

Reclaiming the Role of Philosophy (Reason) in the Christian Faith¹

Johnson Madi¹, Ibrahim S. Bitrus²

{johnsonmadi@yahoo.com¹, bitrus_ibrahim@yahoo.com²}

(D.C.R.E (ABU, Zaria), B.Th. (TCNN/UNIJOS), M.A in Ethics and Philosophy (UNIJOS)).

Bronnum Lutheran Seminary, Yola. P.O. Box 74, Adamawa State, Nigeria. Cell: +234 8039625850¹, (NCE (Hong), BDD & M.Th. (TCNN, Bukuru), PhD in Systematic Theology (USA)). Senior Lecturer at Taraba State College of Education, Zing. Cell +23481303336154²

Abstract

Theology and philosophy are arguably the two greatest fields of divine and human knowledge that precede and give birth to other disciplines, including natural and social sciences. However, the relationship between these two subjects has always been controversial. Scholars, who perceive theology and philosophy as two separate antagonistic disciplines, deny outright the role of the latter in the former. As a darkness, they contend that philosophy has no light to shed on the Christian faith. On the contrary, those who maintain that the two subjects are mutually related, argue that philosophy is not anti, but pro-faith. As a rational friendly ally, they claim that philosophy is a tool with which theologians explicate the articles of the Christian faith. In this paper, we analytically describe the two conflicting views on the relationship between theology and philosophy. Without denying the tension between them, we contend that philosophy, reason plays an indispensable role in the Christian faith and life precisely because professing the Christian faith without a rational explication of its doctrines reduces it to a fideistic and irrational religion.

Key Words: Philosophy, Theology, Christian, Relationship, Role, Faith and Reason

1 Introduction

Our topic of discussion is one that has generated a lot of debate throughout the history of Christianity. Some of the famous statements concerning the relationship between theology and philosophy came from St. Paul, who said:

See to it that no one carries you off as spoil or makes you yourselves captive by his so-called philosophy and intellectualism and vain deceit (idle fancies and plain nonsense), following human tradition (men's ideas of the material rather than the spiritual world), just crude notions following the rudimentary and elemental teachings of the universe and disregarding [the teachings of] Christ (the Messiah) (Colossians 2:8 AMP).

And Tertullian, who emphatically asked; "What indeed has Athens got to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between Academy and the Church?"²

Even though theology and philosophy has a lot in common, in the sense that both deal with same subject matter: God, universe, man, truth, and ethics etc. Also, they deal with concept and issues that have direct effect on man and the society. But the debate has always been how these two relate to each other; throughout history it has taken different forms.

This paper analytically explores the suspicion and answer the question by these Christian scholars raised. We shall begin by defining the two terms, then go on to discuss the various position taken by scholars on what the relationship should be, and finally, we will examine the relevance of philosophy for the Christian. In the paper, we will use the term reason to stand for philosophy and the word faith for theology.

2 Conceptual Clarification

2.1 Theology

The term Theology does not occur anywhere in the Bible. So, the best place to start is the etymological meaning. Theology comes from two Greek words; *Theos* meaning God and *logos* meaning word about or the study of God. So, the term means talking, discussing hard about God.

Grace Theological Seminary opines that; "Theology is the study of God, God's character, God's actions in relation to the *cosmos*, and especially God's relationship to humanity (the character and history of humankind) in its responsive relationship to God within the panorama of the world and history, space and time."³

Thielicke and Louth states that; "Theology is the attempt of adherents of a faith to represent their statements of belief consistently, to explicate them out of the basis (or fundamentals) of their faith, and to assign to such statements their specific place within the context of all other worldly relations (e.g., nature and history) and spiritual processes (e.g., reason

¹ In this paper, we loosely use theology and philosophy interchangeably with faith and reason.

² Tertullian, *de praescriptione haereticorum*, 7; in *Sources chretiennes* vol. 46, ed. R.F. Refole. Paris: Editions du cerf; 1957. P. 7

³ "Theology" by Grace Theological Seminary. Available at <https://seminary.grace.edu>. 16th December, 2020. Accessed on 15th April, 2023.

and logic).⁴ Erickson define Theology as; “that discipline which strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily upon the scripture, placed in the context of culture general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life.”⁵ Theology, therefore, concerns itself with knowledge that has been revealed by God, which man must accept by faith.

