

FAITH AND REASON OR REASON AND FAITH: THE PROBLEMATIC OR THE RELATIONSHIP: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

*In this article, “Faith and Reason or Reason and Faith, the Problematic or the Relationship: A Philosophical Analysis” the researcher argues that there is no problematic between faith and reason but only a relationship of complementation, symbiosis and partnership that mutually enriches both. Reason is at the core of faith enrichment. Faith without reason is blind. The argument here is not on which one is superior or more important, but on what role they play in making their subject matter accessible. It is this role that should be emphasized and not the precedence of superiority. This understanding places both philosophy and theology at the same pedestal of one needing the other without whom the other cannot stand or move. Using the philosophical method of analysis, the paper argues that faith and reason, the concepts behind the medieval concept, *philosophia ancilla theologiae*, that sought to circumscribe philosophy is too narrow an approach in the understanding of the philosophy. Philosophy is *ancilla scientia*, *ancilla sapientia*, *ancilla veritas* and not only *ancilla theologiae*.*

Keywords: Faith, Reason, Philosophy, Theology, Intelligence

INTRODUCTION

Faith and reason or reason and faith, are two very strong forces (or do I say equally strong forces) in the discussion (and any meaningful discussion at that) in Christian philosophy. This issue according to Lawhead first reared its head in the “early centuries of the Church, continued to be debated during the mediaeval period, and remains a source of lively discussion among philosophers of religion in the twentieth century.” (113) It can be argued that even today, in the contemporary era, the problem of faith and reason has not left the arena of philosophical discourse in relation to the revealed or divine sciences.

Surprisingly, it was not an issue for both the Greeks and Jews. The former relied solely on reason while the latter took shelter on faith. But for religious (especially Christian) thinkers they were cut in between the web of yielding to faith alone or to reason alone. When it became obvious, that this option was not plausible for them, attempts were made to reconcile them as complementary factors in knowledge in the religious arena. The issue is which one is first and what role does the other play in accessing the theological/religious themes as they concern God. It is important not to see them from the perspective of which one is first but in the complementary role they are called to play

It is important to note here that in more ways than one, Greek thought seemed opposed to Christian belief. Plato for example alluded to the fact that the individual finds fulfillment not in relating with the creator but in exercise the autonomy of his reason: Plato's doctrine of reincarnation also contradicts the Christian teaching on life after death, the resurrection. Epicurus on the other hand, also, taught that the pursuit of pleasure not obedience to God was the goal of life. He even went on to assert that, the soul disintegrates with the body at death. (113). This is not to say that Christianity had nothing in common with Greek thoughts. Socrates and Plato believed in the immortality of the soul, and that eternal spiritual realities were more important than the physical. The Stoics acknowledged that the world was full of order and directed towards the fulfillment of a divine purpose. Christian philosophy drew a lot of inspiration from such teachings and doctrines.

From all these considerations, one thing seems to stand out clearly; faith is to theology – God – study, what reason is to philosophy – philo – Sophia in general. While it can be argued that philosophy studies everything, theology studies only one thing, the ultimate thing. Since philosophy studies everything, it also by that very fact studies that one thing only, that theology studies. The difference being the methodology and even terminology deployed in this study. This is perhaps the context under which the concept, philosophiae anchila theologiae emerged in the Christian era; where philosophy was seen essentially as oriented towards theology. It is from this concept that faith and reason entered into theological and philosophical discussions. This concept of philosophia anchila is not our concern here but the problematic or the relationship between faith and reason as they apply to philosophy and theology.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Christian theology sees faith as the acceptance of the things God has revealed without questioning even when they seem to be unclear and inconsistent with human experience. The letter to the Hebrews puts it in a clearer manner; faith is the assurance of things not seen; the reality of thing not known (Hebrew 11:1). In this article, we may see faith as a different category of knowledge that is directly opposed to reason. It is the acceptance of what reason doubts. Faith is to religion what reason is to philosophy. It is the most efficacious tool of religion. Faith compels the adherents, to believe what may never be known as it is revealed by God through whatever mechanism that it has come to man. It is a form belief that whatever religion teaches is true and that it is God who has revealed it. It is therefore to be assented to without reservations of any kind. Any form of rejection or doubt is at the peril of the adherer and it is dealt with decisively.

WHAT IS REASON?

