

Research Article

# Understanding the Role of Philosophy in Theology and Christian Religious Education

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**Abstract:** This study is motivated by the negative perception among some Christians who regard philosophy as a threat to faith and theology, even believing that it can undermine conviction and reduce the truth of Scripture. Using a qualitative research method based on a literature study that collects and analyzes various relevant sources, this research aims to re-examine the relationship between philosophy, theology, and Christian Religious Education, as well as to explore the constructive role of philosophy in enriching the understanding of faith. The findings reveal that philosophy functions as a preparation evangelica - a “rational foundation that prepares one to receive faith” - rather than as an antagonist. Furthermore, the study emphasizes that the integration of philosophy and theology produces a critical and reflective educational approach that deepens the knowledge of God and fosters a dynamic Christian Religious Education. Thus, this research offers a new perspective that reconciles philosophy and faith, and recommends ongoing dialogue between the two for the advancement of theology and Christian education.

**Keywords:** Philosophy; Theology; Christian Religious Education

## 1. Introduction

In some Christian perspectives, philosophy is regarded as an adversary of theology. More extreme views even consider philosophy a threat to personal faith. This perception of philosophy as a threat to faith is based on the assumption that philosophy will clash with the truth revealed by God, specifically God's revelation in the form of the Bible (Gulo & Zai, 2025). Anti-philosophy groups view philosophy as an intellectual understanding profoundly opposed to faith.

Criticism and rejection of philosophy within the church, among Christians, stems from the interpretation that philosophy can reduce the entire truth contained in the Bible. If the understanding of God's word is reduced by philosophy, then the people of God's comprehension of the entire truth of the Bible will become biased and blurred. This prejudiced view rejecting the existence of philosophy has actually obscured the people of God's recognition of Biblical truth. The view that rejects philosophy is one that fails to see its benefits and utility. Essentially, philosophy is a tool for deepening a healthy understanding of faith (Togatorop & Tan, 2024).

Buya Hamka stated that human intellect and reasoning in the form of philosophy can go hand in hand. Philosophy with all its rationality should not be considered an enemy of personal faith. On the contrary, philosophy aids humans in thinking critically to understand all the order of God's creation in this universe. Philosophers with a high level of rationality in rationalizing things will still submit to a higher power over all creation. Buya Hamka emphasized that faith unaccompanied by intellect is incomplete. Hakma conveyed that precisely through the combination of faith and philosophy, or between philosophy and faith, it becomes a means for one to find God rationally (Alkhadafi, 2025).

The widespread oral circulation of these prejudiced issues regarding the rejection of philosophy in society forms the background for this scholarly work. Consequently, this writing will explain the relationship between philosophy and faith, and more specifically, will

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elaborate on the role of philosophy in the realms of theology and Christian Religious Education.

## 2. Literature Review

### Understanding the Meanings of Philosophy, Theology, and Christian Religious Education

Etymologically, the word “philosophy” originates from the Greek: *philos*, meaning a profound love, and *sophia*, meaning wisdom. Thus, philosophy means the love of wisdom. It is a form of intellectual discipline concerned with wisdom. According to John Chaffee, philosophy encompasses three important aspects: the Aspect of Wonder, which involves questioning due to amazement at occurrences; the Aspect of Wisdom, which involves studying philosophy to seek the essence of things and truth, thereby creating wisdom; and the Aspect of Truth, which involves considering fundamental truths (Gulo & Waruwu, 2025). The following are several expert perspectives on philosophy: According to Plato (427-342 BC): Philosophy is knowledge focused on attaining true knowledge of reality. According to Al-Kindi (796-874 AD): Philosophy is a science that studies physics, mathematics, and even theology (the divine).

According to Immanuel Kant: Philosophy is the fundamental science and basis of all knowledge, containing four elements: metaphysics (discussing what we can know), ethics (discussing what we ought to do), religion (discussing religiosity), and anthropology “discussing humanity” (Rewita dan Salminawati, 2022).

Meanwhile, the word “theology” comes from the Greek: *theos*, meaning God, and *logos*, meaning speech or discourse. Therefore, theology can mean discourse about God. Leon Morris, quoting Geoffrey W. Bromiley, explains that theology is everything thought and said about God. In other words, theology encompasses everything related to God, His being, and His works (Kristanti, 2021). Christian Religious Education is education that aims for the entire Christian congregation to know God correctly and fully. It is expected that every student receiving Christian Religious Education teaching will possess a good, correct, and comprehensive knowledge of God, along with steadfastness and mature faith (Mawikere & Hura, 2025).