2.2 Philosophy

The definition of philosophy is not free from controversy. Philosophers define philosophy differently.

As a matter of fact, philosophers disagree on many issues and subject-matters including the notion of philosophy itself. The only matter on which they seem to have a consensus of opinion is that the term ‘philosophy’ does not have a universally acceptable definition. So then, is the definition of philosophy impossible? The answer is definitely no. Indeed, there are as many definitions of philosophy as there are philosophers.⁶

So, let begin with the root meaning of the word philosophy: Etymologically the word “philosophy” is derived from two Greek words: “Philos” is meaning, “love” and “Sophia” is meaning “wisdom.” Therefore, philosophy means “the love of wisdom.” But etymological definitions are by nature vague and superficial... They come short of stipulating the true nature of philosophy. Most at times, philosophers would suggest that alternative definition be given that will be viable in the discus of philosophy.

Aben defines philosophy “as a critical reasoning or thinking and discursion or interaction on perennial issues confronting us in the world or universe”⁷ Also, Omoregbe defines the term philosophy in two ways, that one; “it is a rational investigation with pondering questions in the mind as one wonders about the human experiences, with one singular aim to find out answers to that question. On the other hand, it is a rational inquiry using questions about the ultimate meaning of reality in general with particular focus on the human life, seeking for answers to such basic questions”⁸

Philosophy, at least as defined by Aristotle, is concerned with knowledge that man acquires through sensory experience and the use of the natural light of reason. To sum it up, Plantinga remarks that philosophy, “is just thinking hard about something”⁹

Philosophy is generally a reflective thinking about God, man, and the universe by asking questions and searching for meaning of concepts or words or terms. It is based on the force of arguments, trying to verify through reasoning by seeking to find out rational justifications for any views that are maintained or held.

Philosophy insists on coherency of ideas according to standard order or systematic presentation of ideas. Therefore, verification of ideas or facts is an essential aspect of this discipline. It also demands for proofs; it does not just take anything for granted or at face value but seeks to provide proofs for holding a rational position.

Philosophy engages the kind of reasoning different from the scientist (observation) but values judgment that attempt to establish the truth or falsity of proposition. Philosophy therefore, is simply a logical thinking or analysis of facts with the understanding of reaching a rational conclusion.

3 A Case for Disparity between Theology and Philosophy (Faith and Reason)

Here we have two schools of thought, which are religious pietism or fideism and rationalistic atheism.

3.1 Religious Pietism or Fideism

This constitutes a handful of theologians who rejected any relationship between the two fields or renounced any compatibility between faith and reason. They saw reason as irrelevant, as far as the development and preservation of the Christian faith is concerned. This kind of attitude manifested itself in the following people.

St. Paul, who in one of his epistles to the Church in Colossae warn them against philosophy, saying: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men (sophistry), according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Colossians 2:8 NKJV). What kind of philosophy is Paul talking about?

Tertullian (c. 160-230) is among the early Christian theologians that held this approach of disjoining theology and philosophy. He took a wholesale rejection of every aspect of philosophy for use in the Christian faith. He was trying to defend the divine foolishness of the Christian faith by denouncing philosophy as the demon-inspired mother of heresies. He put forth his comments as follows:

⁴ Helmut Thielicke and Andrew Louth. “Theology”. Encyclopedia Britannica. Available at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/theology>. Accessed on 15th April, 2023.

⁵ Millard J. Erickson *Christian Theology* 2nd Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 1983. P. 21

⁶ Isaac E Ukpokolo. *Methodology of Research and Writing in Philosophy: A Guide*. Ibadan: Kairos Publishing; 2015. p 28

⁷ Tersur Aben. *The Relevance of Philosophy in the Study of Theology*. T.C.N.N Monday Lecture Series giving on the 19th January, 2009. P. 1

⁸ Joseph Omoregbe. *Knowing Philosophy* 2nd edition. Ikeja: Joja Press Limited; 2005. P. 3

⁹ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press; 2003. P.