Reason is the exact oppose of faith. It involves a rational inquiry that utilizes the human intellectual and mental cognitive faculties in the assessment and comprehension of all events and experiences. The contention here is that whatever cannot be accessed through reason is outside the scope of knowledge. Reason is what has given rise to philosophical school or a philosophical method in the process of knowledge acquisition. This school of thought is known as rationalism. Audi says that, “the term is also encountered in the philosophy of

religion, where it may designate those who oppose the view that revelation is central to religious knowledge; and in ethics, which designate those who opposed the view that ethical principle are grounded in or derived from emotion, empathy or some other non-rational foundation” (673) This goes to support the assertion we had earlier made that reason is to philosophy what faith is to religion. This faith deals with revelation understood as what God has revealed to man. Reason on other hand deals with what man is capable of knowing through his rational faculties.

The purpose of this article is to examine the problematic or the complementation of faith and reason in theology and in philosophy. Is faith meant to create problems for philosophy and vice versa or are they meant to enhance and complement each other. The position of this article is that it is for complementation in a relationship of symbiosis. One does for the other what the other cannot do for itself and seeks to help the other to better understand itself so as to be understood by others. Faith needs reason to understand theology and reason sheds more light on faith to make it more accessible to the finite human mind. Having said this, I have placed this article on a proper pedestal to discuss the relationship between faith and reason and to show their complementary roles. This role is not antagonistic or opposed to each other but essentially constitute dual approaches to the same realities, penultimate and ultimate.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON

In discussing relationship between faith and reason, John Paul II, in his Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, points out:

Reason in fact is not asked to pass judgment on the content of the faith something of which it would be incapable since this is not its function. Its function is rather to find meaning, to discover explanations which might allow everyone to come to a certain understanding of the contents of faith. The desire for truth, therefore, spurs reason always to go further; indeed, it is as if reason were overwhelmed to see that it can always go beyond what it has already achieved.(42)

According to the John Paul II, reason is called to find meaning, to discover explanation that yields understanding about faith. Reason therefore is at the service of faith. Faith cannot do much without reason. John Paul II insinuates that, this relationship is one of symbiosis and not of superiority or dominance. He further adds complementing this point, “faith asks that its objects be understood with the help of reason, and at the summit of its searching reason acknowledges that it cannot do without what faith presents.”(42) Reason acknowledging that it cannot do without what faith presents is only in the religious circle and not at the epistemological spheres. Here reason does not need faith to function.

One of those who played a leading role in harmonizing faith and reason is Thomas Aquinas. “Both the light of reason and the light of faith come from God, he argued, hence there is no contradiction between them.”(43) Stressing on this point and person, Mondin asserts:

He does not take faith as criterion of truth, nor as a general organ of knowledge, but as an integrating principle of man's rational cognitive capacity. The normal organ of human knowledge is reason... faith is an extraordinary organ yet one

that is rationally accepted based on valid credentials, it is an organ helping reason to more easily, certainly and quickly reach its final threshold; supreme truth.(305)

The point being made here is that there is a relationship of mutuality, complementation and symbiosis and not one of opposition, contradiction and superiority, between faith and reason. the Pope says, faith provides reason with material to rationalize, while Aquinas says faith helps reason to reach its final end- supreme truth.

John Paul II goes on:

Faith therefore has no fear of reason, but seeks it out and has trust in it. Just as grace builds on nature and brings it to fulfillment, so faith builds upon and perfects reason. Illuminated by faith, reason is set free from the fragility and limitations of deriving from the disobedience of sin and finds the strength required to rise to the knowledge on the triune God.(43)

All these point to the fact that there is a relationship between faith and reason. Faith and reason are not isolated and uncoordinated strands or forms of knowledge, but essentially partners and helpers of one another in the process of knowledge in the natural and supernatural realms. Reason (philosophy) can be seen as a tow-van to, not only the knowledge of theology but to all knowledge in general. Philosophy (reason) seeks the ultimate truth. It is beyond *anchila theologiae* also to *anchila ultima veritas*. It is handmaid, and not only of theology, but most importantly, handmaid of the ultimate truth. Writing on this, Uduigwomen says: “Reason's role is to show that God exists, but revelation, that is faith alone, is the basis or ground for belief in God... faith is more meritorious for a believer, but reason is more noble... faith is, therefore the ability to reason with assent” (86-87). Here, the emphasis of our presentation is not on which one is meritorious or nobler, but on their relationship and the complementary role they play. It is the same person who is called to use his reason, who is also called to use his faith also. Faith and reason co-habit in the same subject; the thinking subject who also may be the believing subject.

