

Philosophy as Basis of Christian-Muslim Dialogue¹

by

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Our daily papers remind us constantly that we live in a world of tension and violent conflict. In the past year Nigerians suffered attack on life and property as a result of cartoons published in Denmark, and from seemingly innocuous academic remarks of the pope at Regensburg, both quite unrelated to the Nigerian situation. How can tensions be reduced? Mutual tolerance and respect cannot be taken for granted. Yet the process of dialogue, which promises one of the best alternatives for such violent confrontation, faces many obstacles at present. One hears Christians lament that no amount of dialogue could roll back implementation of Shari'a, while Muslims suspect dialogue as a more sophisticated venue in apologetics and conversion.

Aims and preconditions for dialogue

But is there any good substitute for dialogue in resolving suspicion and tension? Violence only begets further violence. In this context it is appropriate to re-examine the process of dialogue, and ask whether dialogue can be reshaped so that it can more effectively accomplish its *aims*: peace and mutual respect, to replace incitement to riot and destructive violence.

Beginning with the *preconditions* for successful dialogue, we note that in his work on dialogue Joseph Kenny emphasized the need for a context of religious freedom, not just tolerance.² A sense of equality or reciprocity is also crucial, eliminating any form of intimidation or language of superiority. Partners must not use dialogue as a venue for polemical discussion, to establish a position. Not that dialogue means giving up one's convictions. Rather, dialogue succeeds when respective partners are confident of their own religious commitments, and articulate them clearly as a basis in working towards mutual respect.

Types of dialogue

So what kind of dialogue are we considering? If dialogue is designated as 'Muslim-Christian' the religious aspect will certainly be significant. For Christians, dialogue has been promoted by the Catholic church since the 1960s with Vatican II, and by the World Council of Churches. In Nigeria the role of the Catholic church had been the more prominent, though in the Northern and Middle Belt the Lutheran initiative has been significant.

Catholic documents distinguish various categories of dialogue: 1) dialogue of *life*, to help build trust and respect; 2) of *action*, or cooperation on humanitarian goals; 3) of *theological exchange* to deepen understanding of each other's heritage in support of common action; and 4) of *spiritual experience*, sharing religious experience.³ It is noteworthy that only the third of these four: dialogue of theological exchange, represents dialogue in the original sense of the word, as an exchange by way of discussion. Any of these forms of dialogue are important; the first and second can be crucial in setting the stage for successful talks.⁴ But in the present essay I will focus on the third type, *theological exchange* in an encounter where significant issues are *discussed*. My proposal in this essay, however, is to reconsider the *religious or theological*

basis for dialogue, and examine *dialogue on a basis of philosophy*, as a forum which is inherently less threatening to respective dialogue partners.

Difficulties of dialogue on a basis of religion and theology

If dialogue as such is to be successful in removing tension and suspicion, it must meet the given preconditions. But it should be clear that dialogue between partners who present themselves primarily as church leaders or teachers of mosques, or other religious bodies, will find it difficult to meet the preconditions as given above. Inasmuch as dialogue partners represent religious bodies, the suspicion of a hidden apologetical agenda is difficult to dispel. And it is easy to slip from presentation of views, into a mode of persuasion, and perhaps even preaching. Preconditions of parity or equality, too, are difficult to meet when one religious group may be more committed to dialogue, or more dominant socially.

Theological discussion is demanding, complex and sensitive. Kenny speaks of the theological as a rare and difficult type of dialogue, to be undertaken only by specialists thoroughly familiar with both their own religious tradition and that of their dialogue partner.⁵ Unlike religious studies, theology is typically explored from within a particular religious orientation. And inter-religious theological discussion will find it difficult to avoid controversial issues, like the Christian teaching on the Trinity, or Islamic understanding of revelation. Instead of mutual understanding such dialogue may create more friction and misunderstanding.

Objections which can be raised for dialogue on a theological basis also hold for religion itself as basis for dialogue, especially when one religious community provides the venue for dialogue. While theology as such is a more academic enterprise, religion is based on commitment, and religious knowledge is a matter of conviction, based mainly on revelation (Scriptures) and confession (creeds). As such it is based on faith or trust, and typically characterized by an emotional bond.