Philosophy provides the material of worldly wisdom, in boldly asserting itself to be the interpreter of the divine nature and disposition. The heresies themselves receive their weapons from philosophy.... What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem? What between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians? Our system of beliefs come from the porch of Solomon, who himself taught that it was necessary to seek God in the simplicity of the heart, So much the worse for those who talk of a “stoic,” “platonian” or “dialectic” Christianity.¹⁰

By this Tertullian was implicitly implying that there is nothing in common between faith and reason. For him, Athens represents the philosophy of the Greeks and Jerusalem stands for the Christian faith. He regarded philosophy as antithetical to theology and therefore Christians should not rely on reason in their explicating and explaining Christian theology. He further exclaimed in regard to the death and resurrection of Christ by saying; “I believe because it is absurd; it is certain because it is impossible!”¹¹

For him, it is sufficient that God himself has spoken and the only guide and standard for the Christian is the scripture in all matters of faith and doctrine, and there is a need to constantly be alert and guard against those seeking to ensnare the Christian using human reasoning. He concludes that the Christian come to know through revelation all that is needed for life and godliness; anything beyond that is dangerous, it is better to remain even ignorant than to risk being entangled in the evil grip of philosophy¹²

Furthermore, Erickson also has this to say on the comments made by Tertullian: “This approach regards philosophy as having nothing to contribute to Christian theology. In fact, the two have such different goals that the Christian is well advised to avoid contact and dialogue with philosophy completely, belief does not arise because of support from philosophy or other sources, but virtually *in spite of* the contribution of these disciplines.”¹³

Finally, Lawhead also gave an interpretation of Tertullian statement about philosophy and theology to mean; “... just as Athens (the intellectual center of philosophy) and Jerusalem (the spiritual home of Christianity) are separated by hundreds of miles geographically, so pagan philosophy and the Christian Gospel are miles apart spiritually and can never meet.”¹⁴

Another Christian thinker by name Pascal (1623-1662), who was an eloquent man spoke for non-rational approach to religious truth, also manifested this kind of attitude saying that: “The heart has its reasons which are unknown to reason . . . It is the heart which is aware of God and not reason. That is what faith is: God perceived intuitively by the heart, not by reason.”¹⁵ This implies that the Christian faith is very different from philosophical reasoning, and it is only reasonable when viewed with the eye of faith and not with philosophy – it will look irrational. He believed that there is a decidedly a non-rational aspect to Christian faith, and it is clear that even Pascal appeared to be preoccupied with it in practice. For example, Pascal tried to distinguish the god of the philosophers from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹⁶

Furthermore, one of the most spiteful attacks on philosophy, which shows the disparity between theology and philosophy came from Martin Luther, the Medieval Reformer (1483-1546). Luther calls philosophy or reason, “the devil’s whore.”¹⁷ Again, Luther in his Table-talk says, “Let philosophy remain within her bounds as God has appointed, and let us make use of her as a character in a comedy; but to mix her up with divinity (*faith*) may not be endured.”¹⁸ Luther is clearly setting a boundary for reason that does not allow its usage in the Christian theology. It is only to be used where necessary but does not contribute significantly to the development and preservation of Christian faith. Is it the whole of philosophy or a certain kind of philosophy that Luther is talking about? This question will not be answered here.

Finally, on this subject, there is a non-Christian theologian; Averroes (a.k.a Ibn Rushd) (1126-1198). He was an Arabic Islamic philosopher, who developed a rich natural theology with argument for the existence of God. In his thought, he conceives a double concept of truth, thereby declaring that theology and philosophy have the truth, but they are totally distinct and separate issues from one another.¹⁹ This simply intimate that there is no common ground between them, each can stand on its own since their truths are not same. Also, their sources of truth cannot be the same; they are completely incompatible with one another.

¹⁰ Tertullian, *de praescriptione haereticorum*, 7; in *Sources chretiennes* vol. 46, ed. R.F. Refoule. Paris: Editions du cerf; 1957. P. 7

¹¹ Tertullian,

¹² Ed L. Miller. *God and Reason*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company; 1972. P. 120

¹³ Millard J. Erickson. *Christian Theology* 2nd Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 1983. P. 41

¹⁴ Lawhead, William F. *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy* 4th Edition. Stamford: Cengage Learning; 2007. P. 124

¹⁵ Blaise Pascal. *Pensees*. Translated by Martin Turnell. N.C: Harvill Press; 1962. P. 163

¹⁶ Ed L. Miller. *God and Reason*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company; 1972. P. 134

