

**RELEVANCE OF PHILOSOPHY (REASON) AND
THEOLOGY (FAITH) IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
GOTANISM AND MATTERS ARISING**

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Abstract

This paper seeks to present the relevance of Philosophy and Theology for human development and by extension the society in the 21st Century. Due to the exactitude of Science and Technology in addressing human material needs, there are calls that the dual disciplines of Philosophy and Theology have nothing to offer contemporary society. Consequently, there is a deliberate move from the level of government policy and admission quotas in higher institutions to de-market the discipline of Philosophy and Theology because of the misconception of their utility values. There are so many factors responsible for these misconceptions; but, majorly linked scientism which drives the rush for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education. Though STEM education seeks to address the material dimension of human existence through the productions of tangible products or values. Nonetheless human existence also has intangible values that are also enduring for the survival of the human society. These intangible values bothers seriously on human existential concerns. It is these existential concerns which are not limited only to materiality; but affect human values in a world that is far becoming confused and diffused in misplaced values and concerns which Philosophy and Theology corrects in Gotanism. Gotanism is an ideological praxis that seeks to establish the ever more relevance of philosophy and theology as the foundation and fountain to which other disciplines seek their refuge when starved, and always nourished in the intellectual waters. It is an approach to integrate, interact, engage, and communicate philosophy and theology to other disciplines as a multi-disciplinary symbiotic engagement for continuous interaction in advancing the progress of

society. This has become even more relevant in the face of the progress made by science and technology; and how philosophy and theology is still science in its systematic nature. This paper implores a qualitative and analytic exploration to argue the contemporary relevance of philosophy and theology as the basic elements that society needs towards authentic and integral development. In so doing, the paper shall challenge scholars in the field of philosophy and theology to continuously enrich this field of study imploring multi-disciplinary engagement for global attraction.

Keywords: Gotanism, Philosophy, Theology

Introduction

The Life and Works of Rt Rev.Msgr.Prof. Cletus Gotan no doubt have given scholars the need to revisit the problem caused by the School of Logical Positivism also known as the Vienna Cycle Movement (VCM) that arose in the 1920s and was characterized by the view that scientific knowledge is the only kind of factual knowledge (Scientism) and that all traditional metaphysical doctrines or forms of knowledge are to be rejected as meaningless. In a continent like Africa such knowledge in philosophy and theology cannot be taken for granted. Religious matter affects every facet of the African life be it economy, politics, culture, communication, etc. To reject the metaphysical as posited by the logical positivist school is to reject to an average African who is 'notoriously religious' that aspect of his being as *Homo-religio*; and if the African will take the logical positivists seriously, then he/she has denied the very foundation of his/her being and hence, the need to pursue Gotanism as not just a philosophical enterprise but a process of rejecting the influence of the logical positivist school which has impacted negatively on the field of philosophy and theology.

Religious fundamentalism, moral depravity, economic depression and social bankruptcy are the consequent characteristics of a debased society. The overemphasis on the STEM Education to the negligence of philosophy and theology cannot attain complete wholeness. Gotanism as a Philosophico-theological discourse has created so much impact in the areas of multi-disciplinary engagement and can influence the thought of the scientist in a manner that brings philosophy and theology back to science; and science back to philosophy and theology. Gotanism approaches philosophy and theology from a scientific perspective and posits that the two disciplines have a very synergetic relationship, scientific in character against the position of the logical positivist. In fact, the tiredness and lack of resilience in the scientific approach of the positivist school could not contend with the metaphysical pursuit and resilience of philosophers and theologians. This is because many aspects of the world defy easy explanations which cannot be offered by the logical

positivists; but can be explained in philosophy and theology. However, Gotanism in its own approach to the study of philosophy and theology gives hope as it helps explain what the logical positivists' attempts to explain even beyond what they cannot explain. Gotanism is a philosophical principle of synergetic multi-disciplinary engagement in harnessing the intellectual and classical thoughts of what philosophy and theology can offer to other disciplines for productive academic engagement and practical solutions to contemporary existential problems. This paper does not in any way relegate the position of the logical positivists and the 'positive fruits' of STEM education but, the paper attempts to acknowledge the progress made by the logical positivists and then, posits that the logical positivists cannot achieve their aim and purposes alone without recourse to the totality of reality; than just treating an aspect of reality; and that philosophy and theology also have role to play in the holistic development of complete human beings. This paper adopts the qualitative method of research to expose the limitations of the logical positivists and the need for philosophy and theology to also show reciprocated gestures to make their discipline relevant in our contemporary times.