Philosophical aspects of theological discussion

In this context, and with the understanding that I am addressing primarily an academic audience trained in religion and theology, I would propose that the basis of discussion be shifted from religion (or theology), to that of philosophy as more viable and appropriate in the academic or university setting. I am not oblivious to possible objections which can be raised, or factors that make such dialogue difficult. But among the reasons for making such a proposal, the most important is that dialogue is inherently closer to a philosophical than a theological project. For dialogue is characterized by discussion and reasoning, as a method through which two sides try to achieve agreement on fundamental positions; and this already brings us close to philosophy. Language typically applied to theological dialogue also supports this move, for proponents discuss their aims in terms of a *search for truth*, a goal which is at least as central to philosophy as to theology and religion.⁶ Kenny speaks of theological dialogue as focused on "the rational foundations of religion."⁷ As it tries to inculcate respect, and remove distortion of the other's faith, dialogue involves an exploration of *common values* typically hidden beneath unfamiliar rites or vocabulary.⁸ Again, these terms are at least as appropriate in philosophy as in theology.

What is philosophy?

Before we go any further to discuss the advantages of philosophical dialogue, it is important to delineate carefully what is meant by such dialogue based on philosophy. Just what is philosophy? It is not easy to point to a widely accepted definition, for like the term 'theology' the particular meaning given depends largely on the school of thought represented by its proponents (whether Analytical, Idealist or Existentialist). Etymology: *philos-sophia*, as 'love of wisdom' only begins to specify the meaning. For dialogue characterized by philosophy, however, we are primarily concerned about a *philosophical method*, and accordingly can be more specific in attempting to distinguish a *philosophical* method from one characterized by *religion or theology*. In this context a major difference becomes clear: while theology and religion are characterized by revelation, creeds, conviction, faith and trust, the comparable terminology in philosophy is characteristically that of 'rationality' as discussion, analysis, argumentation, debate, judgement, giving account, and verifying one's position. While theology is almost inevitably specific to the religious tradition in which one stands (Christian, or Islamic), philosophy takes a step back from both religion and theology.

Philosophical and scientific knowing

The exact character of philosophical knowing and a philosophical method is more easily elaborated in comparison with science on the one hand, and with religion on the other. Philosophy typically addresses itself to questions about our universe, human self-identity, or our relationship to what is divine, but it is most competent in dealing with matters related to created reality as we experience and observe it in space and time, the structure of our cosmos and everything within it, plants and animals, but also cultural, legal, aesthetic or economic aspects of human existence and experience. But while scientific observation and knowledge examines facts and particulars, providing specialized knowledge for the specific concerns of scientific disciplines, philosophy likes to deal with 'meaning' in a more general way, to explore the 'why', to evaluate, and give judgement on truth or falsehood.

Philosophical and religious knowing

Religious *knowing* is comprehensive and all-embracing, and in that regard it is like the comprehensive scope of philosophy, as it seeks to integrate knowledge from other sources. Religion is defined variously, but one can certainly accept a focus on acts of worship, sacrifices or other rites as expression of a relationship with a transcendent, divine being or source of knowledge, as common denominator. Trust or faith is often said to be the crucial aspect of this relationship. Philosophical knowing, on the other hand, necessarily expresses its views through use of reason, in language; philosophy is characterized by discussion and *rational reflection* on 'totality' issues like the meaning of life, justice, truth, or love. While religious claims (like "God is love"), can be made simply on the basis of accepted authority, philosophy cannot rest content with simple claims on issues of truth or justice, but is called to give an account of that claim, supporting its positions with coherent, well-reasoned argument.

Philosophical dialogue does not abandon a religious stance

Before exploring further implications for dialogue, it is important to consider the question whether one should be expected to leave religious convictions behind in doing philosophical work? In other words, are philosophical discussions as such capable of coming to conclusions that are objective, universally valid, or 'neutral'? This approach has a long history, most closely

connected with Enlightenment thinkers like Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), for whom reason and science represented an unbiased approach, giving results on which all could agree, regardless of prior commitments. I need to affirm in this context that this is not the school of thought to which I adhere; nor is my proposal of dialogue on a philosophical basis motivated by such an approach. For it presupposes that it is possible to come to full and perfect agreement on the basis of rational discussion as such, if only we leave aside religious commitments. This positivist and rationalist approach places a value on rationality that is very different from what I am proposing. In the Netherlands the 20th century philosopher H. Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) was particularly instrumental in refuting the 'autonomy of reason' connected with this view, but at present his position is more commonly accepted, and is particularly promoted by feminist critique of knowledge, which, it affirms, is always based on some particular interest (e.g. that of the economically dominant group).

