3. SELF-KNOWLEDGE

The observation of nature by itself is not enough to derive from it theological conclusions. People are often blind to the works of God in nature. Even Jesus' disciples had to be awakened from the sleep of habit so that they could look at birds and lilies to see in them the wisdom, power, goodness, designs, and the fatherly care of God (A 1765, 246). And so, Christ pointed to His disciples lilies, birds, and grass, the works of God in nature to enrich their knowledge of God, their praise of God, and the trust in God. If the power of God can maintain millions of living beings including innumerable multitudes of birds, if His wisdom can supply proper food for all of them, then so much more will He take care of people (A 1773, 258). So it is with most people. They admire paintings, sculptures, clocks, but what is the most beautiful painting in comparison with a landscape, or a statue in comparison to the makeup of the human body, or a clock compared to the makeup of an ant (A 1765 246)? However, when investigating nature, people want to elevate their own knowledge and cleverness, but not the attributes of God (A 1765, 247). Goeze bemoaned the fact that in his times, the age of lights and clarity, there were people who would rather consider the world to be the result of chance than glorify God as the Creator of the world; they were motivated by the desire to deny God and to shake off the yoke of obedience. But chance is a word without meaning; it is nothingness (Z 23). In fact, the Egyptians who divinized crocodiles acted more reasonably than a sage who considers an accident to be the ground of all being (24). It appears that reason, left to its own devices, may not necessarily lead to theologically admissible results. Human pride can be in the way; thus, maybe people should first look more closely at themselves.

Self-knowledge should show people how corrupt they are; it should show their inclinations and desires, their goals and the reason why they were created in order to see whether they got close to this reason or are still far away from it (A 1759, 377). There is no conversion without such self-knowledge, and no improvement in human lives (379); true self-knowledge should lead to genuine humility before God (380). Also, by rejecting the existence of God – and thus His goodness, mercy, and providential care – people deprive themselves of happiness, even on the earthly scale. “The mole is happier in its den, and the eagle on its rock, than you. Only the one who correctly applies the powers of the soul to contemplate the splendor of his Creator, who, while enjoying and contemplating the world, at the same time raises himself infinitely far above the world with his spirit, tastes and sees how kind the Lord is, deserves the name of a human being” (Z 58). In such contemplations people can

have a foretaste of the eternal life (60). And this is the most important element of the investigation, namely its eschatological aspect. By not acknowledging God, people do not acknowledge the fact that their inner self, the soul, persists after the death of the body and what happens to it then. Considering the prospect of eternal salvation or damnation, the importance of the problem cannot be overstated. For Goeze, this was one of the salient aspects of his publications, by constantly returning to the problem of salvation and devoting a lot of attention to the problem of the last judgment, since, in his view, the teaching about the last judgment was the strongest point that should lead to spiritual conversion (GL 87). However, this eschatological prospect becomes viable only if the soul is immortal. Is it?

According to Goeze, the proof of the immortality of the soul by reason alone is difficult or even impossible (Z 235). Constant attempts to prove it by reason alone indicate that an irrefutable proof does not exist (236). Proofs from reason of the immortality of the soul are sufficient by relying on unproven grounds or they are extensive and thus unclear and hard to follow. It is assumed that the soul can progress indefinitely and thus it is immortal, but some say that the abilities of the soul are limited, which can be seen in people's decline in an old age (307). Reason seems to suggest that the soul is a simple entity composed of no parts and, as such, it is immortal (WA 45; GL 573; Z 216, 224). Is it? It could be annihilated by God who, created it.