¹⁷ *Luther’s Works* (American Edition) vols. 40 and 51. Ed. Helmut Lehmann and Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress; 1955-1986. PP. 175; 374

¹⁸ Martin Luther. *Table Talk*. Updated and revised from a translation by William Hazlitt. Gainesville: Bridge-Logos; 2004. P. 58

¹⁹ Stuart McClintock. “Averroism,” in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* vol. 1, ed. Paul Edwards. New York: Macmillan, 1967. P. 225

3.2 The Rationalistic Atheism

“By rationalism is meant the system or theory which assigns undue authority to reason in matters of religion...”²⁰

This constitutes the idea of stressing the importance or superiority of the *mind (Reason)* over the *heart (Faith)*, in the knowing process of anything to be true or that which gives the primary place or attention to the use of reason in inquiring about truth. It is the attempt of making every judgment in the light of reason rather than faith. The rationalist believes that reason is not compatible or is antithetical with faith. It seems unnecessary and unthinkable to them for anyone to be rational and still adhere to religious faith. In other to prove their claim and stand, rationalist gives excessive arguments that demonstrate the favorable position of reason above faith and tend to consider anyone who hold to religious faith as someone who is ignorant, lazy in the exercise of his mind to think, and having an intellectually weak-minded fellow in accepting the religious faith claims that are unlikely to true.²¹

Brown acutely reveals the main target of the rationalist: “Bound up with this is the assumption that, when this is done, reason will have completely disposed of the supernatural, and that we are left with nothing but nature and hard facts.” That, even though the rationalist differs in the way they develop their systems, one thing is common to all of them, and this is the rationality of the universe and the ability of the power of reason to understand or comprehend it.²²

4 A Case for Complementarity between Theology and Philosophy (Faith and Reason)

Under this heading we have about three schools of thought namely: The Evangelical/Reformed position, Roman Catholicism, and Deistic or Religious Naturalism.

4.1 The Evangelical/Reformed Position

Some evangelical orthodox Christian scholars or theologians in the Patristic, Medieval and even the Reformation periods saw the need to confirm that, reason is relevant to the Christian faith. They continue to affirm that reason and faith are necessary tools or ways through which we can come to know God. The orthodox Christian theologians believed that God in His infinite wisdom decided to reveal Himself to mankind in two ways: the general revelation and the special revelation. The general revelation consists of all that God created in the universe: all that we can see and all we cannot see; we know God through His creatures via the instrumentality of reason. While the special revelation consists of the scriptures and Jesus Christ, we know God here via faith. For them, faith and reason are essential medium for knowing God, but reason only complement faith in explicating and explaining the Christian truth. They characterize this relationship between faith and reason with an axiom: “Faith seeking understanding.” Meaning that for the Christian, believing comes first before understanding and not the other way around. The Reformed/Evangelical position on the relationship between faith and reason is largely influenced by St. Anselm, St. Augustine, and John Calvin.

For St. Augustine (354-430), faith is not inferior to reason; and correct faith is never in conflict with reason. He put this in a cache phrase ‘*credo ut intelligam*’ meaning; ‘I believe in order that I may understand.’²³ Also, the relationship between faith and reason can be compared to the story of the Israelite leaving Egypt; although they left the evil practices of the people behind them, they carried the treasure (silver and gold) of Egypt along with them for proper usage. Likewise, theologians for the service of the Christian faith can appropriate the good aspect of philosophy. Augustine really maintains a good attitude toward philosophy, emphasizing the good aspect of it to be employed and used for the explicating the Christian truth because all truth is God’s truth.²⁴

He strongly holds that faith comes first before reason; therefore, reason is useful in validating faith. It was not in the power of reason to establish the truthfulness of the Christian doctrine, but contain the power to contribute to the degree of comprehending the doctrines that are believed by faith. Humans can only acquire knowledge when the two are working together in the right manner or order.

