

CHRISTIANITY AND PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is about putting good intellectual habits into practice in order to gain wisdom and to reduce the risk of accepting what is untrue. It is not about knowing things or learning facts so much as about knowing how to learn. If you want truth more than you want to be right you will engage in philosophy.

CHRISTIAN OPPONENT OF PHILOSOPHY: “I feel you are putting your Christian faith at risk by engaging in philosophy”.

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER: It is because we are confident in our faith that we are able to think about the Christian faith in a philosophical way. Philosophy, which is the love of wisdom, involves a search for wisdom. In this search, we must use logic and communicate that logic effectively.

God has revealed his word to us in the Bible. But he has given us minds and the powers to reason in order that they may lead us to him. We must not fear truth. We must not fear examining the Bible in an intelligent way because without intelligence we cannot interpret or understand the Bible. We cannot understand the word of God the way he asks unless we use our heads.

The philosopher has to see that reason and logic can't tell us everything. They only tell us so much. As St Augustine suggested, our reason needs to be informed by faith. Everybody can have faith but not everybody can find God through thinking or feeling. Philosophy helps many of us.

The philosopher who is careful and rational will see that we need revelation from God. Reason and sense experience and science can only tell us so much. The philosopher can look at the grounds for Christian belief and see that it indeed is a faith where reason is informed by faith.

Our Blessed Saviour asked us to love God with all our minds. Its right in the middle of the commandment he described as the greatest commandment. He did not ask for mindless obedience.

ATHEIST: The Bible is not a philosophy book. Not a single line justifies Christians looking into philosophy. The Bible does condemn philosophy. Christians respond that it means fake philosophy but the fact remains that though the Bible sometimes uses reason and speaks of wisdom, it does not authorise thinking for yourself outside of the boundaries set by its doctrines.

Some brands of paganism and Hinduism do explicitly encourage philosophical inquiry. If Christians really value philosophy, then why are they not in a religion as clear as those faiths?

It looks like Christians have made up their minds without philosophy and are only using it to make themselves look rational and sensible. It is window-dressing.

CHRISTIAN OPPONENT OF PHILOSOPHY: “Philosophy will tempt you to lean on your own understanding.”

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER: The power to engage in philosophy is a gift from God. God has given it to us because if we are open to his grace, it will lead us to understand things the way God does. Philosophy need not and should not lead to men making a God out of their own ideas.

If we believe in the truth for the wrong reasons, then we are not accepting it for God's reasons for God never makes mistakes. The more we try to think correctly the more we see things the way God sees them. This helps us to know him better.

It is important that philosophers be open to the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lights up the minds of all who are open to the truth and who want to be spiritually and emotionally and morally enriched by it and be delivered from sin. If that is the philosopher's attitude, he or she will not be at risk of being turned away from God.

People have serious questions about the faith and if we cannot answer them then they may walk away.

We must remember that Jesus himself went to school and that all of us do philosophy to some extent without realising it. Jesus did it too. He had to use his mind considerably in order to interpret the Old Testament Scriptures and to put his parables together.

ATHEIST: The Christian faith in reality teaches that though God has given us the power to reason and learn through philosophy, whether we can use this power or not is another question. The faith insists that our minds are deformed by original sin. If original sin is true, then philosophy is leaning on your own understanding and a temptation to keep doing it. If original sin is true and our philosophy is that dodgy, imagine how unreliable our religious, theological and faith deliberations must be!

CHRISTIAN OPPONENT OF PHILOSOPHY: The study of philosophy will lead you to vain human philosophy rather than Jesus.

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER: There is good philosophy and bad. The scriptures condemn godless philosophy or bad philosophy. We don't want to be misled by vain human tradition instead of Jesus - which is another way of saying we want to do philosophy properly.

The apostle Paul condemned only vain human philosophy. If we look at the New Testament, we see that the apostle John called Jesus the Logos. The Logos was a concept derived from Greek and Jewish philosophy and was explored by Philo of Alexandria. Paul said we must be able to give reasons for believing. He called us to philosophy.

If believers ignore reason and evidence in matters of faith and morality, the credibility of Christianity will not be put across to people. People will see no reason to believe in Jesus. They will say, "Why can't I see Simon Magus as my saviour and Lord if I want to?" Truth has to correspond to reality. You cannot make something true by thinking it is true or believing that it is true or feeling that it is true. Jesus said he was the truth. He said God's word is truth. He said he is the light of the world. The light shows what is real. Thus we see that ignoring philosophy will turn people away from true Christianity and they will embrace a counterfeit that is actually a form of vain human philosophy.

If we Christians reject all philosophy we will only turn the world against Jesus. The world will see Christianity as anti-intellectual and anti-truth and as a crutch based on wishful thinking.

ATHEIST: Christians cannot endorse philosophy just because ignoring or rejecting it is going to put people off Christianity. That approach would be manipulative. It would be using philosophy as a means of seducing people many of whom are vulnerable or unsuspecting.

And the notion that the Bible rejects philosophy only when it is a distortion of the truth is a mere notion. The Bible does not justify it.

CHRISTIAN OPPONENT OF PHILOSOPHY: Jesus said we must receive the faith like little children. Philosophers are not doing that.

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER: Jesus did not mean that we should be uneducated and gullible in matters of faith. He meant we should have the childlike humility to search for the truth and to accept the truth. This rule applies to the greatest philosophers of all as much as it does to little children.

In fact, if we ignore evidence and reason we are guilty of arrogantly turning our backs on two gifts of God that he provides so that we might find the truth with his grace. We are not receiving faith like little children.

Child-like faith is a virtue for Christians. No matter how great we become intellectually, we are still children of God and need to remember that we depend on him and that our intellect is his gift. We didn't create ourselves and we didn't create our intellect. It is in this sense of dependence on God that we must have childlike faith. Childlike faith is not to be equated with credulity.

In conclusion, philosophy improves our insight into the gospel message. It does not detract from the gospel.

ATHEIST: While it is true that Jesus did not want us to be complete kids, he did want us to be kids. And the Churches are no better than him and sometimes worse. You would need to be gullible to hold that the Catholic doctrine that bread and wine turn into Jesus literally is true. Literally does not mean literally to Catholics for it is plain that the bread and wine seem no different before or after transformation. Also, the Church holds that Jesus is fully God and fully man - two separate natures. But if he is two natures he is not one person so they are worshipping a man and pretending he is God. But they reply it is a mystery how he can be one person. This is not philosophy but speculation and fantasy.