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СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ДИСКУРСЫ

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What Philosophical Theology & Religion Can Do for One Another

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Although philosophical theology is, in part, an academic discipline aimed at a theoretical understanding of such topics as faith, revelation, divine attributes, divine action, and various conceptually challenging doctrines, it can be more than merely a branch of scholarship. This paper argues that application of philosophical tools to "divine things" can both benefit from cooperation with religion and contribute to the attainment of the good of religion. The paper's method is that of Anglo-American analytic philosophy. Its foundation lies in the ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, about the virtue of religion and about the relation of faith and reason, ideas the application of which to the needs of theology has an established place in Catholic theological thought, but which are equally relevant to Orthodox and Protestant concerns. The paper begins by distinguishing various senses of the terms "philosophical theology" and "religion" and then shows by argument and example what it is that the each one can do for the other. This will be of particular help (1) in justifying (e.g., to students) the inclusion of *philosophical* theology in seminary curricula, as well as more broadly both (2) in showing philosophy students how their chosen discipline can be connected to their religious commitments, and (3) in showing religious believers the value of giving attention and respect to philosophical theology.

Keywords: philosophical theology, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Thomas Aquinas, worship, scientism, revelation, faith, creeds, preambles of faith

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In this paper I intend to show how philosophical theology and religion benefit one another. First, of course, I will have to say exactly what I take each term to mean. Then I will identify some of the way in which each benefits the other.

1. What is Religion?

One might take the term "religion" to refer to a practice centered on human interaction with preter- or supernatural beings, whether by giving something to them or by seeking something from them. In that sense there are many different religions. In this paper, however, I will focus on two other senses of the term "religion", ones in which there is no plural. Both have their roots in ethics, perhaps unsurprisingly since religion will ultimately be situated in the realm of human conduct or action. Although both might be connected to the idea of religion as a practice, I will treat each on its own.

In order to keep my discussion from being too abstract, I will focus it on Catholic-Orthodox Christianity. I think that much of what I say will have broader relevance, but will leave it to others to decide what modifications of my ideas will have to be made in their cases. I think that the thesis is worth defending, even if it applies only narrowly.

The first sense of religion which I want to consider is an activity which John Finnis identified as one of "seven basic forms of [human] good", that is, an activity which is good in itself rather than one that is merely instrumental to the attainment of some other good. He defined it as reflection on two fundamental questions:

> (1) How are [ends, means, and priorities], which have their immediate origin in human initiative and pass away in death, related to the lasting order of the whole cosmos and to the origin, if any, of that order?
> (2) Is… human freedom… itself somehow subordinate to something that makes that human freedom, human intelligence, and human mastery possible…? [Finnis 1980: 89].

This is close to Aristotle's concept of θεωρία as (or as part of) the ultimate human good, though Finnis seems to differ from Aristotle by focusing more explicitly on *man*'s place in the universe than did Aristotle.

The second sense of the term, a rather older sense, refers not to an activity, but to a moral virtue. We can begin with Cicero's definition of "religion" as "that which offers care and ceremony to that of a superior nature which we call divine"[1]. St. Thomas Aquinas classified it as a virtue annexed to justice, a "potential part", or (by definition of that concept) one which has something in common with the virtue of which it is a part, but nevertheless deviates from its exact nature in some respect (*deficiant a perfecta ratione ipsius*)[2].

Justice, of course, he defines as the disposition to give to each his due. Religion has in common with what we might call the paradigmatic forms of justice (such as paying our debts or rewarding public benefactors) that it renders to God what is due to Him. Nevertheless, it deviates from the essential nature (*ratio*) of justice, since it is impossible for man to give to God all that is due to him. The denomination of exactly what is due to God is difficult and the words chosen to express it by various Christian nations have different roots. The Slavs emphasized a symbolic bodily

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1 Cicero, *De Inventione*, ii.53.