I would like to conclude this discourse on faith and reason in the way Uduigwomen did, by quoting from Geisler and Feinberg, who have a done a great deal in establishing the interdependence of faith and reason. They tried to situate faith and reason in the order of precedence and utility.

1. Reason over revelation (faith) is correct because reason is epistemologically prior to revelation (faith). The alleged revelation must be subjected to reason's test.
2. Revelation over reason is right ontologically, because God created reason and it must not be His master but His servant.
3. Revelation only – is correct in the sense that ultimately and ontologically all truth comes from God.
4. Reason only, is correct because reason must judge epistemologically whether God is the source of the alleged revelation.

5. Revelation and reason is correct in that it properly assigns a role to each and shows their interrelationship. One should reason about and for revelation, otherwise he has an unreasonable faith. Likewise, reason has no guide without revelation and flounders in error".(88)

Actually, faith flounders in error when it refuses to be illumined by reason and vice versa. Mondin has three principal approaches in establishing the relationship between faith and reason:

The solutions were: hostility, extraneousness and harmony. The first solution, hostility was held by the first Church Fathers (especially Tatian and Tertullian). These Fathers considered philosophy as a dangerous enemy of Christianity. The second solution that of extraneousness was proposed by some of Averroes disciples... in their opinion, faith and reason are not interested in the same truth, but in different truths which are extraneous to each other... the third solution, that of harmony, was already proposed by some third century Church Fathers (Justin, Clement and Origen)... According to this doctrine, there can be no conflict in principle between faith and reason... faith and reason are channels coming from the same source, God; they are two epistemic forces working for the objective; the conquest of truth.(306)

This last point on harmony is what I have used extensively in this work. I have drawn from the Pope John Paul II – *Fides et Ratio*, from the position of Thomas Aquinas, from Uduigwomen and from Geisler and Feinberg, to substantiate my position. It is the position I have described as complementation, symbiosis, partners, helpers, companions on the same path of knowledge discovery about the ultimate truth of existence and one without the other is poor and weak. Reason prepares the way for faith. Reason lays the foundation for faith and makes revelation understandable and credible. Without faith reason withers, while without reason faith is left with only feelings, emotions and sentiments. Faith and reason are two sides of an epistemic reality called God. Faith seeks understanding that reason gives. Faith and reason are the two ways that Christians fly. This concepts, faith and reason entered into theological and philosophical discussion through the introduction of the concept, *philosophia ancilla theologiae*. It is important to also examine this concept in some details.

THE CONCEPT PHILOSOPHIAE ANCILLA THEOLOGIAE

The concept, "*Philosophiae Ancilla Theologiae*," simply means, 'philosophy' is handmaid of theology. After examining the relationship between faith and reason, it is appropriate to relate these concepts in the context of theology and philosophy. In this section, our concern is to examine what this concept means, its relevance to theology and its circumscription of philosophy. It is in this circumscription of philosophy that my criticism of the concept is highlighted. The origin of this concept, "*philosophiae ancilla theologiae*," can be traced to Peter Damian, who intended through it to silence philosophy. He used it to render philosophy useless, labeling philosophy as lacking a definite subject matter, full of inconsistencies, arguments and debates. The scholastics appropriated the concept and transformed its meaning and usage. In the scholastic usage, philosophy is placed at the service of theology, when and

only when in its own working theology employs philosophy as an instrument of truth in order to establish conclusions which are not philosophical but theological. (Maritain, 1995)