Also, St. Anselm (c. 1033-1109) did not differ much from Augustine in the matter of placing faith first before reason. His methodology is generally summarized with an axiom: ‘*Credo ut intelligam*’ meaning; ‘I believe so that I may understand’ (Proslogion). He did not see any conflict between reason and faith, thereby employed the power of reason in his ontological argument to proof the existence of God. Anselm wrote in the *Proslogion*, saying:

I do not endeavor, O Lord, to penetrate thy sublimity, for in no wise do I compare my understanding with that; but I long to understand in some degree thy truth, which my heart believes and loves, For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe, that unless I believed, I should not understand” (Anselm 6-7). Furthermore, he began the essay by saying: “And so, Lord, do thou, who

²⁰ Charles Hodge. *Systematic Theology* Abridged Edition. ed. Edward N. Gross. New Jersey: P and R Publishing; 1992. P. 46

²¹ Tersur Aben. *The Relevance of Philosophy in the Study of Theology*. T.C.N.N Monday Lecture Series giving on the 19th January, 2009. P. 3

²² Colin Brown. *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*. Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press;1968. P. 48

²³ Augustine. *The City of God in Basic Writings of Saint Augustine II*, trans. M. Dods. New York: Random House; 1948. P. 11.2

²⁴ Alister E. McGrath. *Theology: The Basics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing; 2004. P. 8

dost give understanding to faith, give me, so far as thou knowest it to be profitable, to understand that thou art as we believe; and that thou art which we believe.²⁵

And finally, Calvin (1509-1564), in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, holds that reason is not anti-faith but rather he sees both as God's gifts to mankind. The human reason functions as faith's enlightener and this faith transcends human reason. He observes that reason is that which human beings use to distinguish between what is good and what is bad, and that which they employ to come to understand and judge is a natural gift of God. Calvin sees reason as an instrument or tool in the hand of Christian for explicating the Christian truth and doctrines. So, philosophical reasoning is not anti-faith but friendly to the Christian faith.

4.2 Roman Catholicism

In the Roman Catholic tradition, faith and reason are given a very prominent place and are regarded with high esteem. This is evident in the integrated training of the Catholic priests, which encompasses both theological and philosophical courses. Most of the Roman Catholic theologians if not all, place reason and faith on equal level.

They even rank reason and faith equal in status as instruments for developing and sustaining Christian faith. Thus, seeing faith and reason as equals, St. Thomas Aquinas assigned certain doctrines to the domain of faith and he assigned others to the domain of reason. Aquinas says that Trinity, Creation, Resurrection, and Eternal Life are doctrine that we must believe by faith – which reason can neither teach nor confirm their veracity. But Aquinas says that the oneness of God, the Love of God, and the Laws of God are doctrines that reason too teaches or confirms their veracity.²⁶

For Aquinas, there are basically two different kinds of knowledge that humans can gain and these are the natural knowledge available in the field of reason (philosophy), and the supernatural knowledge available by revelation from God and received by faith (theology). Both faith and reason are not in any way logically incompatible with one another, but rather different levels of operations or activities of the human soul within its own allocated zone, sphere or domain. The domain of reason contains knowledge that humans can acquire through experience and reasoning without any help from divine revelation, while the domain of faith deals with knowledge gain upon the ingredient of divine revelation.²⁷

The Roman Catholic position is one that governs and controls the entire affairs of the church life and practice all over the globe. From the parish priest to the Pope, all are known for employing these tools (faith and reason) for use in both their religious and public life on daily basis.

Popes John Paul II acutely summarized this Roman Catholic position using the analogy of the bird in an Encyclical Letter "Fides Et Ratio" to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship between faith and reason. He said, "Faith and reason are like two wings (*of a bird*) on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth – in a word, to know himself – so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of the truth about themselves"²⁸

Just as the two wings of a bird function to give a bird balance to fly, faith and reason also play the role in the life of a Christian. The two are necessary for correct and balance flight. Without one, the bird cannot fly. So also, is the believer who without one (faith or reason), he cannot acquire complete knowledge of God. This simply means that faith and reason must of necessity be placed at the same equal level or position in order to gain knowledge about God. Faith and reason comprehend correctly; can never be in conflict with each other.