### History of the Encounter Between Faith and Philosophy

Around the 12th century, the relationship between faith and reason was clear and balanced. Spirituality in Europe was largely influenced by Platonic thought, which allowed faith and reason to unite. However, by the 13th century, this European conceptual framework had shifted. The thinking of Aristotle, which appeared more worldly and emphasized empirical experience, surprised European theologians. Some rejected Aristotle's thoughts and teachings, considering them to spread pagan doctrines. At that time, pros and cons arose between the secular approach of Aristotelian principles and Christian theology. This was triggered by Siger of Brabant (1282), who proposed the concept of double truth that is, a distinction between truths in faith and truths in philosophical reason. This implied that something could be true from a philosophical standpoint but false from a theological perspective, and vice versa.

It was here that Thomas Aquinas presented his ideas and arguments in refutation. Aquinas asserted that there is only one truth. He explained that both human reason and divine revelation originate from the same Creator (Fisher, 2017). Regarding the historical encounter between faith and reason, two popular views circulated at the time: First, the view of *Fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). This means that one believes authentically, not blindly. In this context, humans must strive to understand what they believe.

Second, the view of *Credo quia absurdum* (I believe because it is absurd), meaning to believe even if it seems irrational (Muller, 2005). Catholic Church rejected the latter view. According to the Catholic perspective, even if one cannot fully comprehend the divine nature, faith should not be understood as blind. Faith and knowledge derived from reason and philosophy are not considered contradictory or irrational because both faith and reason are created by the same Creator, God (Sutrisno dan Hardiman, 2002).

## 3. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach through pure library research methods, fully based on the analysis of written sources. This type of research is classified as pure library

research, where data is systematically collected from various documentary sources, including books on philosophy and theology, scientific journal articles, recent academic publications, and other relevant documents discussing the relationship between philosophy, theology, and Christian Religious Education (Ismail et al., 2025). In analyzing the data, the researcher applied critical and holistic content analysis techniques. All collected data were examined in-depth to identify patterns, themes, and conceptual relationships between philosophy and the disciplines of theology and religious education (Riyanto, 2020). Through a hermeneutical reading of selected texts, this research seeks to build a comprehensive synthesis of understanding regarding philosophy's role in enriching theological and pedagogical insights within the context of Christian Religious Education.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### Negative Assumptions about Philosophy

The emergence of philosophy is rooted in humanity's inherent curiosity—when individuals began to question, contemplate, and discuss the universe. From this origin, philosophy has continuously evolved as a means for humans to seek solutions to universal problems. Although philosophy is essential for formulating knowledge, it has, in reality, faced significant rejection (Sugiharto, 2010). Many within both Christianity and Islam have opposed philosophy, viewing it as forbidden and a gateway to disbelief. If such misconceptions persist, they risk negatively impacting future generations, as these erroneous views are likely to be passed down and taught to subsequent generations. Historical records from approximately 476 to 1492 reveal a period of intellectual darkness, during which the Church largely prohibited rational inquiry and investigation into religious matters .

### The Intersection of Philosophy and Theology

Reason, often equated with philosophy, has historically encountered theology. Thomas Aquinas argued that faith and logic are not contradictory. Instead, Aquinas explained that logic can help individuals explore the mysteries of faith and can be applied to theological discussions, such as debates about the existence of God. Aquinas viewed the relationship between faith and logic as a form of preparation evangelica, meaning that human reason serves as a preliminary foundation for receiving faith. He understood logic as an introduction to faith, asserting that logic and reason can strengthen one's faith in Christ (Agustinus Wisnu Dewantara, 2018).

Aquinas proposed two methods to sustain Christian faith through logic. First, the logical deductive method, which aims to develop rational arguments supporting church teachings. Second, the socio-empirical approach, which integrates theology and philosophy based on empirical observations and natural reasoning. Aquinas emphasized that philosophy and faith are inseparable and complementary. He underscored the importance of their collaboration, noting that the mind (philosophy) and faith (theology) synergize to attain a deeper knowledge of God. Essentially, when the human mind focuses on God, it is engaging in thought. In this context, God is the center of all human thought, allowing individuals to freely contemplate even the most critical issues, this is what philosophy entails.