Matters Arising in the Study of Philosophy and Theology

The question as to the relevance of philosophy and theology in our contemporary society calls for serious concern. For the sake of this paper, any question as to the relevance of philosophy is also applied to theology. Nonetheless, Bertrand Russell argues that philosophy is an intermediate between theology and science. This intermediate point does not isolate philosophy from theology; every good theology is predicated on a sound philosophy and science; but he (Russell) went further to explain thus:

Like theology, it {philosophy} 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. All definite knowledge --- belongs to science; all dogma as to what surpasses definite knowledge belongs to theology. But between theology and science there is No Man's Land, exposed to attack from both sides; this No Man's Land is Philosophy (1).

Despite the nexus between philosophy and theology; and in fact, with its connection to science, all the questions that interest the most speculative minds are those that science cannot answer, and the confident answers of theologians no longer seem so convincing as they did in former centuries (Russell 1). The task of philosophy and theology poses a very serious question to the proliferation of churches in Africa and with particular reference to Nigeria regarding the existential relevance of the discipline. Why should philosophy and theology not thrive in a society that always prays and believes in God? Why should a society not see philosophy and theology as

relevant to the belief discourse of mind and matter which are components of the *phenomena* and *noumena*; the physical and metaphysical; the immanent transcendental? Does philosophy and theology really make a person not to believe in God or belong to any religion? Why should a firm believer in God not be interested in philosophy and theology? Despite the fact that the belief in God is very prevalent in a society as seen in Africa; and how we interpret matters of divine revelation as if it were a mere direct link with God without recourse to theological and philosophical analysis. According to Stanley Rosen he opines thus:

We seem to have arrived at a sharp distinction between philosophy and religion. But this distinction cannot be unambiguously preserved, for a very simple reason. The commands of God, that is, the contents of divine revelation, are sufficiently ambiguous that they require interpretation. There is so much disagreement about the correct sense of Holy Scripture that claim that this sense is manifest is itself an interpretation, and so subject to rejection. Prophets, preachers, and scholars alike all attempt to derive the genuine will of God from the revealed text. They may themselves appeal to divine revelation, but this simply moves the problem back a step. How do we decide which interpretation is based upon the genuine revelation? The result of this problem is theology, or the application of philosophical, historical, rhetorical, and philological types of reasoning to the task of biblical interpretation (XVII).

Many philosophers (and even theologians) have come to understand that it is no longer acceptable to be engrossed in contemplation of abstract issues while their profession is suffering concrete challenges (Okeja 17). This is because “an activity so utterly remote from the problems and demands of real life might well be considered to be futile, and quite beyond the interest of ordinary folk” (Lewis 5). Yet, the obvious sense of the notorious nature of our various religions calls the attention of our contemplative sense of judgment and usage in human nature. According to Tudor Jones, “In spite of the chaos that now exists in Germany in the political, social and religious life, there are still men who have not bowed the knee to Baal, but have proceeded with their philosophical thoughts as if nothing had happened” (35).

Socrates was aware of these challenges and was the first to have summoned philosophy (and theology) down from the heavens, settled it in the cities, introduced it into the homes of men, and forced it to make inquiry into life and morals and things evil and good (Rahe 5). Ever since then, the material world became the focus of the Sophists and this largely directly or indirectly influenced the logical positivism and scientism to abandon the role of philosophy and theology; thereby not differentiating

what philosophy and theology had done and what they can do. Hence, the separation of philosophy and theology from positive science (as it applied to natural and applied sciences) which from the beginning was birthed together created in contemporary language a disjunction of facts and values (Rahe XXI). The logical positivists and empirical scientists became more interested in facts than in values; values for the logical positivists are not verifiable; as such, should be disregarded and discarded. Revisiting the issues as related to the logical positivists is not to downplay the role of the logical positivists as it advances the natural and applied sciences; not because philosophy is superior to the natural and applied sciences but rather, as a crucial role of the universal application of philosophy and theology. The connection between philosophy and the good life is nowhere more evident than in the domain of theology, even though philosophy and theology differs in subject matter. Hence, no matter how the logical positivists think about philosophy (and theology); our very conception of science (both natural and applied sciences) as well as our decision concerning the sovereignty of science over philosophy and theology, and so of the value of science, are all philosophical rather than scientific decisions. Since these decisions are exercised in normativity which is tied to a philosophical understanding of reality and society. Again, since science can explain the laws of gravity without explaining the force of gravity, it can also seek help from theology, so as to explain the causes of things in relation to God being illuminated by metaphysics which is a branch of philosophy. This, therefore, puts philosophy and theology amongst the list of the sciences because, it is itself a systematic study by its own right when it is applied to everyday life just as the other natural and social sciences invent and apply what they produce.