Goeze believed that by reason it can be proven that what thinks in each person is not matter (Z 238). The soul could be incorruptible and yet die when it loses its ability to have clear representations and to compare them. This happens now in the state of fainting; so the soul could lose awareness after the death of the body (239); only God can ensure that this does not happen, and this truth comes from the revelation (240), although the Scripture does not make it clear whether the soul is immortal by its nature or if this is the gift of God (261). Also, the Holy Spirit constantly works on the human soul by enlightening it and living in it, which would be strange and pointless if the soul died with the body (262). The revelation teaches that the soul will be able to compare its current state with the previous state (257). In sum, reason indicates that it is very likely that the soul is immortal, but incontestable proofs are given from the Scripture (A 1757, 285); "by the light of reason, the immortality of our soul can be pushed to the highest degree of probability, and the light of divine revelation sets it completely beyond all doubt" (WA Vorrede 11). As already expressed in one of his first publications, "reason and Scripture can convince us most definitely of the immortality of our soul. In both there is enough ground on which this truth can be firmly and safely founded; ... but because it is absolutely necessary that every person be convinced of this truth, because the proof taken from reason exceeds the ability of most people and their concepts, so God has abundantly compensated for this deficiency in the extraordinary revelations, since in them shines the important truth of the soul's immortality in full light"⁷.

⁷ Johan Melchior Goetze, *Die künftige Auferstehung der Todten*, in: *Der Beweis des Lehrsatzes: Die Todten werden auferstehen*, Hamburg: Johan Jacob Korn 1742, vol. 2, 130–131.

4. NON-CHRISTIANS AND THE AFTERLIFE

New light on the role of reason in Goeze's view can be obtained from his discussion with other clergymen on the eschatological fate of pagans who never heard of Christ. The discussion concentrated on the statements made by the apostle Paul that anyone can recognize the existence of God from the investigation of nature (Rom. 1:19–20) and that the content of the law is inscribed in each person's heart, which is confirmed by the voice of conscience (Rom. 2:15).

The new-fangled Christians (NM 5), as Goeze called them, claimed that God will recognize as His own those non-Christians who have a good soul, follow the voice of reason (6) and of conscience, and do good works. Not true, said Goeze, since according to the Scriptural statements, the inclinations of all human hearts are evil (7); however, in Goeze's view, by nature, people have a strong inclination to do evil (A 1773, 166) and in the natural state, people are unable to do good just as blind people cannot do things which require the presence of light; this is all because after the fall, the perfection of the image of God was lost (195).

Harsher yet: can pagans do good works? Yes, but this counts for very little since good works must come from a pure source (NM 9). In fact, good works and virtues of pagans are worthless. When pagans want to follow the light of reason and the motions of conscience, they can know what is morally good and bad. This is the law inscribed in their hearts. When pagans act according to this natural knowledge of the moral good and bad, they act according to a natural instinct and thus their behavior is not of a moral nature: it can be according to the law (*gesetzmäßig*), but it is not according to what is right (*rechtmäßig*). Besides, lusts and desires beguile their reason (*Verstand*) and forcefully tear at their conscience so that they aim at what is pleasurable, not what is good; the voice of reason and conscience is simply stifled (14; A 1774, 39).

As for Rom. 1:19–20: "Pagans can recognize from the investigation of creation that God exists, yes, but nothing more than that He is omniscient, supremely wise, and omnipotent, but it is impossible that mere investigation of creation can lead to the living knowledge of his moral attributes, his holiness, justice, and mercy"; also, people do not really have the knowledge of God's eternal power and divinity from the investigation of creation, since, as Paul indicated in following verses, they knew that God existed, but did not praise Him nor expressed their gratitude, but remained conceited in their contrivances, and their uncomprehending heart remained in darkness (AMS 10).

This opinion is rather inconsistent with the views Goeze expressed in other publications, at least in his hefty exposition of the attributes of God. About God's holiness, which is the perfection of God's will (LG 706), he said that people have to apply the light of reason and of revelation to recognize it (705); this holiness is revealed in God's ways, but an unenlightened person cannot see these ways, only a believer can see them in the government of the world, although unclearly (718). On the other hand, since God created rational beings, so He has the right to prescribe to them laws and require that they follow these laws, and He has the right to reward those who do and punish those who violate these laws. That much can be proven rationally

(aus Gründen der Vernunft) and it is confirmed by the Scripture (768). This is clearly an argument that, by natural reason, people are able to recognize God's justice.