Dooyeweerd argued that the deepest concerns that impel our action, our deepest motivations, are always of a *spiritual* character, and lead us in either of two directions: closer to God, in obedience and submission, or further away from Him, in disobedience and rebellion. In this connection Dooyeweerd speaks of the biblical understanding of the heart out of which flow the issues of life.⁹ Work in philosophizing, accordingly, cannot be divorced from our underlying religious convictions, what might be called the 'heart-commitment'.

Thus, it should be clear that in proposing philosophy as basis for dialogue, I am not suggesting that we abandon respective beliefs, or specific theological viewpoints as such, but rather, that these matters be *addressed in a philosophical manner*. This means that beliefs function not as convictions on which one seeks to persuade the other, but as matters to be respected and examined for consequences affecting peaceful and harmonious coexistence. It is true that the history of philosophy, even long before Kant, reveals frequent conflict between religion and philosophy. However, on the understanding of philosophy which I support, religious positions are not abrogated in philosophy; instead, religious convictions are to be retained, and operative when one argues philosophically. Of course, in philosophy such convictions must be verbalized, not just 'lived' (as is proper for religion), and are also subject to philosophical examination as a rational enterprise.

Philosophy and theology in historical perspective

In our modern world 'theology' and 'philosophy' are typically far distant from each other, yet in both the ancient world and for much of the early medieval period, philosophy and theology were not well distinguished. Among the ancient Greeks, philosophy represented all aspects of knowledge, and thus embraced theology itself, most clearly in the work of Aristotle (d. 322 BC). Indeed, the terms 'theology' and 'philosophy' were used interchangeably by Christian Fathers, especially the fourth-century Cappadocian Gregory of Nyssa. The two disciplines parted way in Europe during the 13th century, when theology emerged as 'queen of the sciences' at the University of Paris; while philosophy embraced all the sciences, it came to be regarded more specifically in a *preparatory* role, subordinate to theology. The distinction between theology and philosophy was not so much one of subject matter of the respective disciplines, but rather in the mode of treatment, for theology concerned itself with truth as *revealed*, while philosophy focused on truth known from grounds of reason *common* to Christians and non-Christians alike.

Since the Middle Ages philosophy has distanced itself from such a preparatory role, becoming more specific in its pursuit of issues, with a special focus on the question of knowing

(epistemology). Similarly, many topics like the study of the human soul, traditionally integral to philosophy, are now studied in their own right, as independent disciplines (like psychology).¹⁰ Yet philosophy has maintained a more comprehensive role as it articulates, integrates and unifies *knowledge based on all areas of study*, all the arts and sciences. If one considers theology in its traditional role as a scholarly study within a university or academic context, however, it is clear that it has retained its focus on human *knowledge* of God (particularly as based on authoritative Scriptures), and on issues of *faith* as a human response (to the Scriptures).

Philosophy of religion

One important academic area where the interests of theology and philosophy still overlap is that of *natural theology*, although in the contemporary university we are more apt to speak of '*philosophy of religion*', as a discipline which has taken on many issues of natural theology, like the traditional arguments for the existence of God.¹¹ Here issues debated by theologians (e.g. 'deity', the cosmos as whole, the self) are not unfamiliar to philosophers. But even more relevant is the issue of a theistic approach as it characterizes monotheism and accepts a personal God. Islam and Christianity are both theistic (i.e. affirming the unity of a personal God working in and through the world). Both appeal to divinely revealed Scriptures. Both have strong convictions on moral behaviour rooted in these Scriptures. And both share deep concerns about inroads of modernism or secularism affecting the religious community in our time. Dialogue on a philosophical basis is the appropriate forum for addressing such issues of mutual concern, seeking answers to inform cooperative action. Indeed, it is my understanding that a *philosophical* rather than a theological or religious approach is more appropriate to inter-religious dialogue on such matters. Inasmuch as we are able to *dialogue* at all, we are not trying to preach or proclaim our faith; nor is it in any way a matter of (theological/religious) indoctrination.

Advantages of philosophical dialogue

Thus the present paper argues specifically that the necessary preconditions for dialogue are more easily met with a philosophical approach. Successful dialogue requires that respective parties approach the process on the basis of freedom of religion, or *reciprocity*. From the above description of the two fields of knowledge, philosophy and religion, it is clear that this condition can be ensured when dialogue is characterized as *philosophical* rather than theological or religious. The suspicion of dialogue as a cover for proselytism can also be removed in the academic context of a philosophical approach; partners in dialogue would not be primarily pastors or clerics, and thus perceived as agents of conversion. From the Christian side, it is to be hoped that Christians can receive a better understanding of the role of Shari'a among Muslims, and that through mutual dialogue it would be possible to explore the situation sufficiently to arrive at a solution which protects basic human rights on both sides.