2 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2æ, Q. 80, a. 1.

action and from поклон derived поклонение. The Greeks and the Romans chose an analogous activity – that of a servant (λατρεύς) for his master or of a farmer (*cultor*) in his field – and called what is due to God λατρεία or *cultus*. The Anglo-Saxons emphasized that about God in virtue of which something was due to Him, His *weorþscip* (or worthiness), and their having used that term analogously for that which is due, we now refer to *worship*. The Greeks, one might note, chose one of the two words from the First Commandment (עבד *ʿabad*) and the Slavs the other (שׁחה *shâchâh*)[3].

However much worship is the focal answer to the question, what is due to God, it is not the full answer. The Christian God is not only supremely worth-y. He is also a Revealer and a Legislator. That creates two supplementary *debita* – faith, which will be discussed below, and obedience, which, having less relevance to philosophical theology, will not be discussed further.

2. What is Philosophical Theology?

The best way to answer this question is to begin by describing *non-philosophical* theology and then to go on to describe ways in which theology might be philosophical. I will distinguish three degrees of increasingly philosophical theology.

Given that Christianity is grounded, in significant part, in the Bible, however, we can begin by identifying, for the sake of a clarifying contrast, three *non-philosophical* disciplines of particular importance to the knowledge of God by way of study of that book, i.e., to Biblical theology.

The first is archeology, which had yielded the texts of both secular treaties (covenants) and creation stories. We can compare the former with the covenant at the heart of the Pentateuch. Archeologist K.A. Kitchen wrote that "the *form* of covenant found in Exodus-Leviticus… is neither arbitrary nor accidental. It is a form proper to the general period of the exodus, current in the 14th/13th centuries BC, and *neither earlier nor later* on the total available evidence" [Kitchen 1977: 79]. Similarly with the creation stories of Genesis. Contrast precisely with Mesopotamian counterparts provides not merely historical knowledge, but also valuable *theological* insight. According to the *Enuma Elish*, Marduk and Ea made man "to bear the gods' burden, that the gods may rest". They made man out of the blood of the god Quingu, who was killed for exactly that purpose. How different from Genesis account of man "made in God's image and likeness" in which the creation of man is the crowning act of creation. Even the phrase "there was not a man to till the earth" does not suggest that God's purpose was to make a slave to do His work for Him[4].

The second non-philosophical discipline of particular importance to Biblical theology is philology, emphasized, for example, by Pope Leo XIII in *Providentissimus Deus*[5]. Here is an example (mine, not Pope Leo's). What exception to the prohibition against divorce does Jesus acknowledge in Mt 5:32 (παρεκτὸς λόγου πορνείας)? Adultery? Fornication? Some other sexual immorality? Joseph Bonsirven, SJ, argued

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3 *Exodus* 20:5 or *Deuteronomy* 5:9.

4 For more detail see [Fant, Reddish 2008: 3–12].

5 Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* (1893), para. II.D.2.a.

that the word πορνεία corresponds to the Hebrew זנות (*zenut*), under which term Talmudic texts include illegitimate marriages (such as concubinage) and that is the situation in which Jesus allowed "divorce" [Bonsirven 1949: esp. 46–60].

The third important non-philosophical discipline is literary studies. As Pope Pius XII wrote in *Divino afflante spiritu* (1943):

> The literal sense of a passage is not always as obvious in the speeches and writings of the ancient authors of the East, as it is in the works of our own time. For what they wished to express is not to be determined by the rules of grammar and philology alone, nor solely by the context… The ancient peoples of the East did not always employ those forms or kinds of speech which we use today in order to express their ideas, but employed rather those used by the men of their times and countries. The commentator cannot determine what exactly those were in advance, but only after a careful examination of the ancient literature of the East[6].

To adapt the principle to modern examples, readers of murder mysteries bring to their favorite genre the question "whodunit?" and have certain expectations about how the clues will and will not be revealed to them. If those readers approach *Macbeth* or *The Brothers Karamazov* as though they were just high-brow exemplars of that same genre, they will completely miss the ideas that Shakespeare and Dostoevsky were trying to express[7]. The first chapter of *Genesis* is an important theological text but those who read it as a work of history or of science will miss the point as thoroughly as would anyone going in search of the historical Good Samaritan.

