

## Subject Matters of: Theology, Philosophy, and Science

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Schaeffer observed, “Philosophy and religion deal with the same basic questions. Christians, and especially evangelical Christians, have tended to forget this. Philosophy and religion do not deal with different questions, though they give different answers and in different terms. The basic questions of both philosophy and religion (and I mean religion here in the wide sense, including Christianity) are the questions of being: that is, what exists; man and his dilemma—that is, morals; and how man knows. Philosophy deals with these points, but so does religion, including orthodox evangelical Christianity.”<sup>1</sup>

What is Theology? Theology is the study of God, His existence, His character, and His attributes. It is the study of His governing Laws, the doctrines we are to believe, and the duties we are to practice. Theology consists of two branches: *natural* and *revealed*. Natural theology is the knowledge we have of God from His works of creation by light of nature, and reason. Revealed theology is that which is to be learned only from revelation –The Bible!

What is philosophy? Philosophy is the love and pursuit of wisdom. But modern acceptance of philosophy is, a general term denoting an explanation for the reasons of things; or an investigation into the causes of all phenomena both of mind and of matter. The object of philosophy is to ascertain facts or truth, and the causes of things; to enlarge our views of God and His works, and to render our knowledge of both, practically useful and subservient to human happiness.<sup>2</sup> Philosophy has two meanings: (i) it is a discipline, and an academic subject, and (ii) it also is a man’s worldview. In this sense all men have a worldview.

What is science? Science is a branch of knowledge derived from observation, study, experimentation, and verification. It is the comprehension or understanding of truth or facts, by the mind.

In this modern era man holds the subject matters of Theology, Philosophy, and Science on the same level as orthodox religion. But it is important to ask, what is the subject matter, the principle foundation for these subjects?

What is the *principle foundation of knowledge*, in the areas of theology, philosophy, and science? So how do we go about understanding the relationship of theology, philosophy, and modern science? One way to go about it would be to set out the general subject matter for each discipline.

It may be best to think of theology, philosophy and science in terms of the historical notion of *principium*. The word *principium*, at least historically, is the Latin translation of the Greek word *arche*, which means “beginning,” or “cause,” or “source,” or “foundation.” It is that which gives something its **reason** to be, or justification for its existence.

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Schaeffer, *He Is There And He Is Not Silent*, (Wheaton; Illinois, Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Word definition were taken from Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of The English Language*, (Published by the Foundation for American Christian Education, Chesapeake; Virginia), 1828.

The question as to the difference between philosophy, theology, and science will revolve around the answers to the questions of philosophy's, theology's, and science's *foundations*, their *principium's*.

To answer this question is also to answer the question of authority. The reason or source, or cause of a discipline, in this sense, gives it its justification as well; it points to its boundaries and its rules or laws.

First, if reason is the *principle knowledge or foundation* (*principium congnoſendi*) of philosophy, then, philosophy's boundaries are determined by *reason*—human reason. It's authority lies in reason, and its rules and laws are the rules and laws of reason.

Second, if observation and verification comprise the *principle knowledge or foundation* of science, then science's boundaries are determined by *observation* and *verification*. It's authority lies in observation and verification, and its rules and laws are limited to, and by; *natural* observation and verification --only.

However, in science there is a limitation. What are some of the limitations? Science does not deal with anything that is *not* observable to the human senses. Another limitation of science is that it cannot make any value judgments, that is, it cannot ascribe quality to an observed event or thing. A scientist may be able to determine what cancer is, but, merely as a scientist, he is not able to judge whether cancer is good or bad.

The Bible says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen.1:1). This assumption is true to Scripture and need not be further debated. Science cannot objectively prove or disprove this creation event. Science starts with something, or from something that is already there. The creation of the universe was before science.

The Christian view is that science began with a mandate from the Creator of the universe, and this mandate was given to Adam and Eve in creation (Genesis 2-3). They were commanded to be productive, to dress, to till, and keep the earth, and to replenish it. This was the first scientific enterprise under the authority of the infinite-personal, living God.

Third, the primary subject matter of Theology is God's revelation, both in creation and in His Word. The standard view of Theology is that its essential foundation, is God Himself. He alone provides what is needed for man to understand Him, His revelation to man, and His revelation about the universe, and its order, and about man. The foundation of knowledge in Theology's (*principium*) is revelation itself.

In the Christian sense, the external principle of knowledge, is God's special revelation in His Word, and the internal principle of knowledge, is regenerate reason and the Holy Spirit. There is *natural* reason, and there is *regenerate* reason.

What then, is to lead in the discussion in these disciplines? Is it Theology – with the living God and His revelation of Creation and His Word? Is it Philosophy – with its laws of reason? And what kind of reason? Is it natural or regenerate reason? It is Science which is limited only to *natural* observation, and verification?