C.S. Lewis, an active theologian and writer, frequently employed logic in his works, as documented in his book *Mere Christianity*. To demonstrate consistency in his faith, Lewis relied on logical and rational analytical arguments. One example is his moral argument, where he posited the existence of universal and objective moral values in the world. According to Lewis, the ultimate source of human morality is God. Furthermore, in addressing challenges and doubts about the Christian faith, Lewis consistently used logic. He applied rational reasoning to examine issues such as the existence of God, human suffering, and free will. While Lewis acknowledged the role of logic in understanding God's existence, he believed that faith holds deeper value than mere logical arguments. For Lewis, logic and faith are complementary: logic provides a rational foundation, while faith adds spiritual and personal dimensions to one's belief (Marsden, 2016).

### The Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology

Through the study of philosophy, humans are guided toward more critical thinking based on logical reasoning that aligns with sound judgment. Philosophy grounds nearly all its inquiries in this logical framework. Within philosophical discourse, every subject under examination must be dissected and investigated down to its fundamental roots. At this level, when philosophy encounters theology, the resulting conclusions are not always aligned. In

some cases, particularly with extreme philosophical interpretations, philosophy can exert a negative influence, potentially leading individuals to lose their sincere belief in God (Ariance Lende, 2024).

Riawan emphasizes that philosophy plays a crucial role in understanding faith and the truth of God's word. He further explains that philosophical thought has significantly influenced how Christians conceptualize and express the truths of their faith. Early Christian philosophers such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas employed philosophical methods to defend and explain Christian doctrines, making them rationally and systematically acceptable. Philosophy provides a conceptual and analytical framework that enables Christians to reflect upon and communicate the truths of their faith with greater depth, clarity, and accuracy. It opens the mind to logical reasoning, facilitates philosophical argumentation, and allows for the exploration of metaphysical concepts. Through philosophy, Christian thinkers have striven to reconcile the understanding of divine revelation with human reason, aiming to make the essential truths of faith acceptable to sound rationality. From both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, a common thread emerges: philosophy plays a vital role in examining and understanding the truths of faith through rational and critical inquiry. Therefore, philosophy can serve as a reference and tool for reflecting upon and communicating one's faith to the world. However, at the same time, faith remains indispensable for attaining the highest understanding, comprehending the divine mysteries that ultimately transcend human reason (Riawan & Lawalata, 2024).

Christian philosophers have sought to demonstrate that there is no inherent conflict between faith and reason. On the contrary, faith and reason are complementary components in the pursuit of truth. Augustine affirmed that reason is a gift from God to humanity, intended to be used fully and properly to know God. Reason plays a significant role in perceiving and appreciating God's greatness. It also broadens human perspective in observing and evaluating all of God's creations in the universe, which reflect His character and attributes. Meanwhile, Thomas Aquinas distinguished between truths of faith that align with reason and those that surpass reason's capacity. The encounter between faith (theology) and reason (philosophy) has often been viewed as an irreconcilable conflict. However, through the efforts of Augustine and Aquinas, these two domains have been reconciled, allowing them to coexist and function in their respective roles. Philosophy and reason thus serve as partners that aid humans in comprehending and internalizing the truths of faith deeply and meaningfully.

### **The Relationship Between Philosophy and Christian Religious Education**

The presence of philosophy elevates the dignity of education, as philosophy serves as the foundation of education itself. John Chaffee emphasizes the importance of describing all fundamental aspects of philosophy. Philosophy can also give rise to new multi-perspectives, which is why education has evolved and taken root as Christian education. Over the years, Christian Religious Education has undergone significant philosophical changes, driven by shifts in perspectives and varying levels of education among individuals. Not only has Hebrew philosophy greatly influenced Christian education, but Greek philosophical thought has also left its mark. Ruru explain that the philosophy taught by Socrates to Plato plays a fundamental and concrete role in enabling individuals to act decisively, free from any external influences (Ruru & Bilu, 2023).