If dialogue is to be meaningful we need to ensure that we speak a common language, and share a common underlying worldview. Effective dialogue needs to include discussion of (aspects of) a worldview shared by the two respective communities. These conditions too are not as difficult when dialogue proceeds on the basis of philosophical discussion, for meaning in language is determined substantively by worldviews, and worldviews can be articulated philosophically. Once verbalized in this way, one soon discovers that for two religious groups like Christianity and Islam, there are significant areas of overlap based on a theistic faith

commitment, and especially on common acceptance of the basic distinction of Creator and creation/creature.

Are there other positive aspects for a philosophical approach, and advantages in pursuing such a course? In an academic setting (as at the University of Jos), philosophical discussion is eminently appropriate, and especially in a department of religious studies where Muslims and Christians share facilities, students, seminars. Dialogue from within a *religious* context almost invariably finds one of the parties taking the initiative, representing primarily their own group. Within the university, as colleagues, we initiate discussion on an equal footing. Elements which may be resented as a type of 'paternalism' are absent, or certainly less prominent.¹² With dialogue as philosophic exchange one's representation of a specific religious tradition can be put in the background, if not completely removed. Philosophical debate allows us to take a step back from the heat of the moment, as we reflect, and take the long-range view of the situation. This presents a necessary and salutary approach in a heated, conflictual situation.

The viability of dialogue on a philosophical basis

Dialogue on a philosophical basis is as difficult and demanding as any other kind of dialogue. In Nigeria, particularly in the Middle Belt, the plea for dialogue at a scholarly philosophical (or even theological) level may sound far-fetched, since philosophy does not have a high profile at present. On this issue, however, we need to be aware that philosophy has two faces: a more *technical and professional* one, which is more likely to be (or be thought) elitist, alongside a more general approach, which emphasizes the *search for wisdom*, and is situated on the border of philosophy, religion and culture, and even involves socio-political concerns.¹³ After all, when not connected with an ivory tower image, the philosopher has traditionally been found at the courts of the rulers, giving advice, and promoting discussion as a reasonable alternative to violent attack in resolution of conflict.

A very important aspect of philosophy, as the search for wisdom, is that it encourages us to take a step back, to allow the volatile situation to cool off, and reflect more thoroughly on the situation from a wider approach and perspective. This approach, at the same time, allows us to reflect on what we really value, for ourselves, but also for one another. Wisdom demands a willingness to take the long-range view, not insisting on immediate benefit, whether in time or place. It also requires concern for the well-being of the entire community, not just one's own personal needs or wants.

Philosophy and African Traditional Religion (ATR)

Some scholars have suggested that philosophy has not received prominence because attention has been diverted to African traditional thought as an explanation for 'who we are', or 'how we live'. Indeed, when philosophy of religion receives attention at present, in the African context, it is more likely to proceed with a focus on the role of ATR.¹⁴ Philosophical discussion in the post-colonial period was long preoccupied with the ethno-philosophical issue of defining 'philosophy in Africa'.¹⁵ More positively, Dasaolu has presented the case for considering African philosophy beyond the academic context, to include myth, folktale and worldviews, as these reflect basic beliefs and values of the community, and provide 'raw materials' for African philosophizing.¹⁶ He argues that African oral traditions of thought present perfectly acceptable material for philosophical explanation.¹⁷ Traditional communities had their 'wise' men, those to whom others looked for solutions, for guidance, and for efforts toward reconciliation, especially in times of crisis. We note in this connection the work of Kenyan H. Odera Orika

(d. 1995) who developed 'sage' philosophy as an example of indigenous (oral) philosophizing by native 'wise men (or women)' in their communities.¹⁸

Philosophy, peace and tolerance in Nigeria

I am not alone in advocating the role of philosophy for the Nigerian context. Among reputable Nigerian scholars in philosophy who have examined philosophy for its contribution to tolerance and peaceful coexistence I am thinking of the late C.S. Momoh and Jim Unah of the University of Lagos, and others involved with the National Association for Religious Tolerance (NARETO).¹⁹ Another major initiative in dialogue with both a philosophical and theological character, comes from the work of fr. Joseph Kenny of the Dominican Institute in Ibadan, who has taken a special interest in the issue of religious freedom and dialogue, and posted a series of publications on the topic, *Views of Christian-Muslim Relations*.²⁰

