

INTRODUCTION

There are parallel developments in theology between Christianity, Judaism and Islam. As soon as we cross the line from the Scriptural and traditional content of the three to general questions proposed to rational thought, and credal statements couched in philosophical terms, this becomes quite obvious. The mediæval interaction of philosophy and theology in the complex, e.g., of Ibn Sīnā, Al Ghazzālī, Ibn Rushd, Aquinas and Duns Scotus becomes an important matter for investigation. Writers better equipped on the philosophical side have accomplished work of pre-eminent value relevant to the study we are now making. The invaluable pioneer work of Carra de Vaux on the oriental side and many on the Latin side, and more recently Goichon, Gardet, and Gauthier, have increased our indebtedness. Macdonald and Wensinck have greatly helped us. Such wide-ranging, exacting analysis and criticism is most useful. There are still questions of a more theological nature which the two last-mentioned have opened up, and the Spanish school has contributed here.

Perhaps the time may have come for a reassessment of Renan's *tour de force*. His presentation of Ibn Rushd is brilliant but leaves questions. Perhaps one cannot help but infringe the strict bounds between philosophy and theology in a survey such as we are attempting ; sometimes they are inextricably tangled, but we have tried to keep the theological object and aim strictly in view. Precision in the allocation of the fields of enquiry is not always in evidence in either the Christian or the Muslim camps. When Al Ghazzālī attempted the tearing of the philosophers to pieces, he had inevitably in his mind oriental development of Greek philosophy, the initial awareness of which by Islam and the Eastern Christian Church was touched upon in the first volume of this work.¹ When Ibn Rushd responded with a similar intention to discredit Abū Ḥāmid, it was necessarily in the same context.

From the eleventh to the thirteenth century there were attempts at the synthesis of the Peripatetic philosophy with Jewish, Christian and Islamic thought. This led to attempts to distinguish between what was purely philosophical and what was regarded as the province of religious or theological thought. Then we find theories of "double truth" and

¹ *Islam and Christian Theology*, Part I, vol. 1, pp. 84-182.

distinctions between the *via negativa* and dogmatic positivism. The lines followed can be discerned in the *Moreh Nebuchim* of Maimonides, where the anthropomorphic statements in the Old Testament are studied in the light of Aristotle's philosophy, etc. In some ways the task of the Jews and Muslims was easier than that which faced the Christians. Hebrew monotheism and Semitic unitarianism seemed more likely to assimilate to Aristotle's thought than the incarnational supernaturalism of Christianity, which already had a rich heritage of Platonist and Neoplatonist ideas pressed into the service of theology, although Aristotelianism also had its influence there.

One of the results which appear, *inter alia*, is that subjects, which from a purely Christian point of view should have been discussed and expounded within the bounds of the Christian revelation, came to be studied under the head of metaphysics, although it was obvious that all doctrines of that revelation could not be so dealt with, especially the doctrines of the incarnation and the Holy Trinity. It was perhaps not quite so obvious that if basic theism was reduced to Aristotelian terms, to concepts of essence, substance, accident, and attribute, and with the attributes of impassibility, omnipotence, immutability, eternity and infinity stressed as prime directives, it could easily happen that a grievously wearying and fettering burden could be imposed on a theology designed to expound the doctrine of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". To start with the *via remotionis* and the *via negativa* as almost axiomatic must hamper those whose central doctrine is "God is love". To some extent this applies to the decentralizing of "the Merciful and Compassionate" of the Qur'ān also.

There is some evidence that the minds of Christian theologians were not quite easy. Some did not like references to pagan sources. Hugh of St. Victor urged the distinction between pagan and Christian science, and roundly maintained that postulates of faith transcend reason, even while admitting that nothing contrary to reason can be believed although the fact that sometimes what transcends reason may be wrongly dubbed irrational.¹ Erigena had said, "True religion is true philosophy" but his terms were left undefined.² There was the cliché that philosophy was the handmaid of theology, but it would be truer to say that she was used as a not very respectable drudge. Anselm had laid down the principle that a Christian should achieve understanding by faith and not arrive at faith through understanding.³

¹ Cf. Migne, *Pat. Lat.* 176, col. 76, etc.

² *Liber de Divina Prædestinatione* I, 1.

³ *Ep. ad Falconem* (Mansi : *Sacr. Conciliorum Collectio.* xx. 741).

Certainly dialectic was viewed with suspicion,¹ as is clear, e.g., from the dislike and opposition to its introduction by Abelard.

But it is easy to be critical of an age in which there was adventurous thinking. Rudolf Eucken has said, "The further science has pushed back the limits of the discernible universe, the more insistent do we feel the demand in us for a satisfactory explanation of the whole." This sort of urge lay behind the development of systematized theological thought. No matter how much men of faith consider that human knowledge and discovery have not the last word in matters of faith, men are intelligent beings and like to think of a possible concord between their religion and the growing body of secular knowledge. From a higher standpoint, the Divine must be eternally relevant, but that eternal relevancy is *for us* limited to our day and age; we have not yet seen the final unveiling and we see but a small part of the field and not the whole. But to be alive to the present challenge of contemporary thought and science is a sign of spiritual health. When Kalāmists and scholastics set themselves the task of expounding the doctrines of their faith, they were asserting their prerogative as rational beings, and they could not be forbidden to bring transcendent mysteries to the common understanding so far as they were able. But it was not always clear that Philosophy and Theology differed in method and subject, that Philosophy had very little to do with feelings. There are ranges of experience where philosophy has a minor part to play. It often stands in bewilderment by life and sentiment, by the paradoxical and the quixotic, by imagination and laughter, as well as tragedy and the causes of crass perversity. Life teaches us that men as living and reacting to situations cannot be pinned down by the precision of logic. Moral feeling as creative force is often not to be understood by a purely philosophical measure. But theology has been called "Queen of the Sciences" and so ought to have at least a bowing acquaintance with logic! It is concerned with truth as philosophy is, even while it takes account of value judgements. But the heart has reasons of which philosophy officially knows nothing. Scholastic theology whether Islamic or Christian bases on a body of dogmatic commitment. Thomas Aquinas puts it, "Science begins with self-evident principles or stands on the shoulders of some other science. Theology stands on God-revealed principles."