The Emergence of Gotanism

Gotanism has a central role to play in the doctrine and application of philosophy and theology. Gotanism is an ideological praxis that seeks to establish the ever more relevance of philosophy and theology as the foundation and fountain to which other disciplines seek their refuge when starved, and always nourished in the intellectual waters. It is an approach to integrate, interact, engage, and communicate philosophy and theology to other disciplines as a multi-disciplinary and symbiotic engagement for continuous interaction in advancing the progress of society. It is this integration, interaction, and communication in philosophy and theology with the world. Emmanuel Katongole in the spirit, doctrine and influence of Gotanism argues from experience thus:

My philosophical background has given me the confidence to engage theology in unapologetic ways, and in conversation with other disciplined inquiries in the humanities and social sciences. This too is important, for it saves theology from hubris and the false confidence of self-sufficiency” (52).

Again he recounts what philosophy and theology had done and still doing to enthrone peace during the genocides in Rwanda thus:

First, theology matters. Even though my PhD was in philosophy, I now find myself as a professor of theology, and specifically peace studies. The transition from a 'philosopher' to a 'theologian' has involved a disciplined effort towards learning to think and speak theologically. This has required not only learning a certain theological vocabulary, but also learning to take Christian convictions and practices seriously as a unique vision and claim, not simply 'spiritual matters, but of the world and the way it is constituted (52).

He went further to say that “I have learned how significant it is for one to be clear and explicit about the goals of one's theological enterprise” (Katongole 53). The bottom line in this discursive analysis is that philosophy and theology must engage other disciplines for it to be relevant to people and especially our young generation. Gotanism has brought philosophy and theology to the grassroots most especially in conflict and peace resolutions; hence, the popularity and fame of Rt Rev Prof. Mgr. Cletus Gotan in the academic world. The emphasis of Gotanism towards the realization of multi-disciplinary engagement is specific on the grounds that the man or woman who is contemptuous of philosophy and an invariably theology may be merely a person with an unexamined philosophy and theology, whose assumptions are uncritically held and many of whose judgments are prejudices (Lewis 5). It is this same prejudice that has made entry level students into undergraduate degrees programme to be uninterested in the study of philosophy and theology. The prejudice comes from the deception that philosophers and theologians cannot work in the bank, hotel industry, etc except in the church. Unfortunately, with the number of churches in Nigeria and the deceptions that are preached and the number of populace who attend these churches should make people get curious about what they listen to and scrutinize what they consume in their minds. According to Lewis,

A moment's reflection reveals the extent to which modern thinking is saturated with unexamined and usually false philosophical (theological) notions. It is not difficult to trace their origin back to traditional modes of thought which were the consciously held and taught philosophies of yesterday or to the writers, journalists, broadcasters, lecturers, preachers and teachers of our own day, some of them philosophers, (theologians), others popularizers of other men's philosophies, while the rest reflect, in many cases more than they realize, the current philosophies of the time (6).

From general perceptions and our experience as university's lecturers, we have discovered that enrollment into the theology and philosophy departments as seen in private and government universities are very low compared to other disciplines. No doubt, so many reasons are prevalent; however, there is the need for a multi-disciplinary engagement and adopting Gotanism as a method of teaching philosophy and theology.

In the midst of these multi-disciplinary engagements what can Gotanism do for Africa? To reflect the African condition, IdaraOtu in the report of United Nations Development Program 2019 on *Human Development Report* remarks thus: "Considering the 2019 Human Development Index (HDI) report, Africa is crawling behind in all indices of development, and thus can be designated as a poor continent; of the fifty-three African countries, about forty-three are categorized as low human development countries" (248). The HDI, according to Raymond Aina, can be summarized thus: "Long and healthy life + education + decent standard of living, divided by 3" (131). How can Gotanism help solve the spread of poverty as accelerated by many factors, including but not limited to famine, endemic diseases, corruption, insecurity, ethno-religious conflict, terrorism, political instability, wars, migration, foreign economic policies, unsuitable debts, lack of accountability, and climate change (Otu 248). These and among so many issues Gotanism should begin to address if it must remain relevant in the coming years most especially in the academia.

The Politics of Curriculum Design in Nigeria: Theology in Perspective

Nigeria is one of the most heterogeneous in the world and one of the most powerful tools that determines so many issues in politics is religion. Gotanism must be able to navigate these terrains or else it will have to contend with so many forces. Doing philosophy and theology in Nigerian Universities can be so complex; for example, there are different theologies as seen in the various mainline churches. We have Roman Catholic Theology, Anglican Theology, Methodist Theology etc... which theology will then be taught in the Nigerian Universities? Who determines the theology to be taught in these Institutions? How can Christian theologians help to represent a particular theology that can be identified as a theology for the Christian denomination? Who should design the curriculum of theology to be suitable for all universities? These questions raised are not just questions but questions that can raise dust in the politics of curriculum design in Nigeria that will determine how far theology can engage other disciplines. Is there a theology that is self-sufficient? Is there a difference doing Theology and Christian Religious Knowledge? Should every denomination have a department of theology in the different Universities? In the midst of all these questions will Gotanism give up on its effort in multi-disciplinary engagement between theology and other disciplines? Here, in fact lies

the thrust of the research; should these questions be put out of place and neglecting its importance, then Gotanism will be kept in the waters of irrelevance. Should it take up this challenge, then this gives Gotanism a credit of academic enterprise and pursuit of knowledge that is authentic. One can be rest assured that there are no ends to these questions; and at the point one thinks that the issues are settled, other issues will arise.