Kenny's work is particularly important for his clear recognition of the medieval period as a time when Christianity and Islam shared a world of intellectual discussion, since major Greek philosophers, Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, had been translated into Arabic, and these translations in turn stimulated discussion of ancient philosophers among Christians in the Latin West, especially Aquinas.²¹ The Islamic scholar, Mehdi Aminrazavi, also claims that this offers "a model of a successful dialogue ... based on the medieval philosophical dialogue between Muslim and Christian philosophers."²² They used Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle to support rational explanation of the faith; thus Islamic philosophers like Ibn Sina (Avicenna) shared a common language and intellectual universe with Christians like Aquinas.

Cooperation on the challenges of modernism

Although Aminrazavi calls into question the "feasibility of a Christian-Muslim dialogue" in our time, I believe that the medieval example can support a more encouraging conclusion, for as theists, both religious groups once again share fundamental concerns in facing the challenges of modernity and secularism. Thus I would like to conclude by suggesting that in our own time there is a new urgency for developing a community of thought around the challenges of technocracy, modernization or secularization. I believe that Islam and Christianity can cooperate on a constructive response, somewhat like the collaborative efforts of medieval discourse on faith and reason against the background of Greek philosophy.

Times of tension and civil war typically foster retreat into separate ghettos, making it very difficult to rebuild community and undo the damage. In this context too I would appeal to the scholarly community to explore the philosophical factor as a new avenue by which to rebuild bridges and foster communication.

As Christians we can appreciate the Muslim critique of the classic liberal position, exalting human freedom, dignity and rights; we can also appreciate the Muslim counter-proposal of a theocentric vision that acknowledges the sovereignty of God over human lives and focuses on needs of the community.²³ But one does not need to be Muslim to agree that modern public values are profoundly anthropocentric and individualistic.²⁴ While Muslims do not reject technological advance in communication, transportation or consumer goods as such, their critique has focused on its philosophical presuppositions, its view of the person and society. Accordingly in his work on a 'culture of dialogue' fr. Michel concludes:

One of the most important arenas for Christian-Muslim dialogue at the present time is a critical evaluation of modernity to distinguish the obvious benefits that modernization brings to humanity from the anti-religious and ultimately destructive attitudes that often accompany it.²⁵

These concerns are also reflected in the paper of Aminrazavi, who recognizes the challenge facing Islam as it addresses modern (Western) culture. It appears that Aminrazavi is unaware of the considerable literature from a Christian perspective addressing these issues.²⁶ Thus I would propose that such literature be used as a suitable entrée for discussing modern problems that affect both religious groups in similar ways. One can hope that a shared basis in *theism* would provide the impetus for exploring the relevant issues. And let us not wait with implementing a forum for such shared discussion until another crisis of the scale of 2001 erupts and forces us to scramble for damage control.

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¹ This paper was first presented at the Jos-Bukuru Theological Society on October 9, 2006.

² According to Kenny, "Peace among People of Different Religions" (third section): 'Toleration is something a more powerful party offers to a weaker party, and toleration is the non-prosecution of an evil or a wrong. Religious freedom, on the other hand, is based on social equality of all the parties concerned; it says nothing about the correctness of religious belief, but merely assures the civil right of people to choose the religion they wish to follow.'

³ Ignatius A. Kaigama, *Dialogue of Life*, 8. See also the categories used by fr. Th. Michel, *Creating a Culture of Dialogue*, part 2: "the dialogue of life, cooperation in social concerns, theological exchange and the sharing of religious experience."

⁴ The fourth is obviously possible only when a high level of mutual trust has already been established.

⁵ See Kenny's discussion of the third type in the article "Dialogue".

⁶ The search for truth is the central characteristic of dialogue as such, as in V.C. Chukwulozie's discussion, "The Philosophy of Dialogue", where he designates the second type as the search for truth on questions of mutual interest, to attain fuller knowledge of reality (37).

⁷ See Kenny's designation in the article "Dialogue."

⁸ In the same article Kenny speaks of the need for understanding of one another's heritage, studying the respective theological backgrounds, to discover aspects that could support common action.