All three of those disciplines are important to theology. They are not, however, adequate to every theological task. What is philosophy and what can it add?

There is, to be sure, a very early tradition of seeing Christianity precisely as a (or better, the true) philosophy. St. Justin Martyr, at the beginning of his *Dialog with Trypho*, characterizes philosophy as "the only philosophy which is safe and profitable"[8]. St. John Chrysostom, in his Fourth Homily on First Corinthians, said that "The Cross made philosophers of all men, even of rustics and of the uneducated"[9]. If we are to distinguish *philosophical theology* from other kinds of theology, however, we will need a narrower sense of the term.

Philosophical work is essentially a matter of definition, conceptual distinction, and argument-construction, all of which are distinctly (even if not uniquely) philosophical tasks. Philosophical theology can be distinguished from the tasks of interpreting the narratives, poetry, and parables that Sacred Scripture contains. It must be distinguished from the task of putting the events narrated and the terms used in Sacred Scripture into their historical contexts.

We can distinguish three ways in which philosophical tools can be applied to questions of interest to theology.

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6 Pius XII, *Divino afflante spiritu* (1943), para. 35–36.

7 For an elaboration of that point, see [Thurber 1943: 60–63].

8 Justin Martyr, *Dialog with Trypho*, c. 8, *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris: Migne, 1857), 6: 491–92 (471–800).

9 John Chrysostom, "Homily 4 on First Corinthians", para. 6 (my translation) (Cf. *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris: Migne, 1862), 61: 34 (29–40), or in Schaff P., ed., *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York City, New York: Christian Literature, 1889), 1: 12: 19 (16–22).

The first, and most modest, is piecemeal application. Perhaps no philosophical inquiry can be *completely* dissociated from any other question, but insofar as the wonder that leads to philosophy can begin with very particular questions, we can begin by thinking of *philosophical* theology as an attempt to answer such individual questions, singly, in a way that relies heavily on *philosophical*, as opposed to literary, philological, or historical, concepts and methods.

The approach to theological questions, even the philosophical approach, however, need not be piecemeal. St. John Henry Newman summarized the work of the theologian as including:

> handling, examining, explaining, recording, cataloguing, defending, the truths which faith, not reason, has gained for us, as providing an intellectual expression of supernatural facts, eliciting what is implicit, comparing, measuring, connecting each with each, and forming one and all into a theological system [Newman 1878: 336].

And so we find, in works like the *Ecthesis* that is the third part of St. John of Damascus' *The Fount of Knowledge* and St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiæ*, philosophical theology in a second sense of the term.

In the very second article of that *Summa*, St. Thomas asked whether "sacred doctrine" (theology) is a *scientia*. He answered that it is. What does he mean by this affirmation? He drew his epistemology from Aristotle, of course, who characterized *scientia* (ἐπιστήμη) as a body of knowledge organized in a certain way, namely[10]

> by demonstration… for it is when a man believes in a certain way and the starting-points are known to him that he has ἐπιστήμη, since if the starting-points are not better known to him than the conclusion, he will have his ἐπιστήμη only incidentally.

That is not the only way in which theological material can be organized. Creeds, and lives of the saints, are organized, but on different principles. The kind of work which I have in mind here could surely be characterized, in a meaningful sense, as philosophical, or at least a philosophically informed, (as opposed to Biblical) theology. The *Summae* and the *Fount of Knowledge* are a kind of work very different from Saint Thomas' *Commentary on Romans* or St. Basil's *Nine Homilies on the Hexaëmeron*. John of Damascus began his *Fount of Knowledge* with the *Dialectica*, sixty-eight purely philosophical chapters, and only then proceeded with an explication and defense of properly theological theses.