About the knowledge of good and evil Goeze made curious remarks that this knowledge does not matter since it is, as it were, on a theoretical level that does not influence people's behavior, or, because they are so thoroughly corrupted by sin, because they are natural sociopaths for whom no amount of moral knowledge will affect them. This is not quite the same as what Goeze claimed before. He said that people have sensations about what is good and evil and these sensations are so strongly impressed (*geprägt*) in human souls that even when people try to suppress them, they never can completely root them out. When trying to suppress these sensations, people experience painful disquiet of their spirit, bitter reproaches; on the other hand, they experience pleasant peace and enlivening joy when they follow these sensations. These sensations are the voice of conscience (LG 771) and an expression of it can be found in the writings of many rational pagans. "Aren't these sensations a true law? And who inscribed them in our heart?" asked Goeze rhetorically. These sensations are universal. And thus, "if we want to use our reason properly, we have no choice but to say: that is the finger of God! He has written his law in our spirit, he has given this inner judge its power to accuse us without contradiction, to condemn or to acquit according to the state of our actions." These sensations had been stronger and purer before the fall since the heart now is affected by powerful lusts (772), but, still, the fact that God is the Creator and the Lawgiver is deeply imprinted on human hearts as also testified by Paul in Rom. 2:15–16. However, this revelation made by natural law of the justice of God was darkened by the fall, thus, God repeated His laws in the Scriptures (773). Therefore, now, people can see God's laws in their hearts and, at the same time, in a much clearer fashion, in the Bible (774). Human reason recognizes the fact that God is the judge of the world and the Word confirms it (780). And thus, the natural reason does know about the justice of God, about His laws, although dimly, and is prompted by conscience to act upon it. Even Rom. 2:15 is used as a confirmation of this argument, although when discussing the otherworldly fate of pagans, the importance of this verse was dismissed.

And there is more. The love of God brings the highest pleasure because it seeks the true wellbeing of His creation and His goodness is His inclination stemming from it to endow all creation with all perfections that they are able to have (LG 799, 832–833, 841). The true wellbeing of God's creatures occurs when they are in the state fitting God's designs and God's designs have no other (799) goal than true goodness. Thus, it is needed that God lets His designs and His will know or He gives rules which the creatures should follow. God prescribed to nature proper laws of motion and laws of conduct to rational and free beings. How could they follow these rules if they did not know them? (800). Conscience is people's accuser, witness, and judge and it can be pacified by repentance (815).

God's goodness is revealed in nature just as it is in the realm of grace so that "just as we see (*erblicken*) in the kingdom of nature, in all creatures without exception, traces of God's wisdom and omnipotence, so we also discover in them the effects of the divine goodness." The human body and soul are mirrors of God's

goodness (LG 843). All the elements of nature are the traces of God's goodness by which God maintains the happiness of rational beings on earth, even if sometimes God uses some of these elements of nature to punish people (844). God's love is omnipresent and "each person can see it on himself and open eyes can see it, just as [they can see] the majesty of God in each plant, in each drop of water, in all things that surround us. The heaven, the earth, the seas, all the elements, even the abyss preach the love of God. All is there determined for our good, for our preservation, pleasure, and comfort. And so, each true believer can taste and see it in all places and in all things (Vorwürfe) how friendly the Lord is" (874–875). And in the light of the many previous statements, even a non-Christian can see and taste it around, possibly in a less clear fashion than a believer can. And thus, even non-Christians can detect God's goodness in nature and their own bodies and souls, and because there is no more morally-related attribute than divine goodness, so this moral attribute can also be detected in nature.

