

## CHAPTER 2

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# Philosophy and Priestly Formation

*Isaac Ehaleoye Ukpokolo*

*Ought not a Minister to have, First a good understanding, a clear apprehension, a sound judgment, and a capacity of reasoning with some closeness.... Is not some acquaintance with what has been termed the second part of logic, (metaphysics), if not so necessary as [logic itself], yet highly expedient? Should not a minister be acquainted with at least the general grounds of natural philosophy?*

John Wesley, *Address to the Clergy*<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

I consider it simply appropriate to bring into a discourse titled ‘formation, the Catholic priesthood and the modern age’, some candid reflections on the place of philosophy in priestly formation, particularly as attempts have been made in some quarters to represent certain aversion to reason when matters of faith come up. This is known to manifest not only in popular arguments and street conversations but even among pastors, preachers and teachers at Bible schools and Christian communities as noted above by John Wesley. From manifest experience, to embrace faith without reason would either produce a fundamentalist mindset or a fanatical disposition, while of course, reason without faith would either lead to agnosticism or atheism. After all, an act of faith is an intelligent act.<sup>2</sup> And in Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 155) we are admonished that

“in faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace: believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace. And, I take it to be a privilege to be invited to do an essay in this regard, particularly in honour of a renowned philosopher, teacher and preacher of our time. For me, that an essay on philosophy and priesthood is relevant in contemporary times, stands evident in the light of a number of encounters I have personally had. I would mention just two of many occasions. First, many years ago, I was introduced by a Professor of Medicine at the University College Hospital (U.C.H) Ibadan to a woman who was introduced to me as the wife of the founder of “Faith Clinic,” a worship centre at Ibadan city. Hearing that I am a philosopher she exclaimed: “So, you don’t believe in God?” Yet, I could not readily relate my identity as a philosopher with atheism. I took the time to explain to her and allay her fears. Well, I hope I succeeded. The second instance occurred in Israel, while on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, leading a group of Catholic Charismatic Renewal members, where I was serving as National President of the Group and Co-ordinator of Anglophone West Africa. The Tour Guide could not hide his astonishment when I disclosed to him that I am a teacher of philosophy, not only in a university but also in a Catholic Major Seminary in Nigeria. His question was, “How do you manage the marriage between philosophy and Catholic Charismatic spirituality?” My response was simple, “Philosophy and Catholic Charismatic spirituality are faithful spouses in me; complimenting and mutually assisting”. “Philosophy endowed me with reasoning capacity, leading me to the reasonableness of faith”. Catholic Charismatic spirituality, on the other hand, intervenes in my encounter with reality, with truths, and the good when reason becomes impotent and unable to lead me on. For instance, we say seeing is believing, but I dare to say, it is not. We must believe that a thing is possible before we should believe it even though we saw it (John 20:29)<sup>3</sup>. And so, in this essay, I attempt to highlight the place of philosophy in priestly formation. For the avoidance of doubt, it is not possible to establish in one essay of less than five thousand (5,000) words, all that philosophy has to do in priestly formation. I would just attempt to identify specific areas in philosophy, and how these areas stand relevant to the training of priest for the church. Thus, I do not intend to go into the history of the relationship between

philosophy and priestly formation, or how and when it started, I would rather attempt some highlight in the relationship.

I begin with the question of methodology, wherein critical thinking and sceptical attitude are brought in as philosophical ideals. I then go further to represent certain epistemic modes required for dealing with the surrounding reality. Next is an attempt to establish the need for a given metaphysics at every point in our daily experience. The essay goes further to examine some ethical stances in relating with others. Finally, I present in a nutshell, that philosophy in its appeal to reason, does not deny the application of faith in our daily experiences, and vice versa. All these, stand necessary not only as points of direction for pastoral ministries outside the Catholic Church but even in the Catholic Church that is usually seen as the church wherein the ideal church subsist.