There are, however, two reasons for concern (and caution) about calling this philosophical theology. First, that project already has another name – systematic theology. Will not *every* field of knowledge (and especially every systematization) use the tools of definition, distinction, etc. in the course of its work? What, on this use of the term, would *not* be philosophical? Second, and more importantly, to the extent that it builds on "the truths which faith, not reason, has gained for us", the project Newman identified must be *contrasted* with St. Thomas' conception of philosophy as knowledge secured on the basis of our natural cognitive capacities alone. Later Thomists have narrowed the scope of the term philosophy somewhat,

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[10] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, vi.3.

to accord with modern usage, by excluding other forms of knowledge (such as the natural sciences) also based exclusively on our natural cognitive powers. On this narrower sense of the term, philosophy begins with common experience, not with the more specialized experience that comes from experiment and scientific observation[11].

Nevertheless, the term "philosophical theology" has several advantages.

In reply to the first concern, there are important parts of theology that it would not be appropriate to call "philosophical" – saliently Biblical theology, but also much of pastoral or practical theology. One could think of the adjective in the phrase "philosophical theology" as working much like the adjective in "mathematical physics".

In reply to the second, one might point again to physics. Since the philosopher of physics takes one step away from common experience when he studies, say, Bell's inequalities, perhaps it is not unreasonable, as long as we are aware of what we are doing, to call the project Newman described as, in a meaningful sense, *philosophical* theology. Despite the soundness of those replies, however, the term philosophical theology is now mostly reserved for a third, more limited, intellectual project.

St. Thomas acknowledged a difference between the *scientia* that is theology and other *scientiæ*: "every science proceeds from self-evident principles. But sacred doctrine proceeds from articles of faith which are not self-evident"[12]. This does not, he argued, preclude recognition of theology as a *scientia*, since its principles still "proceed from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed"[13]. Nevertheless, a *scientia*, in the strict Aristotelian sense of the term, proceeds from premises that are "true, primary, immediate, better known than and prior to the conclusion, which is further related to them as effect to cause"[14]. The premises must be, that is to say, knowable by natural reason. St. Thomas provided an example of this in the first three books of his *Summa contra Gentiles*. This third sense of the term "philosophical theology" corresponds to what St. Thomas had called establishing "preambles of faith".

"Philosophical theology" is a term that can be given a broad or a narrow sense. In the narrower sense, it might be understood as a *purely* intellectual, or academic, discipline, "aimed primarily at *theoretical understanding* of the nature and attributes of God and of God's relationship to the world and things in the world". Philosophical theology in that sense is found, for example in the detailed explorations of very particular ideas that make up the *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, from the introduction to which the description quoted above is drawn [Flint, Rea 2009: 1]. Indeed the term has perhaps such a narrow meaning even for St. Thomas Aquinas, who, in his commentary on Boethius' *De Trinitate*, distinguished "philosophical theology" from Scriptural theology precisely insofar as the former offers an account of God as a being separate from matter and motion, while

11 For details of one way to do this, see [Adler 1965; Adler 1993].

12 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1a, Q. 1, a. 2, obj. 1.

13 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1a, Q. 1, a. 2, corpus.

14 Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, i.2.

the latter also considers "things which are in matter and motion when the manifestation of divine things requires it"[15].

I do not want to assert that such narrowness is necessarily a vice. Indeed a narrow focus is often a virtue – sometimes because it facilitates greater depth of inquiry, sometimes merely because of the accidental features of a particular social or institutional context. Nevertheless, narrowness, even when it is a virtue, by definition leaves some things out. In what follows, I want to draw attention to what such narrower focus, whatever its justification, can easily leave out, namely a connection to living religion. It is the exploration of that connection that leads me to ask how philosophical theology might contribute to the practice of religion and how philosophers might, in turn, benefit from what religion has to offer.

3. How does Religion benefit from Philosophical Theology?

Does religion need philosophical theology? To the extent that religion is based on the existence and nature of God, it of course needs *some* account of God, i.e., some kind of theology. But does it need precisely a *philosophical* theology? Need-claims have to be justified by citing an important good that they are if not uniquely then at least singularly well-suited to provide. So what does philosophical theology do for religion?

a. Benefit to the Virtue of Religion

Let us begin with the contribution that a philosophical approach to theology can make to the virtue of religion. Philosophical tools (rather than, say, philological or literary ones) can play an important rôle in distinguishing the virtue of religion from its contrary vices. St. Thomas identified one of those vices as superstition[16], which he defined as worship in ways that are circumstantially objectionable, e.g., worshipping the wrong object (idolatry) or in the wrong manner (undue or improper worship, *cultus indebitus*), or by vain observances (*cultus superfluus*)[17].