Incidentally, what happens to non-Christians after death? Goeze was somewhat vacillating in this respect. Early on he stated that there are many levels of damnation. The harshest is for those who deliberately rejected the Gospel, the lightest is for pagans (Z 603). Eternal damnation it is, but not too severe. However, late in his life, Goeze may have considered this assessment to be too harsh and he said that he wished salvation for non-Christians, which is possible since "God can have other means unknown to us through which he can bring non-Christians, who cannot participate in the ways known to us, to the knowledge of the truth" and people should not condemn them, but they also should not elevate them beyond the condition in which they currently are (AMS 16); "the judgment concerning those who are outside [the Christian faith] belongs only to the one who is the Judge of the entire world" (A 1774, 40)⁸. Salvation comes only through Christ and the Scriptures know no other way. There are many things which are not revealed in the Scriptures and this may include an avenue of salvation for pagans by means which are known only to God. In this light, people should not trouble themselves with the problem of what happens to such pagans. Trying to answer this question leads only to quarrels (of the kind in which Goeze was heavily involved). After all, is the answer really necessary for our own salvation? It is enough for people to know that all God's ways are good and just, whether they know these ways or not⁹.

⁸ More succinctly in Joh[an] Melchior Goeze, *Protestation gegen das, von dem Herrn Verfasser der Gallerie der Teufel ihm beygelegte zweydeutige und schmähende Lob*, Hamburg: Harmsens Schriften [1785], 7–8. Goeze did not deny salvation to non-Christians, he only wanted that "Christian teachers should be true to the presentation of the Bible and that in his judgments they should not go further than its statements allow and be convinced by evident proofs that the more general judgment belongs in this case to the Holy Scripture," J.C.M. St[eineck], *Wahrhafte Nachricht von dem Leben des weiland Johan Melchior Goeze*, Hamburg: Hermann 1786, 208; Goeze did not provide theological details about how pagans can be saved through Christ without knowing Him; "It cannot be denied that he leaves the difficult contradiction as an unsolved riddle, but it can be clearly recognized how little he is inclined to pronounce a sentence of condemnation," Georg Reinhard Röpe, *Johan Melchior Goeze. Eine Rettung*, Hamburg: Gustav Eduard Nolte 1860, 266.

⁹ Johan Melchior Goeze, *Fortsetzung der Widerlegung der moldenhawerischen Schrift über Seligkeit derer, die von Christo nichts wissen*, Hamburg: Dietrich Anton Harmsen 1784, 8–9.

The takeaway from this discussion is that, for Goeze, reason can gain the knowledge of the existence of God and some of His attributes, but human reason without the truth is as little able to lead people to eternal happiness as the irrational animals (NM 6). Neither human morality nor the morality-related attributes of God can be learned from the investigation of nature. This is in rather stark contrast to the claims of other physico-theologians¹⁰. According to Goeze, the corrupted human nature prevents human reason from full functional activity and it has to be enlightened by the Scriptures to be set on the right track. And thus, physico-theology outside the framework of Christianity has a limited impact on human lives. It must be illuminated by Christian morality to acquire such impact.

Early on, Goeze gave human reason the ability to learn quite a bit about God and His attributes from the observation of and reflection on nature, its laws, and intricate makeup. Early on, he also consigned pagans to hell, although with little suffering in it. At the end of his life, Goeze saw human reason as being able to gain very little knowledge when not enlightened by faith. On the other hand, he relented with respect to the fate of pagans opening the theological possibility that they can be saved, although even the revelation is silent about the way God would accomplish it. The role of physico-theology is reduced, but the optimistic eschatological prospects are increased.

5. THEODICY

Revelation comes particularly strongly to the theological rescue in the matter of the existence of evil. Reason and experience often cringe before it and wish the world would have been made without it.

There are many things in human life and in nature that are often found rather unpleasant, even hideous. However, it is humans' greatest audacity when they judge and complain about the works of God (LG 387); it is as though they accused God of the misuse of His power. Can God, who is never motivated by blind passions and