The following pages will show how far it was admitted that God was the subject of rational speculation. This is one mark of developed Muslim dialectic (*kalām*). First comes the exposition of "being" and

¹ As, e.g., Lanfranco.

this leads to the discussion of creation or emanation. In this way we are directed to the question of the divine existence and attributes and only afterwards brought to the substance of Islamic or Christian faith. Both sides follow the same pattern and this leads to Ijī's *Mawāqif* and Thomas's *Summa* on either hand. In Islamic scholastic as finally shaped, though being is the proper subject of Physics, God is the subject of metaphysics. Sufis would challenge this. In Sufism we find various ideas, e.g., Neoplatonist concepts of the One who transcends existence, and a widely agreed conviction and even a fervent declaration that univocal predication of God and man is impossible. Ibn Sīnā¹ says, "Being *qua* being is the subject of metaphysics"; Shabistārī says that for reason to go in quest for God is like seeking the sun by the light of a candle; Ibn Rushd holds that God and the intelligence are the proper subjects for rational enquiry.² It is axiomatic that "No science can prove the existence of its own subject". So Ibn Rushd takes the arguments for God's existence under the head of physics while Ibn Sīnā prefers to take them under metaphysics. But this does not change the general rule that all this is subject to the enquiry of the human reason. Duns Scotus opposes such an idea, and considers that God is the proper subject of theology. We must allow for the ambiguity of Ibn Sīnā's *Ilāhīyāt* which has been variously understood as metaphysics and theology, and it may be that his idea is not far from that of Duns Scotus. One would think that a commitment to the impossibility of univocal predication, *mukhālafā*, would exclude God from the discussion of "being" and yet it is Ibn Sīnā who proposes the concept of the *Wājibu'l Wujūd*, the necessary *per se*, in the analysis of being, to designate the Supreme Being. Duns does not accept that God transcends being and readily accepts the necessity for rational enquiry. Revelation though supernatural has, however, to be accepted by the finite mind.³ Ibn Ḥazm on *istidlāl* and Aquinas on the use of argument in theology both make the point that argument must be conducted with the authority of Sacred Writ forever in mind.⁴

With these preliminary generalizations concerning the impact of reason on Theology, we should also observe that in Ibn Rushd and Duns Scotus there is real concern for the practical results of religion in the lives of people who might not take kindly to the discipline of philosophical thought. The concern is common to Christians and Muslims.

¹ *Ilāhīyāt* II, cap. 1.

² Com on *Metaphysics* IV. com. 1 III, com. 14 and XII.1 quoting Aristotle 982b, sq and 1026a.

³ *Op. Oxoniensis* Prol. q. 1.

⁴ *Summa Theol.* Ia. q. 1, art. 8, ad. 2.

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Duns Scotus says that theology is concerned with salvation and should be classed with *praxis* not *theoria*. Walter of St. Victor, opponent of logic and metaphysics, thought they had a vicious influence and led to nihilism. He is disturbed that philosophers give various opinions side by side without deciding which is true and demands that heresy should be condemned.¹ Precisely the same thing was troubling Muslim thinkers, e.g., Al Ghazzālī and Ibn Rushd, in spite of the differing conclusions they reached as to how this might be met. Many thought that *‘Ilmū’l Kalām* went too far in making heretical opinions known under the guise of refuting them. Religious truths cannot be studied when obligations are lost sight of.

What the scholastics think is that it is best to marshal the whole range of facts and then bring them into a synthesis in which the problems of Theology may be adequately studied. But who is capable of achieving such a complete synthesis as was deemed advisable? How could such a scheme allow for inspiration and revelation? Is anything comparable to the Aristotelian encyclopædia possible at the present time? Were these scholastics humble enough? Perhaps this is one of the reasons why scholasticism does not commend itself to us today.

In passing we should also observe what we find when we make cross references between Islamic and Christian scholasticism, and that is that Ibn Sīnā is more favoured by Duns Scotus and the Franciscans, and Ibn Rushd by Aquinas and the Thomists in spite of the clear opposition of the latter to Ibn Rushd in many important matters. Illustrations of this are that Aquinas follows Ibn Rushd in agreeing that “Being” and “One” are identical in regard to existence and substance is one *per se*, whereas Ibn Sīnā regards *ens* and *unum* as additional to substance.² Aquinas thinks that there is confusion here between *unum* and the principle of numerical unity. Scotus says that if *ens* and *unum* are identical, the principle of plurality would find no place in nature and to say “one being” would be tautological.³

The following pages will show how true is Guillaume’s observation about the stimulus given to Christian Aristotelianism by the “Arabian” philosophers, though we must not lose sight of the early contacts with Aristotelians in the theological school of Antioch in pre-Islamic times.

¹ Cf. Erdmann : *History of Philosophy*, vol. I, p. 350.

² III, *Metaphysics*, cap. 2; VII, *Metaphysics*, cap. 1.

³ *Quæst. in Metaph.*, IV., q. 11, note 2. For the list of matters in which philosophy was criticized by Al Ghazzālī, see later, pp. 41ff.