The roots of superstition are partly internal to the Church – the abuse of prayer or sacramentals – and partly external – the use of pagan or other folk practices in a way that associates them with the super- or preternatural. At various points in its history, the Church has had to make precisely such distinctions – sometimes to defend legitimate practice against overly scrupulous, or even heretical, critics; sometimes in the context of the condemnation of objectionable practices.

From its earliest days, the Church has honored the Mother of God, the Apostles and early martyrs, and then other Christians who led lives so saintly as to make them models for emulation and even intercessors to whom prayers might legitimately be offered. In order to clarify the nature of such a practice, the Church needed to distinguish the *veneration* (δουλεία, почитание) appropriate to saints

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15 Thomas Aquinas, *Super De Trinitate*, pars 3 q. 5 a. 4 co. 4.

16 The other was irreligion.

17 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a2ae, Q. 92.

from the *worship* (λατρεία, поклонение) due (and due only) to God[18]. The controversies over the veneration of icons in the eighth century and over Chinese rites (e.g., honoring Confucius) in the seventeenth[19] raised similar questions.

Questions can also arise about holy water and a variety of other Christian devotional practices ranging from holy places to relics, to novenas and First-Friday Communions. Protestants, in particular, accuse Catholic and Orthodox Christians of superstition in these respects, a charge rejected, of course, by those churches. Are such practices superstitious? How can one tell?

We could, of course, just distinguish the use from the abuse of holy water by anecdote and analogy. A story vaguely associated with Danish physicist Niles Bohr has it that someone, on being asked about having put a horseshoe above his door replied first that he was not superstitious, and then added, "But they say that it brings luck whether you believe in it or not"[20]. Anyone whose attitude towards holy water matched that attitude about horseshoes has committed a superstitious abuse.

Joseph Wilhelm treated the question in what might fairly be called a more philosophical, if less amusing, way. Many of the practices in question, "though they seem to attach special importance to number and dates, are approved by the Church because these dates and numbers are convenient for shaping and regulating certain excellent devotions". They become superstitious ("eccentricities", he called them) when Christians begin, for example, to make claims about which devotions are more powerful than others, "expecting from certain pre-arranged circumstances a greater efficacy of the religious performance" [Wilhelm 1912, 14: 340] or "attributing the efficacy of prayers or of sacramental signs to their mere external performance, apart from the interior dispositions that they demand"[21].

However much questions about saints, icons, the Chinese rites, etc., may seem to be theological, their resolution does not depend on revelation alone. It will depend upon making distinctions in a way that will seem very much like other philosophical work.

There is, however, another vice contrary to religion, one that is a kind of theological counterpart of the scientism which holds that only the scientific method yields genuine knowledge. Stephen J. Gould, in a famous article on the relation between science and religion [Gould 1998: 269–283], made one important point, but also made two errors. That important point was that science and theology each has a limited domain of epistemic authority. His first mistake was the demarcation of the boundary between the two. Gould says that science covers facts; theology, values. His second was in believing that their domains do not overlap, as though the doctrine of the Resurrection was not as much a claim about facts as is Plutarch's account of the assassination of Julius Caesar or the doctrine of Transubstantiation as much so as Galileo's claim about the rockiness of the moon. Still, Gould is right that both science and religion have their limits. Of course no Christian thinks that

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18 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a2æ, Q. 84, a. 1.

19 For a history, see [Minamiki 1985].

20 George Gamow attributed the remark to Bohr himself [Gamow 1966: 57–58]; Werner Heisenberg said that Bohr told him the story, but about someone else [Heisenberg 1969: 129–130].