4.3 Deistic or Religious Naturalism

The deist is a school of thought, which holds the idea that there is God, who is responsible for the creation of this world or cosmos but denies the fact that this God is not miraculously or supernaturally active in the running of affairs of humans or creations in the universe. They vary in their religious believe; some believe that God is good and the afterlife of the soul of an individual, others are strong anti-Christian polemics among whom are Voltaire, Francois Marie Arouet (1694-1778) and Thomas Paine (1737-1809). There are however, people like Thomas Jefferson, who seeks to marry deism with the Christian practice.²⁹

Whichcote (1609-1683) of the religious naturalism wrote, "To go against Reason is to go against God; it is the self-same thing, to do that which the Reason of the case doth require; and that which God Himself doth appoint: Reason is the Divine Governor of Man's Life; it is the very voice of God."³⁰

²⁵ Anselm Basic Writings, 2nd edition. Translated by S.N. Deane. Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company; 1966. P. 7

²⁶ Tersur Aben. *The Relevance of Philosophy in the Study of Theology*. T.C.N.N Monday Lecture Series giving on the 19th January, 2009. PP. 3-4

²⁷ Ronald H. Nash. *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. Grand Rapid: Zondervan; 1999. P. 170

²⁸ Encyclical Letter Fides Et Ratio of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship between Faith and Reason. Published 14th September, 1998. Available at www.vatican.va Accessed on 15th April, 2023.

²⁹ "Deism" in A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion. Edited by Charles Taliaferro and Elsa J. Marty. New York: Continuum; 2010. PP. 60-61

³⁰ Colin Brown. *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*. Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press; 1968. P. 75

On a general note the deists admit that reason is related to faith, but hold that reason come first before faith or reason is above faith or they prioritize reason over faith, in that they push or relegate faith as a tool for the acquiring of only religious knowledge. Insisting that nothing can be rationally believed which is not understood, therefore they maintain that they are not under any compulsion to believe all that is in the scriptures.³¹

In other to demonstrate their position, they engage in discussing ideas or concept without reference to the scripture or and refuse to acknowledge Church claims or teachings. A good example of this is Alighieri (1265-1321), who discusses the idea of hell in his explicit representation of the inferno, but at the same time, does not use scripture to support it.

Another deist by name Jefferson, believes in the existence of God as a religious naturalist and that is all about it. He only relies on the tool of reason to gain his knowledge about God but refuses to accept whatever the teaching of the church regarding God. And in our contemporary society, we have people like Wittgenstein (1889-1951) and some Logical Positivists who advocate and maintain that reason is above faith or that reason is primarily over faith and seek to explain the discussion of religious faith as a Language game, being played by a group of people in the Christian communities around the globe.³² (Aben 4).

The deists propagate the supremacy of reason over faith, so whatever the claim of the church has about God, truth, and doctrines that cannot be explicated using reason is unacceptable and irrational to them, only that which is rational is the truth to believe. For them God is a rational being and if anybody desires to be a good Christian it is for that person to participate in the rationality of this being called God.

4.4 Role of Philosophy, Reason in the Christian Faith

The role of critical, logical, systematic and skeptical thinking in the life of any human being and the vocation of a theologian cannot be over emphasised. Man is a thinking being, this is what distinguishes him from other animals in the society. So, that one becomes a Christian does not negate his thinking faculty which is a gift from the Creator himself. In fact, Christianity is not a mindless faith but a rational one for that matter. Therefore, philosophy has an enormous relevance for a Christian theologian in a variety of ways. This can be seen throughout the history of Christianity – from the early period to the contemporary times.

The history of the church reveals that philosophy has always played a crucial role in the nurture of believers and in the proclamation of a Christian world-view in general and the gospel in particular. The first universities in Europe were, of course, Christian, and the study of philosophy was considered of central importance to the health and vitality of the university and the Christian life. This is no less true today. In fact, . . . philosophy is crucial to the texture, curricula and mission of the Christian university and the development of a robust Christian life.³³

First, philosophy aids in the task of defending the Christian faith – technically known as Apologetics. Apologetics is derived from a Greek word ‘apologia’ meaning ‘defence.’ “This is the task of giving a reasoned defence of Christian theism in light of objections raised against it and of offering positive evidence on its behalf”³⁴ The task of defending Christian faith against outsiders (unbelievers) and sometimes even from within, from those who embrace dangerous doctrinal error of the truth is a crucial one. But to do that effectively requires the aid of philosophy; for instance, to demonstrate or give evidence for the existence of God or to answer the question “Does God exist?” Also, the issue of the problem of evil – how can one vindicate God in spite of the evidential and existential evil that seem inconsistent with his attribute such as Omnipotent, Omniscience, Omnibenevolence? This cannot be a matter of just believe, one needs to demonstrate by argument – presenting a set of statements, which will serve as premises that lead to a conclusion in order to clarify and defend the theistic view. Doing this involve the use of philosophy. The attacks on Christianity normally and always involve the use of reason to object some of the beliefs like the Trinity, resurrection, angels etc. How shall one defend the faith, without depending on the evidence provided by the light of natural theology (the attempt to say what can be known about God or divine matters apart from any commitment to any claims to special revelation and so on)? The light of revelation is necessary but not sufficient to handle the objections against Christianity.