### **Priestly Formation Project**

The entire training of students (at priestly formation) should be oriented to the formation of true shepherds of souls after the model of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd. They are therefore to be prepared for the ministry of the word: that they might understand ever more perfectly the revealed word of God; that, meditating on it they might possess it more firmly, and that they might express it in words and in example; for the ministry of worship and of sanctification: that through their prayers and their carrying out of the sacred liturgical celebrations they might perfect the work of salvation through the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments; for the ministry of the parish: that they might know how to make Christ present to men, Him who did not “come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45;cf. John 13:12-17), and that, having become the servants of all, they might win over all the more (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19). Therefore, all the forms of training, spiritual, intellectual, disciplinary, are to be ordered with concerted effort towards this pastoral end.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps, a rather succinct statement of the above representation of the project of priestly formation is that, the entire training is meant to produce men of proven integrity, strength of character and wisdom of the ancients as espoused in the scripture as well as in the teaching authority of the church dedicated to the service of God and his people. It is however very pertinent to note that such candidates are taken from among men – from specific human contexts, which inevitably influenced them; and to these same contexts, the priests are sent for the service of the people.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the life and ministry of these men must adapt to every era and circumstance of life.<sup>6</sup> Such is the ground, as well as the goal of priestly education - to bring forth the ‘seed’ of God in the person. The term ‘education’ to be sure, derives from the Latin word *educare* or *educare*, which means ‘to bring out’. And so, to educate a person is to bring forth a reality that lies latent in the being. Thus understood, the idea of education invokes a certain kind of Platonic innatism assisted through effective instruction and learning to be brought forth to manifest in words, thoughts and actions. It could be added here, that, the term education derives from the same root as ‘exodus’ implying a sort of liberation.

The foregoing conception of education as a process is brought to bear on the candidate for priesthood in the Seminary.

As generally understood, the word ‘seminary’ derives from the Latin *semine* which means ‘seed’. The seminary is thus the ground – the nursery – wherein the seeds are sown: the seminarians as it were are seeds, nurtured and carefully bred through watering, pruning, fertilizing, weeding and even grafting until they bloom with the best of values both in Faith and Reason.

### **The Place Of Philosophy**

According to Bertrand Russell, the conceptions of life, and the world, we call “philosophical” are a product of two factors: one, inherited religious and ethical conception; the other, the sort of investigation which may be called “scientific”.<sup>7</sup> Individual philosophers have differed widely in regard to the proportions in which these two factors entered into their systems, but it is the presence of both, to some degree, that characterizes philosophy.<sup>8</sup> The point here is that faith and reason are not necessarily mutually exclusive as it is believed in certain quarters of human culture. Philosophy is something overlapping between theology and science.<sup>9</sup> Like theology, it consists

of speculations on matters as to which definite knowledge has, so far, been unascertainable: but like science, it appeals to human reason rather than to authority, whether that of tradition or that of revelation.<sup>10</sup> Thus understood, definite knowledge belongs to science, while all dogmas as to what surpasses definite knowledge belong to theology. Yet, interpenetrating the spaces of science and theology is philosophy.

For the purpose of clarity, philosophy by its etymology is the love of wisdom. But this is not the same thing as love of knowledge, in the sense in which an inquisitive man may be said to love knowledge; “vulgar curiosity does not make a philosopher.” And so, properly defined, philosophy is the love of the ‘vision of truth’. And here lies the meeting point of faith and reason.

In the light of reason, philosophy employs the aid of critical thinking, endowing the human person with the power of disciplined thought life, an important fruit of college education. Critical thinking fosters high-order active, intelligent evaluation of ideas and information. More precisely, it is the general term given to a wide range of cognitive skills and intellectual disposition needed to effectively identify, analyse and evaluate beliefs and truth claims; to discover and overcome personal preconception and biases; to formulate and present convincing reasons in support of conclusion, and to make reasonable, intelligent decision about what to believe and what to do.<sup>11</sup> Put somewhat differently, “critical thinking is governed by certain intellectual standards such as; clarity, precision, accuracy, relevance, consistency, logical correctness, completeness and fairness.”<sup>12</sup> All these, present philosophy as an activity – a critical, rational reflection on already existing beliefs employing the tools of logic, language and rigour. By these we get easily acquainted with ideas as Friedrich von Schelling would say:

the fear of speculation, the ostensible rush from the theoretical to the practical, brings about the same shallowness in action that it does in knowledge. It is by studying a strictly theoretical philosophy that we become most immediately acquainted with Ideas, and only Ideas provide action with energy and ethical significance.<sup>13</sup>