In this context, just what should a Christian believe the relationship of theology, philosophy, and science to be? The answer to this question depends on *one's theology*. Should Theology dictate to philosophy and science? Or, should philosophy and science dictate to theology? What should lead in the discussion that is looking for meaning in the universe, and answers to man's problems?

The only proper way to understand God's revelation is through God's own revealed Word, which is the principle knowledge or foundation of Christian theology. (Modern theologians hold and teach that all questions about God are raised in the context of human experience, and the assumption of subjective feelings; this is also called, *dialectical theology*). Thus, it is objective-theology, a theology that is based in revelation; and not subjective-theology, a theology that is based on feelings; that ought to set the parameters, the rules, and the laws and all other disciplines.

There is, specifically, an *apologetic* thrust to the use of philosophy and science in the area of Theology. In this sense, theologians should be quick to use philosophy and science as their tools when and where they can in order to demonstrate something of Christianity's own truth.

One primary use of philosophy by Theology is that, "It serves as a means of convincing the Gentiles and preparing them for the Christian faith."<sup>3</sup> In Acts 14:15-18, Paul said to the Gentiles who believed in an abstract God –(Zeus); "God has not left Himself without witness . . ." The bounties of common Providence witness to us that there is a God. The *rain and fruitful seasons* could not come by chance, and they are not of chance. All the powers of nature witness to a sovereign power in the living God who created nature.

The Lord Jesus made a powerful defense of the existence of God (Matthew 5:45). God gives witness of Himself by way of the "sun" and the "rain." Christianity presents the living God as the Creator, and Sustainer of *all things* (Hebrews 1:1-3).

In about A.D. 60, a Jew (Paul) who became a Christian and who also knew about the Greek and Roman cultures, and the thinking of his day, wrote a letter to those who lived in Rome. He told the Christians in Rome that Christianity has an *intellectual content*, and that they should not be ashamed of it (Rom. 1:16-17). Previously, he had said the same things to Greek thinkers while speaking on Mars Hill in Athens (Acts 17:16-32). He had spoken with the Acropolis above him, and the ancient marketplace below him. At this place the ancient Greek thinkers met for discussion (v. 21).

He remarked that the belief systems of the Greek and Roman worldviews were not enough to answer the questions posed about the existence of the universe and its forms, or about the uniqueness of man. They did not have adequate answers to these questions—about the uniqueness of the universe, and about the worth of man.

Paul declared to the Greek Athenians, that man has a personality, and that the universe has form, order, unity, and beauty (see, Acts 17:21-34). He presented a worldview of what *final reality is*, the living **God!** Then, he went on to present the resurrection of Christ and God's judgment on mankind's rebellion and sin. Man's Creator will hold him accountable for his sins.

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<sup>3</sup>Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith, Philosophy in the Service of Theology*, (Philipsburg: New Jersey.: Regent Publishers, 2006), p. 27.

## Summary

The Christian theological position does speak of who God is. In fact, it speaks objectively, and clearly of *Who* the living God is in **four** different areas: Dr. Schaeffer weighed in on this matter and said:

“**First, the universe**, the external world, even as it stands now, and since the Historic Fall mentioned in Genesis 3, speaks of existence itself. We know that the universe is there (existence is there), and God is there.

**Second, the universe** has order. It is not in chaos, it has unity in all the particulars. We find in Genesis 1, the Creator made all things reproduce after their own kind. Here is order. God created the world with order, form, and unity.

**Third, the universe** speaks of God’s character. He created a universe that is totally good. And it was created by God’s *fiat*. It was created *ex nihilo*, Latin for, ‘out of nothing.’ God spoke the universe into existence.

**Fourth, the universe** speaks of God as a Person. When God made man in His own image, He stated something more fully about Himself than He has in any other part of the universe. This universe and Christianity speak[s] of Personality, of Being, and that Being is, the living God, who exists. The *cosmos* speaks of order, and it speaks of unity, beauty, and reason.”<sup>4</sup>

The end of man is to stand as a finite being before an infinite Being – the living God, in a personal relationship. Christ’s first command to man was to love God with all his/her heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. This is not an abstract duty; it’s a devotional duty for a reasonable being—man. We have ***an infinite reference point, and absolute, objective standard –the living God; He gives meaning to all of our finite points.***

The Christian man/woman has an *infinite, eternal, reference point*, in the living God, He not only exists, but He is Personal, and can communicate with *us* and we with Him –in love, worship, and obedience!

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<sup>4</sup>Freancis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, (Illinois: Downes Grove; InterVarsity Press, 1972), p. 58.