21 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), para. 2111.

religion answers *all* scientific questions. What does it say, for example, about whether neon can combine with other elements? Nevertheless, many Christians, sad to say, are not any better than was Gould at the essentially philosophical task of drawing the line of demarcation between the two different forms of knowledge in the right place, some continuing to insist that revelation answers questions about the formation of geological strata or the origin of major biological taxa. Part of the solution of this problem will have to come from biblical scholars skilled in the task of literary criticism. God wrote the Bible in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek of two millennia ago, not in any modern language. More importantly, He used the literary genres familiar to his immediate audiences. We can learn a lot about the Genesis creation story by comparing (and contrasting) it to the *Enuma Elish*, more perhaps than by comparing it to Steven Weinberg's *The First Three Minutes*. And in that work, philosophical tools will not be of much help. Other parts of the solution, however, will require precisely philosophical tools – distinguishing creation from the various kinds of change that science studies and then absolute from derivative creation.

b. Benefit to the Good of Religion

Can philosophical theology also contribute to the attainment and enjoyment of the good of religion? Religion can, after all, be done by narrative. In the Poetic Edda, the battle between the gods and the giants ends with the destruction of Valhalla. The Bible assures us that, in the battle between God and Satan, God will win. What is the value of the philosopher's syllogism when the poets offer us such vivid stories?

The problem is that those two stories offer not only aesthetically compelling, but different (indeed contradictory, and therefore competing) accounts of the battle between good and evil and of man's place in the universe. Edward Gibbon said about the various religions on offer in the Roman world that they "were all considered by the people, as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful"[22]. The magistrates' idea that religion, true or not, may be useful seems to have contemporary manifestations. Perhaps what underlies Aleksandr Lukashenko's "Orthodox atheism" is his belief that Orthodox Christianity, regardless of whether its dogmas are true, can have a positive "influence on formation of spiritual, cultural and state traditions of the Belarusian people"[23]. Finnis' conception of the good of religion, by contrast, includes attainment of true insight into the nature of the world.

For some people and on some occasions, perhaps stories themselves will be enough. Even at the level of stories, however, once we accept the reasonable idea that the good of religion is dependent on its truth, philosophical questions will arise. Can stories be accepted just because they have "the ring of truth"? And what

[22] Gibbon E. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1788), chap. 2, sec. 1.
[23] Article 16, Constitution of the Republic of Belarus.

exactly does "the ring of truth" mean anyway? That seems not just to be a question for literary critics.

One possible basis for the acceptance of religious stories is the credibility or other authority of the story-teller. We accept the truth of relatively ordinary stories on the basis of relatively ordinary evidence. Many religious stories – St. Thomas the Apostle's mission to India or St. Joseph of Arimathea's settlement in Glastonbury – are ordinary and must face ordinary historical scrutiny. Even if we leave aside the more extraordinary details of those stories (the kind found in Bl. Jacob of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*), however, we cannot avoid the question of such extraordinary stories as the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection and Ascension. These are at the very core of the Christian religious narrative. Given the fallibility even of eyewitnesses, we need an account of when can we accept reports of such miracles. If David Hume is too sceptical, we know that some miracle-reporters are too credulous. We need an answer to questions that are fundamentally epistemological (and therefore philosophical). If such an account is not philosophical *theology* in the strictest etymological sense of the term, at least it is so in the sense of being a philosophical foundation on which certain theological projects depend.

Whatever the general value of religious stories, for some people, and on some occasions, the propositional content of the stories will also be necessary. That is why the Church does not just retell Bible stories (or visually depict them in icons or on stained glass); it also (and it must) promulgate creeds. The first step away from the stories will be extraction of the propositional content of the stories in which religion is presented to us. That will require the skills not so much of *philosophical* theologians, but of some of the other kinds mentioned above. Once we have the propositions, a new series of tasks, philosophical tasks, will emerge.

Sometimes questions will arise piecemeal.