From the above, those ideas that provide human actions with energy and ethical significance are arrived at through theoretical philosophising employing the tools of critical thinking.

In addition to critical thinking as a mindset, is the closely related disposition of scepticism. This is perhaps one of the reasons why it is assumed that philosophy or reason is averse to faith. However, it is important to stress here that, the sceptical attitude referred to here is not the reckless rejection of Absolute Deity by the atheist, neither is it the methodic doubt of Rene Descartes, who derives the existence of the Absolute Deity from the ego rather than the ego from the existence of the Absolute Deity. This scepticism of philosophical prescription is not the scepticism of David Hume who in attempt to take empiricism to its logical conclusion rejected the essence of causality, the practice of induction and the projection that the future could resemble the past, thereby creating a problematic at the very foundation of scientific knowledge. Of course, it is not the scepticism of the Sophist indicating some reckless current of relativism and its related tyranny. The scepticism here referred to in philosophical prescription is the scepticism of George Santayana. His words:

Scepticism is an exercise, not a life; it is a discipline fit to purify the mind of prejudice and render it all the more apt, when the time comes, to believe and to act wisely; and meantime the pure sceptic need take no offence at the multiplicity of images that crowd upon him, if he is scrupulous not to trust them and to assert nothing at their prompting. Scepticism is the chastity of the intellect, and it is shameful to surrender it too soon or to the first comer: there is nobility in preserving it coolly and proudly through a long youth, until at last, in the ripeness of instinct and discretion, it can be safely exchanged for fidelity and happiness.<sup>14</sup>

From the above, philosophy prepares a mind to engage its reality – material, social, spiritual-, with care and caution, fairness and modesty, firmness and rigour, and yet, a readiness to consider what is before it. In other words, the mind encounters the environment with a certain epistemic mode characterized by respect for ‘the other’. What

this means is that philosophy equips the candidate undergoing priestly training and formation with certain methodological skills, cognitive mode, metaphysical grounding and moral attitude. This is the contribution of philosophy to the wholistic development and formation of the priest.

Having highlighted the nature of the methodological skills (critical thinking and sceptical attitude) in the preceding paragraphs, it is now time to examine the cognitive or epistemic mode onto which the candidate is introduced. Here the question is that of 'epistemology', or 'theory of knowledge'. And, the history of epistemology reconstructed as a judicial hearing would be deciding one singular question: How is reliable knowledge possible? And by extension, how are we to differentiate knowledge (episteme) from mere opinion (*doxa*) as we are more rationally right to depend on knowledge rather than opinion. The one who possesses the knowledge, possesses knowledge of something, that is to say, of something that exists, as what does not exist is nothing.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, knowledge or '*episteme*' is always true and is infallible, as it is logically impossible for it to be mistaken. However, opinion or '*doxa*' can be mistaken. Opinion cannot be of what is not, for that is impossible; nor of what is, for then it would be knowledge.<sup>16</sup> If this is so, an opinion must be of what both is and is not. But how is this possible? Bertrand Russell responds:

particular things always partake of opposite characters: what is beautiful is also, in some respects, ugly; what is just is, in some respects, unjust; and so on. All particular sensible objects, so Plato contends, have this contradictory characters, they are thus intermediate between being and not-being, and are suitable as objects of opinion, but not of knowledge. "But those who see the absolute and eternal and immutable may be said to know, and not to have opinion only. Thus we arrive at the conclusion that opinion is of the world presented to the senses, whereas knowledge is of super-sensible eternal world; for instance, opinion is concerned with particular beautiful things, but knowledge is concerned with beauty in itself."<sup>17</sup>

To this extent, philosophy arms the human mind with the capacity to transcend particular, sensible, transient, context-dependent objects and phenomena to locate the pure, eternal immutable reality. In the light of this epistemic mode, the mind is able to engage the vision of truth which is the task of philosophy.