¹⁰ To quote only physico-theologians mentioned by Goeze: a person has to be blind and insensitive who does not see from the makeup of the world the goodness, power, and wisdom of a praiseworthy Ruler of it all, Bernard Nieuwentyt, *Het regt gebruik der werelt beschouwingen*, Amsterdam: Johannes Pauli 1714, reflection 26.1; works of God speak about His existence, power, wisdom, and goodness, W[illiam] Derham, *Astro-theology*, London: W. Innys 1731 [1714], 227; the elements of nature and their beauty speak about the goodness, power, and wisdom of God, Jo[hann] Albert Fabricius, *Hydrotheologie*, Hamburg: König und Richter 1734, 387; God's goodness is manifested in all parts of the earth, even in the coldest climate, Johann Gottlieb Walpurg, *Cosmotheologische Betrachtungen*, Chemnitz: Johann David Stöbel, vol. 1, 1748, 190; "my reason convinces me that God must exist who makes me and other creation real and I find traces of his wisdom, power, and goodness in heaven and on earth," 340. We can also mention physico-theologically minded poet Gellert, whose play *Das Loos in der Lotterie* Goeze considered decent in his very negative assessment of theater, Johan Melchior Goeze, *Theologische Untersuchung der Sittlichkeit der heutigen deutschen Schaubühne*, Hamburg: Johan Christian Brandt 1770, 18, 22, 79, 102–103; Gellert said in his *Moral lectures* (1770) that "the heaven and earth proclaim to us his [God's] greatness and goodness," C[hristian] F[ürchtegott] Gellert, *Sämmtliche Schriften*, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung 1856, vol. 7, 171.

acts according to His infinite perfection, do something which would not be the best? All that God does is right and praiseworthy (388).

Good people must exercise love, patience, meekness, faithfulness, constancy, and other virtues, and they would not have an opportunity for these if they lived in a wilderness or only among people of angelic disposition. Evil people should be warned to lead them to conversion, which would be impossible if they lived only among evil people. So, the mixture of the good and the bad has a healing effect on them both (A 1778, 66–67).

God's wisdom is manifested even in weakness. Bodily illnesses bring people to Christ. How often do they forget Him when they are healthy? In illness, people can clearly see their weakness. Through illness, God shows people how sweet heaven is and how bitter the earth can be (A 1756, 434). God foresaw that after the fall people would consider their bodies to be idols. Weakness, pain, sickness exist so that people are reminded that in all its beauty and perfection the human being is a weak creation that, without the help of God, would not last for one second (BG 54). After the resurrection, the human body will be like the glorified body of Christ (55). For now, if people had complete knowledge of their bodies, they would be proud and soon would think that their intellect is the same as God's and would try to grasp all divine mysteries (57).

Arguably the strongest way that God speaks to people through nature is through natural disasters. Through natural disasters, in particular, famines, God reminds people that all natural resources come from Him; that they should not misuse them; that people should work for their keep; that people should turn to Him (A 1771, 243–244). Natural disasters have a special place in Goeze's investigation, since they are very important in the context of the last judgment. In a way it was a timely topic in Goeze's time, particularly after the 1755 Lisbon earthquake. After this event, which was widely discussed in Europe, Goeze called people to see in the judgment of God's wrath His majesty and humble themselves under His hand before His judgment spreads so that no rescue will be possible. "For Jesus' sake, spare (shone) [us] and do not repay (lohne) [us] according to our sins!" The almighty hand also knocked in Hamburg, where some reverberations of the Lisbon earthquake had been felt (Zwo 5). Just as the hand of God crushes rocks, may the hardened hearts be crushed, so that people can save their souls before the arrival of the last judgment (6). When the Bible speaks about the last judgment, God's warnings should be taken seriously and various disasters should be seen as preludes or mirrors of the last judgment to come (12). The flood, the destruction of Sodom, the destruction of Korah, the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish state are preludes to the last judgment (13; cf. GL 100–103). These are the similarities in the Bible between an earthquake and the last judgment. 1. God often and insistently warned those whom He wanted to strike by calling them to repentance (Zwo 13). Today, the NT includes such warnings, e.g., Luke 21:25–36 (14). 2. The ungodly, "ignoring all the warnings of God, persist in their [sense of] security until the moment when/that God snatches them away, that/when there is no savior." (15). 3. The patience of God reached its limit, and so did sinfulness of people (16). 4. The last judgment is very frightful, so God shows now