⁹ Note use of the term 'heart' in Ps 51.10; 66.18; or 86.11; see also L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy. An introduction to Herman Dooyeweerd's Thought*, ch. 2, "Out of the heart", 44-51.

¹⁰ Of course theology may also be understood broadly to include analysis of any matters related to religion or spirituality; scholars speak of a 'theology of creation', meaning study of 'ecology', addressed from a Christian perspective.

¹¹ It is important to note that even when subject matter overlaps, the two subjects are not be confused; philosophy of religion subjects religion to scrutiny from a philosophical perspective, while natural theology examines the subject matter of theology on the basis of commonly accessible knowledge, i.e. without basis in a special revelation.

¹² This is the term used pointedly by Wambutda who avoided the term 'dialogue' based on the history of its use, reflecting a patronizing attitude to other parties in discussion. Catholic documents do associate the terms 'dialogue' and 'mission' rather closely; D.N. Wambutda, "Introductory Remarks for the First International Conference on Christian-Muslim Relation."

¹³ Kwesi Wiredu, "On Defining African Philosophy," 161.

¹⁴ This is clear from Kwesi Wiredu's "African Religions from a Philosophical Point of View."

¹⁵ See Moses Akin Makinde, "Whither Philosophy in Africa?":

The pioneers in the field of philosophy ... were philosophers of African origin, like Professors John Olubi Sodipo of Nigeria, Pauline Hountondji of Benin Republic, Kwasi Wiredu of Ghana, Odera Oruka of Kenya and, of course, expatriates like Professors E. Ruch in Southern Africa, Robin Horton in Nigeria, and Gordon Hunnings.... Unfortunately, these philosophers spent most of their time debating on whether or not there was African Philosophy. ... John Mibiti was the only African in this category of writers. Following the lead of Levy-Bruhl, the author of Primitive Mentality whose thesis maintained that Africans were incapable of second order thought, the central issue in subsequent debate on African Philosophy was the thinking that African Philosophy was ethno-philosophy or group mind without any philosophical method as known to Western philosophers.

See also P.O. Bodunrin "The Question of African Philosophy".

¹⁶ Jide Dasaolu, "Philosophy and African Traditional Thought."

¹⁷ Dasaolu refers to G.S. Sogolo, *Foundations of African Philosophy*, 101.

¹⁸ H. Odera Oruka. *Sage Philosophy. Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*.

¹⁹ Papers from a series of conferences were published from 1988-89 in C.S. Momoh et al., eds., *Nigerian Studies in Religious Tolerance*.

²⁰ Kenny's "Dialogue with Muslims", is the 3rd chapter of this series. See also his bibliography, "Muslim-Christian Relations: Works by Joseph Kenny O.P."

²¹ See Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy. Vol. II, Medieval Philosophy*. Note chs. "Islamic Philosophy" (186-200); "The Translations" (205-211); and, "William of Auvergne" (218-227).

²² Mehdi Aminrazavi, "Medieval Philosophical Discourse and Muslim-Christian Dialogue."

²³ See Th. Michel, "A Conflict of Values", the last section of "Islamic Revival in Asia and Its Implications for Christian-Muslim Dialogue", on the website *Interreligious Dialogue*: "Muslim revivalists propose a theocentric universe. ... They hold that the humanistic approach to morality espoused by Western modernity leads to dehumanization, where the person is viewed primarily as a consumer of goods, a prospective buyer to be reached by effective advertising, rather than as a creature of God called to live a simple, God-fearing, non-materialist life."

²⁴ Th. Michel, “A Conflict of Values”:

“While liberalism does not deny the existence of God or reject religion, it is skeptical of the ability of any religious system to attain truth and is opposed to the role of religion in public life. Religion is admissible as the personal choice of some individuals who feel they need to give moral direction to their private and familial lives, but it has no place in public affairs. The marketplace, social interaction and, above all, government, are spheres that must exist and operate outside the influence of religious thought.”

²⁵ Michel, “Revivalist Critique of Modernity,” one of the last sections of the last section of “Islamic Revival in Asia and Its Implications for Christian-Muslim Dialogue.”

²⁶ The list is so extensive that it is hard to know where to begin. Among outstanding Christian philosophers one should mention Pascal, and in the 20th century, the neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain. For authors who have contributed significantly to Christian thought in a more general way, H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture* is certainly important, as are the popular works of C. S. Lewis on issues of pain, evil, or miracles, etc. A basic bibliography of useful works can be found in Brian Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision. Shaping a Christian Worldview*.