The foregoing present a strong link between epistemology and metaphysics or ontology which has to do with the nature of reality in itself or the study of being. Ontology, for instance, has been characterized as the study of the most general kinds that exist in the universe. Usually, the emphasis has been on demarcation: which candidate for existence really does exist. Aristotle and Plato disagreed in their answers, and philosophers have gone on disagreeing ever since. Think of W. V. O. Quine's Ontological aphorism, "to be is to be the value of a variable."<sup>18</sup> Ontology in itself is an aspect of metaphysics, that branch of philosophy that inquires into the general fundamental normative principles of reality, and how this can be distinguished from appearance. The conception of the reality we have is very functional in the way we relate with the world and our environment in general. It is my belief that every position held and maintained rests on a given metaphysics be it personal, social, political, intellectual, moral or relational, all must rest on some metaphysics, although one may not know this. Thus, it is very important to have epistemic consciousness of one's guiding metaphysics.<sup>19</sup> In examining the nature of reality, we do not aim at a detailed knowledge of particular things, such as the special sciences might give, but rather at an outline conception of reality within which all knowledge of particular things must fall, and by which such knowledge must be judged. There are certain general conceptions which make up at once the framework of knowledge at the framework of existence. Such are the categories of being and cause, change and identity, space and time: and our knowledge of particular things would depend on the conception we form of these basic categories. On its part, epistemology has shown them to be principles of thought while metaphysics on its part inquires into their real significance. Metaphysics as an area of discourse consist in a study of the ontological meaning of the categories, either in themselves or in their specification, thereby marking off its field of concern from that of the special sciences.<sup>20</sup>

Part of the reality encountered by our minds is human. And so, philosophy projects that branch of discourse that aids the human person to relate with other human persons. This is the area of ethics or moral philosophy concerned with bringing to the fore, those general fundamental normative, immutable principles of behaviour, distinguishing right from wrong, just from unjust, good from evil as we relate with one another. Of course, it has been argued in some quarters, that the moral life did not begin by laying down general principles or conduct, but by forming codes of concrete duties. Duties to parents, children, neighbours, and nations. These were the concrete forms in which the moral nature first manifested itself, and in which also is still finds its chief expression. In this respect, it is argued, the moral life is analogous to the mental life, which does not begin with abstract speculative principles, or with theories of knowledge, but with specific acts of knowing. In both alike, the knowledge of principles was second and not first; and in both alike principles were implicit from the beginning.<sup>21</sup> And so, it is suggested here that, these implicit nature or principles from the beginning makes the search for some overarching ground totalizing framework of reference for moral actions not only necessary but innate in us. And such is the object of focus of the human mind to which a seminarian is exposed. These are normative, axiomatic and fundamental assumptions, precepts, theories and procedures of right action.

Three of the leading moral ideas are: the good, duty, and virtue. Each of these is essential in a system which is to express the complete moral consciousness of a people. Where there is no good to be reached by action, there can be no rational duty, and without the notion of duty, the idea of virtue vanishes. Furthermore, where there is no sense of duty, but only a calculation of consequences, we would have merely a system of prudence. This may be good enough in a way but lacks moral quality. Such conduct may be natural and allowed but it is not virtuous. For in such conduct, we miss the reference to a moral agent. It is a matter of wit and shrewdness only and is not a manifestation of virtuous character.<sup>22</sup> These later attitudes and dispositions the seminarians are trained to approach with leprosorial disdain.