an agreeable/endurable (*angenehm*) inkling (18). People can see now the exercise of the wrath of righteous God through the sword of vengeance in His right hand and how necessary it is that God from time to time let His voice be heard in this world to wake up people from their slumber. Today, some deny the existence of God (20), some ignore His voice. God wants to wake them up from the sense of false security. God destroys cities to illustrate the destruction of the world (21). The wisdom of God decides what are the best means to accomplish God's designs; the highest goal is exalting His glory or revealing His majestic attributes before the eyes of rational creation, and an earthquake is a convenient and forceful way to accomplish it. Some believers are surprised that God is not present only in heaven considering the earth to be unworthy of His attention, even much people, so that they would be a subject of blind fate. Such thinking is an error denigrating the glory of the omnipotence of God (32). Importantly, there is nothing wrong in seeking natural explanations of such phenomena as earthquakes; however, this would be harmful if people only considered causes given by the power of their imagination and forgot God's causes revealed in such phenomena like earthquakes (36). When trying to explain earthquakes by the action of winds, fire, or water in underground cavities, a question should first be asked, who gave winds, fire, and water such power that can manifest itself through earthquakes? Who created underground cavities? How is it that all the elements were not active before? (37). People should remember that the earthquake in Lisbon was a punishment; in other places that felt some of it, it was a warning; destruction was mercifully limited to Lisbon alone, in other lands, the earthquake was a message of what could happen in them (38). God could just as easily destroy Hamburg as He did Lisbon, He has as much reason to direct His wrath against people in Hamburg as against inhabitants of Lisbon, so people should be grateful that He did not. The ashes and ruin of Lisbon show God's justice and omnipotence. The still standing temples and houses in Hamburg show God's love and mercy (39). This can change if people continue to abuse God's love and patience (40).

Although the days of illness, of natural disaster, of worry, of fear, of need are considered (94), people can deal with them and make them better in their view when they 1. strive for having a good conscience (WA 96); 2. rely on the care of God (97); 3. are patient (98); and 4. cheer themselves up by the hope of eternal life (101). In all this, people should praise God's works even if they are incomprehensible to them (LG 389).

Goeze had no doubts that all that God does is right (Deut. 32:4), since God cannot make mistakes (A 1771, 49; A 1773, 237) and that God is the highest and best being and so His works are perfect in that they agree with His attributes, that is, His holy designs can be actualized through them. And so, the human body, soul, fate, and conduct are so directed to enable the arrival at His highest goal, which is the glorification of His name. However, by the misuse of their freedom, people distance themselves from this goal (A 1767, 258). All is good. Blind people complain about the works of God, but if they saw the works of God in their entirety, they would be ashamed of their opinion and frightened because of their blindness (259). For the time being, they should look closely at the works of God to see that He does everything right (A 1773, 240).