Christianity can flourish if she adopts the tools of philosophy in the practice of apologetics, it would help her in substantiating the faith against distortion of the truth. The scripture commands believers to not only tell what they believe, but also why they believe. “. . . always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Gerhard a Lutheran theologian explains that Apologetics are an essential part of the theological task. He outlines three reasons such an enterprise is important: first, to refute sceptics, second, to strengthen the faith of believers, and third, it perfects one’s natural knowledge of God.³⁵

³¹ Charles Hodge. *Systematic Theology* Abridged Edition. ed. Edward N. Gross. New Jersey: P and R Publishing; 1992. P. 50

³² Tersur Aben. *The Relevance of Philosophy in the Study of Theology*. T.C.N.N Monday Lecture Series giving on the 19th January, 2009. P. 4

³³ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press; 2003. P. 34

³⁴ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig.

³⁵ Johann Gerhard. *On the Nature of God and on the Trinity*. Translated by R.J. Dinka. St. Louis: Concordia; 2007. PP. 56-57

Second, philosophy aids the church in its task of polemics – this is the task of criticizing and refuting alternative views of the world. There are legions of ideologies in the world, some of which are secularism, modernism, post-modernism etc, which are in direct conflict with Christian world view. A Christian theologian can develop a purely scriptural critique of such ideologies employing the tools of reason.

Third, philosophy is a central expression of the image of God in us as Christians. God himself is a rational being, and humans are made like him in this respect. They demonstrate this in their ability to engage in abstract reasoning, especially in areas having to do with ethical, religious, and philosophical issues. For Christians to deny the use of philosophy in theological enterprise is tantamount to an erroneous conception of the being called God. Frame affirms, “Scripture does teach that God observes the law of logic, not because there are laws “above” him to which he must conform, but because he is by nature a logical person. That God is logical is implied by the scriptural teachings that he is wise, just, faithful, and true – attributes that would be meaningless if God were free to contradict himself.”³⁶

Fourth, philosophy permeates systematic theology and serves as its handmaid in several ways. Philosophy helps to add clarity to the concepts of systematic theology. Further, it can help to extend biblical teaching into areas where the Bible is not explicit since theology needs to be systematized. Doctrines such as the attributes of God, Trinity, incarnation, human freedom, and Eucharist etc need a rational explication. Philosophy can provide the tools and terms that aid to add clarity and to shed more light on these concepts of systematic theology.

Fifth, the discipline or field of philosophy can facilitate the spiritual discipline of study. Study itself is a spiritual discipline, and the very act of study can change the self. Of course, the discipline of study is not unique to philosophy. But philosophy is among the most rigorous of fields and its approach and subject matter are so central to life . . . that the discipline of philosophical study can aid someone in the pursuit of truth in any other area of life or university study. And Christians believe that other areas of discipline are also a vocation from God and philosophy cannot be excluded from such academic pursuit.

Sixth, the field of philosophy is absolutely essential for the task of integration – to integrate means to blend or form into a whole. In this sense, integration occurs when one’s theological beliefs, primarily rooted in Scripture, are blended and unified with propositions judged as rational from other sources into a coherent, intellectually adequate Christian worldview. Christians need to relate with other cultures in a way that is thoughtful and faithful to the culture of the scriptures. This requires the clarifications of questions of value, knowledge, and thought forms, and this can only be achieved through the involvement of philosophical victuals.³⁷

C.S. Lewis said; “to be ignorant and simple now – not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground – would be to throw down own weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defence but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered”³⁸

Eighth, philosophers are in the business of thinking clearly, cogently, and profoundly. So, for anyone to understand and evaluate their material requires an excellent mental exercise. Christian theologians, preachers, and teachers can benefit a great deal from this in the exposition of the subject matter to their audience.