### **Faith And Science**

The life of the Catholic Christian and indeed, the life of a priest in the Catholic Church is a life of faith. It is a form of life in which the individual agent understands himself first as a contingent being whose existence and those of other beings (human and non-human) proceeds from the Being of the Supreme God who originates and sustains the entirety of reality. Since the Priest more specifically receives a vocation to propagate this faith in the providence of God who sustains all things in the universe; one who aspires to be a priest, therefore, must as a matter of necessity be an exemplar of faith in God.

Yet, the man of faith also lives in a contemporary world that is also driven by the advancements of science. By science, reference is made here to the totality of knowledge which comes to us through the deployment of *ratio* – reason. Here, a distinction is therefore made between matters of faith and science. Given the differing *methods* of faith and science (reason) the debate about the compatibility (if any) of the both has continued even unto contemporary times. We are better off when we conceive of faith and science as being endowments given to the human person by God. Hence, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth. In this connection, Pope (St.) John Paul II in the opening of his encyclical letter, *Fides et Ratio* stated that “faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.”<sup>23</sup> Reason here is not restricted only to the activities of the natural sciences; it rather includes the logical ratiocinations that are typically characteristic of philosophical inquiries into ultimate reality.

Insight from the Catechism of the Catholic Church is apt in this regard:

Methodical research in all branches of knowledge provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith are derived from the same God. The humble and preserving investigator of the secrets of

nature is being led, as it were, by the hand of God in spite of himself, for it is God, the conserver of all things, who made them what they are.<sup>24</sup>

The Seminarian, therefore, is not formed only to perform parochial duties without the use of reason. I dare to say here that the entirety of the mission of a priest is short-circuited if his activities are not moderated by the use of reason which itself is God's own gift. The onus is therefore on formators to underscore this important aspect of a holistic formation of priests which combines faith in God with the rational faculties which the same God has bequeathed to humanity. The one in formation too must gradually develop an understanding of the complementarity of the gifts of faith and reason and the importance of both gifts for the nurturing of a divine vocation.

### **Concluding Remarks**

It would be rather odd to end this reflection without pointing out some practical signposts by which philosophy is identified in the training of priests. First of such is that the activity of philosophising aids us in the task of apologetics<sup>25</sup> – the task of giving a reasoned defence of Christian theism in the light of objections raised against it and offering positive evidence on its behalf (1 Pet. 3:15). This has to do with making a reasoned articulation of the faith and be ready to disarm any attacks mounted against it. Second, philosophy also is meant to aid us in the task of polemics. Whereas apologetics involves the defence of Christian faith, polemics is the task of criticizing and refuting alternative views of the world.<sup>26</sup> Third, philosophy is very central to an expression of the image of God in us. This image refers to God as a rational Being.<sup>27</sup> Fourth, philosophy in priestly training curriculum permeates systematic theology and serves as its hand made in several ways. It helps to add clarity to the concepts of systematic theology.<sup>28</sup> A fifth consideration is that the discipline of philosophy facilitates the spiritual discipline of study. Study is itself a spiritual discipline, and the very act of study can change the self.<sup>29</sup> Anyone who undergoes the discipline of study lives through certain types of experiences where certain skills are developed through habitual study: framing an issue, solving problems, learning how to weigh a piece of evidence and eliminate irrelevant factors, cultivate the ability to see important distinctions instead of blurring them, and so on. The discipline of

philosophy also aids in the development of certain virtues and values. Sixth, philosophy can enhance the boldness and self-image of the Christian community in general.<sup>30</sup> Finally, discipline is most essential for the task of integration - to blend or form into a whole. In this sense, integration occurs when one's belief, primarily rooted in scripture, are blended and unified with propositions judged as rational from other sources into a coherent intellectually adequate Christian world views.<sup>31</sup>

I have in this essay attempted to show that the various elements of critical thinking, which itself generates a positive form of scepticism, and the need to understand the importance of ontology in the grounding of reality, are all crucial to the development of a culture of philosophising which in itself is always at the service of the Christian gospel and its ministers. The necessary connection between ethics and human relation was also briefly drawn in view of the nature of the ministry of Priests to which seminarians aspire to embrace. I have insisted here on the complementarity of faith and reason in the human quest for truth and meaning. These various elements highlight the importance of philosophical reasoning to priestly formation. Indeed, these various elements are means to a wholistic formation of priests.