Thomas Aquinas, following Peter Damian argued that philosophy is handmaid of theology. What this means is that, philosophy is help maid, servant, helper, partner, assisting theology in understanding itself. What this entails is that philosophy takes a subservient relationship to theology and it does not have an identity separates from its service to that sort of enquiry in theology. The mediaeval philosophers used the methods and the logical techniques of the ancient philosophers to address difficult theological questions and points of doctrines. The roles that the mediaeval philosophers concedes to philosophy was that of complementing theology, they saw the richness of philosophy, the methods of its arguments in the clarifications of concepts and explanation of reality and thought it was the best method for the understanding of theology that is wrapped in mystery and inaccessible to human comprehension. They thought that using its methods, theology could be made more understandable and therefore more appealing. In this, they did not accord any serious value or importance to philosophy. They only saw it from its role in the understanding of theological truths and only to that extent, is philosophy useful to the mediaeval (Christian) philosophers. In this period, philosophy was not given any definite subject matter. It was conditioned to assist in the understanding of the complex nature of theology that deals more with matters that transcend finite rationality. Philosophy therefore was deployed as a tool and as a method to give reasonable reason to issues about faith, revelation, divine illumination, the existence of God, etc. Philosophy proceeds through reason in the search for knowledge. Theology proceeds through faith/revelation in the quest for truth. Philosophy sees things in line with reason; theology on the other hand, sees them through faith and revelation. Philosophy studies ultimate realities, theology studies ultimate reality. Philosophy is about all things and everything, theology is about one thing, “the one thing”- the ultimate supreme reality. Since philosophy is about all things and everything, it therefore follows that the one thing that is the subject matter of theology, the ultimate reality, is also under the scope of philosophy, since it studies all things without exception and the one thing is included in the all things. It is because the mediaeval philosophers had a religious/Christian bent of thought, that they gave priority to theology and circumvented the role of philosophy to it. It is this that gave rise to the concept, 'ancilla theologiae.' Mondin, citing Thomas Aquinas, says: “Sacred science can receive something from the philosophical disciplines, but not out of necessity, but only to better clarify its teaching. Its principles are not taken from philosophy, but directly from God through revelation. Therefore, it does not take from the other science as if they are superior, but use them as lower sciences....” (340)

This is the function that most mediaeval Christian philosophers conceded to philosophy; a lower science useful only in clarifying theological teaching and not really necessary for it. In this concept of ancilla theologiae, Thomas Aquinas asserts as Mondin narrates that: “philosophy gives theology a rational scheme to recognize, interpret and express these mysteries.”(342) It is this philosophical method and tool that theology uses to articulate her positions. It is this deployment of philosophy in the explanation of theology, arising from this concept of ancilla theologiae that has given birth to new system/brand of philosophy known as Christian philosophy. Here then lies the supreme importance of the emergence of this concept

in philosophical arena. It led to the establishment of a totally new branch of philosophy that all through the ancient period was not developed in explicit terms. Though, it can be argued that, the foundation was there in the skeletal form – allusions were to it in the metaphysics of the philosophers of this era. It is through this that there were renewed interests in trying to align faith with reason or reason with faith, to better appreciate both reason and faith. Faith and reason are now being seen as two sides of the same coin in Christian philosophy. Faith and reason have already been considered in the section before the concept *ancilla theologiae*. That was done on purpose. An understanding of the relationship between faith and reason is essential in understanding the concept, *ancilla theologiae*. It is the relationship between faith and reason that opened the minds of the mediaeval philosophers to so describe philosophy as “*philosophiae ancilla theologiae*. Some philosophers had captured it as the problem even contradiction between faith and reason (113-115) while others have simply seen it as a relationship – the relationship between faith and reason, e.g. Mondin (355) and John Paul (37) and some others see it as the problem of the relationship between faith and reason. (85) I see it not as a controversy, not as a problem, but simply as a relationship; as a relationship that is characterized by partnership, help maid, companionship, complementation and symbiosis. It is not one of rivalry, opposition, and contradiction, but one of mutual enrichment and enhancement. At this point, it is pertinent, given the philosophical nature of this work, to critically examine this concept as a philosophical term.

CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPT: PHILOSOPHIAE ANCILLA THEOLOGIAE

The concept, *philosophiae ancilla theologiae*, as introduced into philosophy by the mediaeval Christian philosophers, has had far-reaching implications for philosophy. Philosophy is a critical science, that is characterized by thinking, asking questions, questioning the answers, philosophy's scope and subject matter is so all- inclusive and all-embracing, that nothing that is rationally conceivable is considered exclusive to it. Philosophy understood as *philo-sophia*, love of wisdom, is not restricted to any particular wisdom, but embraces everything that can be so qualified.

Philosophy grew out of poetry in Greek culture in Pre-Greek philosophy. It was the poets, (Homer, Hosioid, etc.), who through poetry reflected on the world and poetically through what poetry is known for tried to offer explanations about the origin of the world as they saw it. They did this through stories, folktales, myths, etc. about the activities of the gods and how they started mingling with mortals. Lawhead supports this position when he affirms:

The story of philosophy begins with poetry. The poet held a central place in Greek culture. They were not only interested in tales... instead; the poets developed, preserved and conveyed historical, scientific and religious truth of the time. They were concerned with history; because their tales gave an account of the past and how various traditions, races and culture came to be. Furthermore, they attempted to answer cosmological questions by speaking about the origins, structure and workings of the universe. The poets told the stories of the gods and their accounts were taken to be authoritative. Hence to the Greeks, the poets were inspired or filled with a divine spirit no less than biblical writers in the Christian tradition. Finally, all these served as an ethical function. The poets explained the world through myths... the myths of the

poets tried to provide a comprehensive view of the world and the individual's place in it. (4)