Essentially, no educational system exists independently of philosophy. Philosophy strives to provide life's purpose and the goals of education, while education offers the means to achieve philosophical fulfillment in life. The dialogical relationship between educational science, philosophy of education, and Christian education, which is directly derived from Christian theology, can guide and facilitate Christian education in achieving its objectives. Educational philosophy articulates a systematic framework and provides practical guidance for the educational process. In the context of philosophy and Christian Religious Education, Christian education seeks its proper place within philosophy, particularly in addressing fundamental issues such as the philosophy of science, ontology, epistemology, and axiology. The philosophy of education attempts to express this in a scheme known as a systematic framework that functions as a guide in practical educational processes (Delahoya, 2024). According to Yao Tung, Christian metaphysics influences educational praxis, particularly in Christian Religious Education, which requires God's presence in every process. This is why theology emerges from this paradigm, serving as humanity's interpretation and response to the Creator (Tung, 2021).

The integration of philosophy into Christian Religious Education is of paramount importance. The philosophy of Christian education provides a strong foundation and deepens the understanding of Christian principles and values. A philosophical approach in Christian education aims to shape positive attitudes and character while strengthening one's trust in God. Philosophy also integrates all aspects of a person's faith values, encompassing every dimension of the student's life.

Philosophy can provide students with a robust theological foundation and teach them how to understand and correctly apply biblical teachings in daily life. The presence of philosophy in Christian education helps students grasp the basic principles of their faith and translate them into tangible actions of love, forgiveness, and sacrifice for others. The concept of Christian educational philosophy encompasses the theoretical foundations and values underlying the Christian educational approach. The philosophy of Christian education is based on the belief that education must involve the development of students' character and faith understanding. One of the fundamental principles in the philosophy of Christian education is the delivery of knowledge centered on Christian teachings. Thus, philosophy makes a significant contribution by enabling conscious and rational reflection on God's goodness as reflected in the values of Christian education (Gulo & Tapilaha, 2024).

Philosophy plays a crucial role in the moral and personality development of students in Christian education. It also functions to instill Christian values in students' daily lives. If Christian education typically focuses solely on general knowledge of Christian teachings, philosophy expands this focus by teaching students to think critically and intelligently, bridging sound reasoning and faith-based knowledge within the framework of Christian teaching.

### **Principles of Christian Religious Education Philosophy**

In the relationship between philosophy and Christian Religious Education, Christian education focuses primarily on the person of God and His works, while philosophy is understood as a discipline that emphasizes reason and logic in understanding various matters. The philosophy used to comprehend the core of Christian teaching is theistic philosophy, which differs from secular philosophy (Van Til, 2010). There are five principles of Christian Religious Education philosophy, as follows: "First, God as the primary source of all things. Here, God plays the central role as the sole creator of the universe. Theistic philosophy serves to highlight this. Thus, Christian Religious Education philosophy is built upon and rooted in the complete and comprehensive truth of God's word".

Second, humans are created in the image and likeness of God. However, throughout a long historical process, humans experienced a fall into sin and separation from God. Nevertheless, human sinfulness and separation from God did not lead God to respond cruelly by discarding or destroying fallen humanity. Instead, God responded to human fallenness with compassion and gracious mercy, restoring and repairing fallen humans to become complete creations and persons once again. Here, Christian Religious Education philosophy views that humans can indeed be restored in spirit, soul, and body - which have been damaged by sin - through the grace-filled truth of Christ.

Third, spirit, soul, and body serve as educational instruments. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can enable humans to radiate the light of God's love. In this regard, Christian Religious Education philosophy focuses and strives hard to demonstrate and prove daily life renewal that aligns with the truth of God's word. Fourth, the universe. In this aspect, Christian Religious Education philosophy views that all creation and the universe must obey and submit to God the creator. This aims to glorify and exalt God alone. Fifth, centered on God's will. Christian Religious Education philosophy not only focuses on the restoration of human identity but also centers on God's will - attitudes of love, justice, and welfare for the entire universe (Wiratmadja, 1980).

### **The Relevance of Philosophy to Christian Religious Education**

History records that philosophy was once positioned as *Ancilla Theologiae* (the handmaid of theology). In this context, philosophy was treated as a servant rather than a critical thinking partner. During this period, there was little progress or advancement in educational and religious knowledge. Instead, decline and chaos prevailed. Historical records show that Socrates was executed by poisoning, accused of dangerously influencing and poisoning the minds of Greek youth to reject the prevailing beliefs in the gods. Furthermore, Christianity itself experienced periods of decline, such as when Galileo was sentenced to death

for his heliocentric theory that challenged church teachings. From these historical accounts, we can preliminarily conclude how dark knowledge becomes when not balanced with philosophy, where reason and rationality work together in understanding universal truths. All these events represent instances that degraded human rational thinking.