I like to restate that priestly formation is always a continuum which does not cease at ordination to the priesthood but continues through a lifetime. Just like the Church that is always being reformed, the Priest too continues to be reformed by applying himself to the demands of faith and reason as the times demand. The result of such continuous reformation is always a Christian community whose roots grow deeper in the soil while bearing a variety of good fruits for the wellbeing of God's creation.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> Moreland J. P. and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundation for a Christian Worldview* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 11

<sup>2</sup> Anthony A. Akinwale 'On the Relationship between Faith and Reason', in Academia.edu. Ibadan

<sup>3</sup> Oswald Chambers *Making all Things New* (Hants: Oswald Chambers Publications Association & Marshall Moegan and Scott) pp.

- <sup>4</sup> Pope Paul VI 'Decree on Priestly Training - Optatum Totius' *Proclaimed by His Holiness*, (1965), No.4
- <sup>5</sup> Pastores Dabo Vobis 'Pastoral Exhortation of John Paul II' No. 5
- <sup>6</sup> Pastores Dabo Vobis 'Pastoral Exhortation of John Paul II' No. 5
- <sup>7</sup> Bertrand Resells *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945), 10
- <sup>8</sup> Bertrand Resells *A History of Western Philosophy*" 10
- <sup>9</sup> Bertrand Resells *A History of Western Philosophy*" 10
- <sup>10</sup> Bertrand Resells *A History of Western Philosophy*" 10
- <sup>11</sup> Gregory Bassham, William Irwin, Henry Nardone, James M. Wallace *Critical Thinking A Student's Introduction* (New York: McGraw Hill Companies, 2013), 1
- <sup>12</sup> Richard Paul, *Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive in a Rapidly Changing World* (Rohnert Park, CA: Centre for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique, 1990), 51-52
- <sup>13</sup> Friedrich W. J. von Schelling, *Werke*, ed. Manfred Schroter (Munich: Beck, 1958 -59), 3:299
- <sup>14</sup> George Santayana *Scepticism and Animal Faith Introduction to a System of Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publication, 1955), 69-70
- <sup>15</sup> Bertrand Resells *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945), 10
- <sup>16</sup> Bertrand Resell "A History of Western Philosophy" 11
- <sup>17</sup> Bertrand Russell "A History of Western Philosophy" 11
- <sup>18</sup> Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1-2
- <sup>19</sup> Borden Parker Bowne, *Metaphysics* (New York: American Book Co., 1910),1
- <sup>20</sup> Borden Parker Bowne, *Metaphysics* (New York: American Book Co., 1910),2
- <sup>21</sup> Borden Parker Bowne, *Metaphysics* (New York: American Book Co., 1910),2
- <sup>22</sup> Borden Parker Bowne, *Principles of Ethics* (New York: American Book Co., 1892), 1-2
- <sup>23</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship between Faith and Reason*, (1998), no. 1
- <sup>24</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* , no. 159
- <sup>25</sup> Moreland J. P. and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundation for a Christian Worldview* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 14
- <sup>26</sup> Moreland J. P. and William Lane Craig, "Philosophical Foundation for a Christian Worldview (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 14
- <sup>27</sup> Moreland J. P. and William Lane Craig, "Philosophical Foundation" 14
- <sup>28</sup> Moreland J. P. and William Lane Craig, "Philosophical Foundation" 14-15
- <sup>29</sup> Moreland J. P. and William Lane Craig, "Philosophical Foundation" 15
- <sup>30</sup> Moreland J. P. and William Lane Craig, "Philosophical Foundation" 15
- <sup>31</sup> Moreland J. P. and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundation for a Christian Worldview* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 15