Nevertheless, due to the need to promote the material progress of Nigeria through education, policy makers have consistently maintained that science and technology holds the keys for Nigerian material progress. As such, there is a deliberate government policy to promote disciplines that are in the service of science and technology. In their misconception of philosophy and theology they relegated these two disciplines. This misconception is as a result of the way policy makers see the practical relevance of philosophy and theology to the individual and to society. Therefore, is very important we discuss the relevance of philosophy and theology for the individual and the society.

Relevance of Philosophy and Theology to Contemporary Society

Philosophy and theology as academic disciplines have a lot of misconceptions which have mislead many into thinking that it does not have any relevance to other fields of study or in the contemporary world. Most people are of the opinion that Philosophy (even theology) is abstract and has no practical value and that philosophers and theologians are dreamers who speculate about things that are beyond human comprehension. They maintain that majoring in philosophy or theology is a waste of time or that one cannot make a good living from it. Philosophers and theologians were seen as those who have nothing to offer practically. They were seen as those who isolate themselves from the rest of the world (Nweke and Uyanwune, 784).

Nweke and Uyanwune maintains that there is a relationship between philosophy and other disciplines in the sense that philosophical reflections and investigations can be applied in interrogating the foundational assumptions of all disciplines. More so, Philosophy mostly provides the fundamental principles that underpin various disciplines and continues to play often indispensable roles in various academic and practical fields of human endeavor. In the field of Law, Jurisprudence is essential for formulation of legal theories. In the field of Education, Philosophy is crucial in the areas of pedagogy, educational foundations, management and policies. Ethics is relevant to all facets of life. Within its own academic field, there is philosophy of virtually all disciplines which questions fundamental assumptions of such disciplines. Thus, Philosophy's relevance remains ineluctable (784). Even theology plays similar roles in relations to the other disciplines.

Apart from what philosophy and theology is doing in the various academic disciplines, they also contribute directly to human development. At the individual

level, the relevance of philosophy can be discern from two dimensions namely, the inculcation of critical thinking skills and imbibing of intellectual independence and tolerance. Critical thinking widens our scope and perspective. It gives us the breadth and depth to evaluate reality more critically. In effect, it influences our fundamental beliefs and our general worldview and our perception of values. Consequently, such change of perception can affect our lifestyle since our way of looking at the world is transformed, and with it our way of living. Secondly, philosophy fosters the culture of intellectual independence and tolerance of other people's views in order to free the mind from dogmatism. Though one is not obliged to accept the views or position of others but the ability to listen affords us a broader spectrum for the interpretation of reality (Makumba, 24-25).

Furthermore, philosophy is also a relevant discipline because in the final analysis doing philosophy means taking a position and in any case philosophical theories are responses to real problems of life. There is the desire to look more critically at the problems that pummel society today in order to give them solutions that are more comprehensive. This entails that philosophical theories is at the service of human society and the individual. More so, recourse is often made to philosophy in an attempt to recover the valued treasures of past generations and apply them in current contexts of human knowledge and living (Makumba, 25).

Similarly, there is no time we need a rigorous theology than now. Globally, the world is fighting religious extremism and terrorism which are caused by the misinterpretation of the sacred texts of religion and its spirit. A good theological education that is infused with human values is a necessary step to train versatile religious leaders, who are cosmopolitan in their thinking and humane in their approach to other cultures and religions. Therefore, theology is the sacred science that defines meaning for people and directs them to the Sacred within human space. Humans have this longing for the Sacred as basis to make sense of their existence. This shows that proper theology is the gateway that can take humans out from superstition and blind-faith.

Conclusion

Using the theory and praxis from Gotanism, this paper make a case for the relevance of philosophy and theology as academic disciplines in our institutions of higher learning. This is borne out of the fact that the contemporary assumption within society and policy making circle is that philosophy and theology are pristine disciplines that cannot serve the scientific enterprise of contemporary society. No doubt, the ideology that is driving education in the contemporary is logical positivism which is outwardly seen in scientism. Scientism is science and technology as the only means to solve human problems and any ways of knowing that is not in tune with science is nonsensical. This reductive and exclusive way of

looking at reality is what Gotanism seeks to address. The way to do that is to bring back theology and philosophy to their rightful place in the education of the human mind which is necessary for social transformation. This is what this paper has achieved.

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