The question might begin with a particular passage or concept found in Scripture. Does God have a name or is He just God? Moses, in the theophany at the burning bush, knew that the Israelites would ask him exactly that question and he wanted to know how to answer. What did God mean by answering as He did – אהיה אשר אהיה; ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν, "I am who am" – rather than, say, "Jupiter" (< Lat. *Jovis-pater*, the god-father or perhaps sky-father)? "Jupiter" does not seem particularly theologically problematic in a way that, say, "Marduk" (probably < Akkadian *amar-utu*, the son of Utu (the sun-god)) would have been. St. Thomas Aquinas offers a distinctly *philosophical* reason why the name God gives in *Exodus* is "the most proper name of God" – "it signifies not some form [i.e., a particular kind of being], but being [*esse*] itself". "The being [existence] of God is his very essence"[24].

Sometimes, the question is rather about how to understand a particular theological doctrine in light of its apparent tension with ordinary experience, with secular knowledge, or even with other theological doctrines. What exactly do Catholic and Orthodox Christians mean when they say that God is really present in the Eucharist, in what started out as bread and wine? The answer to that question requires a certain kind of account of the metaphysics of substance and accident. Does the doctrine of

[24] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1a, Q. 13, a. 11.

divine omniscience not imply a foreknowledge of human actions and thereby conflict with the doctrine of freedom of the will? An adequate answer requires an account of the relationship between God and time, and an analysis of freedom.

In addition to answering questions, philosophical tools can make a second kind of contribution, also piecemeal, in religion. Some important Christian doctrines are at a remove from our ordinary experience sufficient to require some care in the selection of appropriate terminology. The doctrines of the Trinity and of the Incarnation, for example, required care in the deployment of concepts and terms – ὑπόστασις, οὐσία, φύσις; *persona*, *substantia*, *natura*. Some of these had well-established uses; others of had to be adapted for the articulation of theological doctrines. Of course such work needs to be done afresh every time Christianity is extended to a new culture with a new language.

Any systematization will require the deployment of philosophical tools. A *summa*, in contrast to a creed, goes beyond a mere list, showing how the various points of doctrine are logically connected to one another. It shows that particular kind of coherence that makes theology a *science*.

Religion can also benefit from a more narrowly philosophical theology, one differing from the second sense mentioned above by having premises limited to those knowable without the aid of revelation and differing from the first by its greater scope.

Just as the divine revelation of truths about God that are knowable by natural reason benefits those who lack the education and leisure necessary to follow the philosophical proofs of which they are the conclusion, so the demonstration of such revealed truths as are susceptible to philosophical proof (as preambles of faith) is beneficial to those who have a sceptical turn of mind as well as to those who have been seduced by specious arguments against them. Such preambles include existence of God and the creation of the world, but there will also be preambles of faith in philosophical anthropology as well – arguments for the existence (and creation) of human souls, their immortality, free will, etc. Salvation is for the village atheist no less than for the pious peasant. The establishment these preambles of faith, is a *purely* philosophical task.

In addition to the proof of preambles of faith, philosophical theology can also be of benefit to religion by defending the reasonability of doctrines for which proof is not available. An example would be the resurrection of the body and the rejection of the idea of reincarnation.

Finally, the tools of philosophy, a *philosophical* theology, will play an important rôle in the integration of the insights of revelation and the conclusions of the natural sciences into a coherent world-picture. One example is the demonstration of the compatibility of the doctrine of creation with the evolutionary world-picture offered by cosmology and, at a different level, biology.

None of this is to say that everyone who engages in religious ritual or worship needs also to study philosophical theology. Religious ritual and worship need not be, for Catholic and Orthodox Christians it *is* not, a purely personal intellectual project. The results of philosophical theology can reach individual Christians institutionally – through the authoritative teachings of the Church, through the liturgy, and through the promotion and suppression of particular practices, devotions, and hymns.

4. How does Philosophical Theology benefit from Religion?

Here the thesis is that theology, even philosophical theology, will be done *better* by those who also cultivate the virtue of religion – not, it is important to note, invariably better by those who cultivate the virtue than by those who do not, but at least better by those who cultivate it than it would be by those same individuals if they neglected it. There are ways in which religion can contribute to philosophical theology.