Goeze, who was often accused of theological backwardness, was not really far away from theologians of his times. He was more rigid in not allowing free reign to human reason, seeing a danger of its slipping into atheism or at least deism as was the case of many authors in his time, the cases of Tindal in England and Voltaire in France being most visible¹¹. However, Germany also had a share of such a pernicious influence and the protracted theological quarrels of Goeze with Lessing precisely indicate these, which were conducted as a consequence of Lessing's publication of vicious attacks on Christianity authored, as it later turned out, by Reimarus, who was also active in Hamburg, truly in Goeze's backyard. This somewhat stiffened Goeze's orthodox position thereby making the role of the revelation more and more pronounced than the role of reason. However, for all of his theological career, his self-description as not being an enemy of reason (BG [8]) stands. This is particularly clear in his enlistment of physico-theology as an important, viable tool to be applied not only by naturalists, but by everyone who has an eye to see nature around them¹². Human reason is a powerful tool, a gift of God inserted into each soul at its creation to be used for knowing Him. Sin can lead people in a different direction, but straying from the right religious path is not irreversible. Reason cannot stand on its own alone, but can revelation? It seems that there is an interplay between the two, the sound reason and the sound logic, through self-discovery and through the investigation of nature, leads people to something larger than themselves and something larger than nature. Sound reason and sound logic lead them also to the Scripture and to arguments supporting their divine provenance. This revelation, in turn, enhances reason, purifies it from noxious influences stemming from sensuality and passions, thereby strengthening its reasoning power¹³. Reason can discover some things which can also be learned from revelation, thereby each supporting the other and fortifying the faith of people. However, there are things which reason can never reach. The teaching about some attributes of God comes from reason and from Scripture, the teaching about the Trinity comes only from Scripture (BG 233). By reason, people can only state the possibility of the resurrection and the rest comes from the revelation ([9], 234, 239). But for Goeze, as a clergyman, the investigation of Scripture was of primary importance since in it he sought moral precepts that can impact individual lives. This can be seen in his hundreds of sermons, summaries and excerpts of which have been published annually over thirty years in separate volumes of the *Auszüge*. Most of them are of a very practical nature; there is very little discussion of large theological matters such as the mystery of the Trinity or of the Incarnation,

¹¹ Somewhat curiously, Goeze considered Voltaire to be "a witty and agreeable poet" (Z 263); however, he did chastise Voltaire for being unconcerned about whether his view of the fate of pagans after death agrees with the Scripture or not (GL 357–358)

¹² Goeze explicitly referred to some leading physico-theological figures, including Nieuwentijt, Derham, Fabricius, and Walpurger (Z 56; BG 31; LG 517).

¹³ "Reason and revelation are not in opposition to each other, but rather the former is supplemented and continued by the latter. Reason must therefore feel grateful when revelation offers it a helpful hand," Bernhard Lohse, Johann Melchior Goeze als Theologe des 18. Jahrhunderts, in: Reinitzer Heimo (ed.), Johann Melchior Goeze 1717–1786, Abhandlungen und Vorträge, Hamburg: Friedrich Vittig Verlag 1987, 49.

and even his theological treatises have more of a sermonizing tone than a somber theological presentation. Practical application of Christianity was more important for him than resolving contentious theological issues.

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JOHAN MELCHIOR GOEZE O WIERZE I ROZUMIE

Streszczenie

Johan Melchior Goeze był duchownym w XVIII w., obrońcą ortodoksyjnego luteranizmu przez trzy dekady w hamburskim środowisku teologicznym, a dziś znany jest głównie z debat z Lessingiem. Jednym z dyskutowanych zagadnień była rola rozumu w religii. Goeze był zdecydowanym obrońcą prymatu objawienia; jednakże rozum stanowił dość istotny element w jego własnych badaniach teologicznych. Jest to szczególnie widoczne w roli, jaką przypisywał podejściu fizykoteologicznemu w religii. Fizykoteologia była bardzo silnym nurtem teologii w XVIII w., a Goeze uważał ją za najlepszy sposób na doprowadzenie do Boga każdego człowieka, nie tylko wykształconych teologów. Jednakże przekonujące dowody, jakich rozum może dostarczyć na istnienie Boga, mają ograniczoną moc, co szczególnie dobrze widać przez dogłębną samoanalizę. Jeśli rozum dostarcza jakichś dowodów teologicznych, są one mniej lub bardziej prawdopodobne, a pewność można uzyskać wyłącznie z objawienia. Ta pewność jest potrzebna szczególnie ze względów eschatologicznych, ponieważ stawką jest wieczne przeznaczenie duszy ludzkiej. Istnieją jednak kwestie, których Pismo Święte nie rozwiązało, a los niechrześcijan był jedną z nich. Zdaniem Goezego los ten leży w rękach Boga, a ludzie powinni raczej troszczyć się o własne zbawienie przez Chrystusa, niż spekulować na temat tego, jak Bóg rozwiąże problem zbawienia niechrześcijan.

Słowa kluczowe: Johan Melchior Goeze, fizykoteologia, eschatologia, rozum, wiara

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