The poet in Pre-Greek philosophy, dealt with history, not philosophy. They offered varied explanation about cosmology but they attributed everything to the activities of the gods. To them, the gods were anthropomorphic in all ramifications. They were driven by the passion that influenced mortals. What is important about the poets is that they occupied and performed the functions that Greek philosophers assumed when men realized that the poets were not bothered with the fundamental human questions of the 'whys' of things but merely narrated historical events. Philosophy and philosophers came in then to replace them and that replacement altered for all times, Greek culture and Greek thought.

Greek philosophy therefore, emerged as a response to the uncritical mythologies of the poets, the traditional authority of the gods, through a new process of self-critical and reflective thought process. This critical and reflective thought process is what is known as philosophy. There was a new dawn in the search for answers to the many ordeals of human life. This change consisted in asking fundamental questions of 'what and why' of 'this and that' and of 'all things'. This then is the birth of philosophy, understood as a thinking science, a question asking science, and a critical science. What this portends for philosophy is that, philosophy started as, *ancilla Scientia*, *ancilla sapientia*, and continued as *ancilla veritas*. It was only in the mediaeval era, (perhaps because of the interaction between Greek and Jewish cultures after the death of Aristotle, that the hybrid culture of Hellenism gave philosophy a theocentric dimension), that philosophy took a special turn and interest in a specific aspect of human wisdom and truth, that the concept, '*ancilla theologiae* emerged.'

The emergence of this concept *secundum quid* derailed the overall concern of philosophy and narrowed it to theology/religion in the quest to understand faith. *Ancilla theologiae* concept therefore, is a circumscription of philosophy. This circumscription though not a negation of philosophy, it is nevertheless a limitation in the scope and subject matter of philosophy that before this time included all things and everything, to the extent that a rational question can be asked around it or about it. Philosophy deals with the ultimate truth possible for man. In the mediaeval era, philosophy became restricted and useful only to the extent that it contributed in the course of advancing the understanding of the faith and man's relationship with God.

The concept of *ancilla theologiae* because it confined philosophy only to serve as a helper to theology, limits the scope of philosophy and therefore does not exhaust the totality of the concern of philosophy. It should also be noted that apart this period of philosophy, there is no other period of philosophy where this concept has been utilized in the description of philosophy's role in human affairs. In the period immediately following the mediaeval period, philosophy returned back to its primeval concern of search for the ultimate truth through the natural faculties of man. Philosophy started asking fundamental questions again about life, man's destiny and about all realities conceivable by the human intellect.

As important as this concept is even as we have seen, it deals with only an aspect of philosophy and so cannot be used to define philosophy as such. Philosophy is in actual fact, *ancilla scientia*, *ancilla sapientia* and *ancilla veritas*. Uduigwomen shares our sentiments when he says:

Some especially the mediaeval Church Fathers have regarded philosophy as the handmaid of theology seeing its central task as the defence of Christianity. My aim here is not to exalt philosophy or downgrade it. As mother-subject, its centrality to all other disciplines is indubitable and incontestable. The

questions/problems it addresses are fundamental and of enduring value (iii).

This is therefore the position of this paper, that philosophy is mother-subject, central to all disciplines, addressing fundamental issues of lasting value. To define philosophy or see it as ancilla theologiae only is to take what belongs to all and give to one, the reverse should be the case. One can easily be assimilated into all than for all to be assimilated into one. Philosophy therefore is broader in scope and perspective than just serving as ancilla theologiae.

CONCLUSION

Faith and reason are two concepts in philosophy and theology that have occupied and still occupy philosophical and theological discussions even today. Some philosophers are still asking fundamental questions around these twin concepts. Questions such as, do we believe what we know or do we know what we believe are still being asked and they touch on both philosophy and theology.

The argument and position of the paper is not on superiority, precedence or importance but on complementation, symbiosis and multiplicity. These two concepts are deployed by man in his bid to interact with and understand the religious dimension of his life. Since man is also and most importantly, a religious being, faith and reason are at the service in this dimension. Reason supports faith to make both its subject matter and process known and accessible to man who is at the centre of both faith and reason.

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