First, the virtue of religion can protect philosophical theology from error. This returns us to one of the supplementary *debita* mentioned above. It would be distinctly odd to say that what is due to God is only worship, but not faith. *Maybe* a certain kind of deism, one with a doctrine of creation but no doctrine of special providence (and *a fortiori*, no revelation) would make worship appropriate as an act of gratitude for creation without imposing any epistemic duty such as faith. But Christians surely do owe to the Revealer God belief – both with respect to matters the truth of which we cannot see ourselves and with respect to matters which we think that we can figure out for ourselves. Such faith is analogous to the ordinary faith we have in our fellow human beings, a virtue which plays a necessary rôle even in the natural sciences[25]. Faith can provide guard-rails for a purely philosophical theology.

The contrast of Aristotle's theology (and an ethical thesis which he builds on its basis) with the Christian theology as articulated by St. Thomas Aquinas provides an example. Both seem to agree that the most perfect human activity would be some kind of imitation of divine activity. On Aristotle's account, that would mean contemplative activity and his theology leads him to dismiss some alternatives:

> Acts of justice? Will not the gods seem absurd if they make contracts…? Acts of a brave man, then, confronting dangers and running risks because it is noble to do so? Or liberal acts? To whom will they give?… Now if you take away from a living being action, and still more production, what is left but contemplation? Of human activities, therefore, contemplation, that which is most akin to the activity of God must be most of the nature of happiness[26].

However much Aristotle's *Metaphysics* may have served as a foundation for the very fruitful Scholastic theology of the high Middle Ages, however, there are important facts about God that are beyond its reach. Those facts – supplied by history and revelation – will require some important modifications to Aristotle's conclusion.

One cannot ignore God's productive activity. God created the world. So human creative activity – the paintings of Bl. John of Fiesole (Fra Angelico) and the inventions of Thomas Edison – emulate, to the extent humanly possible, one form of divine activity. What about moral action? The central Biblical term covenant (διαθήκη) is not so very different from Aristotle's contract (συνάλλαγμα). We surely do think of justice as an attribute of God. Similarly with generosity. And bravery? Even if, as Aristotle wrote, it is, to a certain extent, necessary because of our bad

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25 I argued this in more detail in my "Faith as a Virtue in Theology, Philosophy, & Natural Science", *Faith & Philosophy* (1998), 15: 4: 462–477.

26 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, i.8.

appetites, it is not entirely so. The desire not to suffer pain, even in a good cause, is not itself the result of a bad appetite. Jesus' willingness to suffer death on the Cross shows a courage that we must do our best to emulate. So, however much can be said in favor of contemplation, in contrast to action, as imitative of divine activity and an anticipation of the Beatific Vision, revelation provides an important corrective to Aristotle on this point.

In addition, if the goal of theology is an account of God and there are things about God that we cannot know by natural reason alone, then a purely philosophical theology can only start us towards a goal that we cannot achieve by philosophical methods alone. Religion (faith) thus helps us come closer to attaining the end at which philosophical theology is aimed.

Recognition of religion (in Finnis' sense) as a human good may start as a non-theological inquiry, but if pursued with sufficient determination, it will not end there. The arguments central to Christian apologetics show why this is so. Such recognition will lead to a theology, first perhaps to a philosophical one, but then to a more comprehensive knowledge of God. It would be distinctly odd, however, to think that theology should end with a mere intellectual knowledge about God. Surely the culmination of such an activity should be not just knowing God but, having gotten to know Him, rendering Him what is his due – religion in the sense of worship. Religion, here does not so much help in *doing* philosophical theology, but in bringing us to the goal which is its natural culmination.

5. Conclusion

It would be easy to think, in our ever more secular world, that the proper practitioner of religion is the believer and its proper locus the church while the proper practitioner of philosophical theology is the scholar and its proper locus the library and classroom. Perhaps there is a sense in which that is true. Liturgy is one thing; lecture, seminar, and research is another. We must, however, be careful not to overemphasize that difference. There are important ways in which each benefits the other.

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