The existing fact shows that when philosophy has space for rational and critical thinking, knowledge experiences rapid development simultaneously. The church must stand justly and impartially. The church should not be self-centered, considering itself exclusively right and focusing only on its own truth claims, thinking that its truth comes directly from God. If the church continues to reject reason and degrade rational thinking, Christian Religious Education will certainly never experience healthy development and improvement. Discussing Christian Religious Education does not mean studying only the doctrines and dogmas of a particular church with their respective truth claims. Essentially, the study of Christian Religious Education aims to create an educational atmosphere that breeds critical thinkers who function optimally. Christian Religious Education exists to provide enlightenment and liberate students from teachings that claim exclusive truth and from theological truth claims stemming from narrow-minded perspectives.

There are three relevancies between philosophy and Christian Religious Education, as follows (Sidabutar & Situmorang, 2022); "First, philosophical science must have its place and portion in Christian Religious Education. Philosophy is often considered an enemy of theological science and anything related to God. Such views assume that religious teachings are final and permanent, requiring no other intervention in their study and approach. We realize that life contains both rational and irrational spaces. These should not contradict but complement and coexist. If philosophy and Christian Religious Education work together without dominating each other, students will receive Christian value teachings in a very good and healthy way. This previously occurred during the medieval period. However, in the modern era, philosophers have undertaken rethinking integration between philosophy and theology, leading to the understanding of philosophy as *regina scientiarum* (the queen of sciences).

Philosophy should not be opposed to faith. Because if the two are set against each other, a person's faith can potentially become fragile. This is why Leahy emphasizes that all sciences in this world have their own methods and laws, and these sciences will not accept domination by spiritual institutions. Science will resist the infiltration of faith into its domain (Louis Leahy, 1990). Second, the practice of Christian Religious Education should provide space for freedom of thought. If Christian education and philosophy close off spaces and opportunities for joint discussion while maintaining their respective truth claims, Christian Religious Education will certainly struggle to develop. Conversely, if both have room for discussion, development becomes possible and can lead to significant change. Christian Religious Education should not be limited to church dogmatics alone, which can hinder the development of Christian education itself. Allow philosophical science to work and maneuver freely so that humans can think rationally and critically.

Third, Christian Religious Education should not be exclusive but must open itself. Pazmino states that everything in this world has its philosophical roots. The philosophical root of philosophy lies in its use of logical and critical thinking techniques, even dissecting cases down to their fundamental roots (Pazmino, 2008). Philosophical science bases itself on openness, producing scientific formulations ready for testing and criticism from multiple angles. Based on this phenomenon, Christian Religious Education should be willing to open itself and not be exclusive. Indeed, Christian education science should be willing to receive various sharp criticisms. By doing so, Christian Religious Education is expected to create complete and integrated religious education. The ultimate goal of Christian Religious Education is to provide religiously valuable education while maintaining rationality, thus avoiding teaching based on blind worship. If Christian Religious Education continues to close itself and remain exclusive, it risks falling into Nietzsche's expression that God is dead for religious people. Nietzsche, an atheist philosopher, claimed that only with the death of God can humans achieve maximum civilization.

## 5. Conclusion

The relationship between philosophy, theology, and Christian Religious Education is not antagonistic but rather symbiotic and mutualistic. The initial assumption that positions philosophy as a threat to faith and theology lacks a solid foundation. On the contrary, philosophy serves as a preparation *evangelica*, providing a rational basis for the acceptance of

faith. Through a philosophical approach, the understanding of divine truth can be communicated in a more systematic, critical, and profound manner. Figures such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas have demonstrated that the integration of reason and divine revelation enriches theological exploration and strengthens the foundation of Christian faith. In the context of Christian Religious Education, the presence of philosophy offers a transformative approach. Philosophy not only helps learners develop critical and logical thinking skills but also enables them to reflect on their faith in a more holistic and contextual way. Without philosophy, Christian Religious Education risks falling into a closed and dogmatic approach. Conversely, when philosophy is given an equal space for dialogue, Christian Religious Education can nurture a generation that is not only religious but also rational, inclusive, and relevant to the challenges of the times. Thus, the collaboration between philosophy and theology in Christian Religious Education is not only possible but essential for creating a healthy and sustainable educational dynamic.

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