Ninth, some of the difficult challenges that Christianity faces in history and will continue to face is from the discipline of philosophy. Therefore, when Christians study philosophy, they get the privilege of becoming acquainted with the most formidable adversaries of the gospel and this is a great benefit for the gospel witness.³⁹

It is one thing to study philosophy; it is another thing to be involve in the art of philosophizing. One must make the choice of what to become.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, faith and reason are not vicious enemies, but friendly colleagues in search for the truth about God, humanity, and the universe. Faith needs reason to explicate and explain the Christian doctrines for proper understanding. Also, to establish the certainty of what people belief. Therefore, it suffices to say that; all theologians are philosophers by nature, which they can either be simple or sophisticated in their enterprise, directly, or indirectly, but not all philosophers are theologians.

³⁶ John M. Frame. *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*. New Jersey: P & R Publishing; 2015. P. 163

³⁷ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press; 2003. PP. 14-17

³⁸ C.S. Lewis. *The Weight of Glory*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; 1949. P. 50

³⁹ John M. Frame. *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*. New Jersey: P & R Publishing; 2015. PP. 3-4

References

- [1] Aben, T. (2009). *The Relevance of Philosophy in the Study of Theology*. T.C.N.N Monday Lecture Series given on the 19th of January, 2009.
- [2] Anselm. (1966). *Basic Writings* (2nd ed.), translated by S.N. Deane. Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company.
- [3] Aristotle. (n.d.). "Protreptikos," quoted in Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, translated by E. I. Watkin. New York. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Book VI, Ch. XVIII.
- [4] Augustine. (1948). *The City of God in Basic Writings of Saint Augustine II*, trans. M. Dods. New York: Random House.
- [5] Brown, C. (1968). *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*. Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press.
- [6] "Deism" in *A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion*. (2010). Edited by Charles Taliaferro and Elsa J. Marty. New York: Continuum.
- [7] John Paul II. (1998). *Encyclical Letter Fides Et Ratio to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship between Faith and Reason*. Published 14th September, 1998. Available at [URL]. Accessed on 15th April, 2023.
- [8] Erickson, M. J. (1983). *Christian Theology* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- [9] Frame, J. M. (2015). *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*. New Jersey: P & R Publishing.
- [10] Gerhard, J. (2007). *On the Nature of God and on the Trinity*, translated by R.J. Dinka. St. Louis: Concordia.
- [11] Hodge, C. (1992). *Systematic Theology* (Abridged Edition), ed. E.N. Gross. New Jersey: P and R Publishing.
- [12] Lawhead, W. F. (2007). *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy* (4th ed.). Stamford: Cengage Learning.
- [13] Lewis, C. S. (1949). *The Weight of Glory*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- [14] Luther, M. (2004). *Table Talk*, updated and revised from a translation by William Hazlitt. Gainesville: Bridge-Logos.
- [15] *Luther's Works* (American Edition) 55 vols. (1955-1986). Ed. Helmut Lehmann and Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress.
- [16] McClintock, S. (1967). "Averroism," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. P. Edwards. New York: Macmillan.
- [17] McGrath, A. E. (2004). *Theology: The Basics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- [18] Miller, E. L. (1972). *God and Reason*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- [19] Moreland, J. P., & Craig, W. L. (2003). *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press.
- [20] Nash, R. H. (1999). *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- [21] Omoregbe, J. (2005). *Knowing Philosophy* (2nd ed.). Ikeja: Joja Press Limited.
- [22] Pascal, B. (1962). *Pensées*, translated by M. Turnell. Harvill Press.
- [23] Tertullian. (1957). *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 7, in *Sources chretiennes*, vol. 46, ed. R.F. Refoule. Paris: Editions du cerf.
- [24] Thielicke, H., & Louth, A. (n.d.). "Theology" in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Available at [URL]. Accessed on 15th April, 2023.
- [25] Grace Theological Seminary. (2020). "Theology." Available at [URL]. Published 16th December, 2020. Accessed on 15th April, 2023.
- [26] Ukpokolo, I. E. (2015). *Methodology of Research and Writing in Philosophy: A Guide*. Ibadan: Kairos Publishing.