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Not the final version.

IS PLANTINGA-STYLE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY REALLY PHILOSOPHY?

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Many different sorts of intellectual activity or practise have won the label ‘Christian philosophy.’¹ One of the most influential – certainly in recent years – is that associated with Alvin Plantinga and his friends and associates. It will be my focus in this paper.

Like him, many of Plantinga’s compatriots in the province of Christian philosophy identify with the Reformed tradition of Protestant Christianity. And all accept the basic ideas of what has come to be known as ‘Reformed epistemology.’ So one would not go far wrong in thinking of the variety of Christian philosophy to be discussed here as Reformed Christian philosophy (RCP). That is how I shall refer to it.

RCP has won many adherents and looks set to win many more. It has filled many pages explicitly put forward and widely accepted as containing the results of philosophy, especially philosophy of religion. Here it is apt to note that the journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers, *Faith and Philosophy*, which provides a home for RCP, is regularly characterized both by Christians and by others as one of the foremost journals in philosophy of religion.

But what if RCP, so widely regarded as a form of philosophy, isn't *properly* regarded as such? What if we shouldn't think of it as being philosophy at all? This idea may seem shocking initially, but it becomes much less so on reflection. In this paper I shall defend the proposal that it is true.

1. REFORMED CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

First, however, we need to clarify how RCP is to be understood. Plantinga's account of Christian philosophy begins with philosophical theology, characterized as follows: "Philosophical theology is a matter of thinking about central doctrines of the Christian faith from a philosophical perspective; it is a matter of employing the resources of philosophy to deepen our grasp and understanding of them."ⁱⁱ Plantinga then distinguishes between philosophical theology and what he calls Christian philosophy, which *includes* philosophical theology as he understands it but also includes apologetics (both negative and positive), philosophically developed critiques of culture, and constructive Christian philosophy: the attempt to address philosophy's problems Christianly.ⁱⁱⁱ

RCP, I judge, should be regarded as including everything listed here except for positive apologetics, which Plantinga in the same piece actually critiques from a Reformed perspective. The Reformed epistemological view he has developed, central to RCP, maintains that the fundamental beliefs of Christians should have Christian sources, central among which is an experiential sense of the divine. But even without positive apologetics, the task RCP sets for itself is clearly an ambitious and comprehensive one.

Some of Plantinga's friends and associates, including Nicholas Wolterstorff and Michael Rea, speak more of philosophical theology than of Christian philosophy. But since both are adherents of RCP, and seem to regard philosophical theology as something that RCP should

concern itself with, we can gain further insight into what RCP is about from what they have to say.

In his essay ‘How philosophical theology became possible within the analytic tradition of philosophy,’ Wolterstorff speaks of philosophical theologians addressing “such topics as the relation of God to evil, the precise nature of God’s omnipotence, whether God knows what persons will freely do, whether or not God is eternal, impassible, simple, and so forth.”^{iv}

Although he never attempts a general definition of philosophical theology, Wolterstorff’s way of assuming that readers will know what he’s talking about, something he regards as renewing the work of medieval Christian thinkers, and his close association with Plantinga, comport well with the thought that what he is describing as “possible within the analytic tradition of philosophy” and its topics find a home within the recent resurgence of Christian thought stimulated by Plantinga’s work.

Michael Rea, in the opening pages of *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, which he edited with Thomas Flint, says that philosophical theology is “aimed primarily at theoretical understanding of the nature and attributes of God, and God’s relationship to the world and things in the world.”^v That this includes all of the main Christian themes and everything one might try to do with them in inquiry across a very wide range of problems, employing the resources of philosophy, is evident when one scans the book and its table of contents, noticing discussions of the authority of Scripture, trinity, incarnation, atonement, divine providence and human freedom, divine revelation, the resurrection of the dead, prayer, original sin, and so on.

Recently, Rea has been advocating the idea of “analytic theology,” but as far as I can tell this is just philosophical theology, as he conceives it, under another name, and promoted in such a way as to attract the interest and presumably the active participation of Christian theologians –

it is analytic *philosophical* theology.^{vi} Furthermore it seems clear that the Christian philosopher who engages in it from an RCP perspective may still, as Rea sees it, be regarded as doing philosophy.

Suppose however that I am mistaken about this, and that Rea regards analytic theology as distinct from philosophical theology. Still there would be for Rea, and for many like-minded Christian philosophers, a practice fundamentally like that described by Plantinga, which adherents of RCP may engage in as philosophers doing philosophy. And given what we have found to be the comprehensiveness and ambitiousness of RCP's vision, this practice has to be regarded as involving the production of answers to many philosophical questions and solutions to philosophical problems (both large and small) – answers and solutions that, in the nature of the case, involve or presuppose the truth of one or more Christian claims.

II. THE 'COMMUNAL CONDITION'

So much for what RCP is, and some of what comes with RCPers saying that it is a way of doing philosophy. But here's my question: *should* we say this? I will argue that we should not.

My argument for this proposal hinges on a condition that, so I propose, should be accepted as needing to be satisfied if a working out of solutions to philosophical problems or answers to philosophical problems is to count as philosophy – I call it the *Communal Condition* – and on the failure of RCP to satisfy this condition, due to its failure to deliver, for the benefit of the broader philosophical community, more than hypothetical results. In this section I develop and defend the Communal Condition.

There are many forms of human inquiry, and whatever else philosophy may be, it is one of these. It is up to us as human beings to decide how these forms of inquiry should be

differentiated, and what are the conditions of engaging in one or another of them. It follows that it is up to us as human beings to decide what we will call philosophy.

Now there is considerable disagreement on this matter. If there is unanimity on anything relevant at all, it is on the very general idea that philosophy, as a practise of inquiry, is aimed at solving problems whose distinctiveness comes from their being (or their being rooted in problems that are) more *fundamental* than the problems that tend to be addressed through other disciplines. Philosophy, accordingly, is widely acknowledged to be very hard, and many despair of this area of human inquiry ever progressing very far.

This agreed feature of philosophy already shows the plausibility of my proposal:

The Communal Condition: to be doing philosophy one must aim not just to solve certain fundamental problems, or contribute thereto, but to do so together with likeminded others in a shared enterprise leading to informed consensus.^{vii}

To count as doing philosophy one has to consciously be *a member of the human philosophical community and functioning as such* in the manner indicated. Without acceptance of the Communal Condition we could hardly possess a proper appreciation of what ‘fundamental’ signifies in a human context of inquiry (great difficulty), or be putting forward a sufficiently demanding criterion (consensus) for full satisfaction that philosophical problems have indeed been solved.

The proposal of this Communal Condition for philosophy will, I expect, seem quite modest and intuitive to many. Perhaps this is because its central idea is taken for granted in other areas of inquiry, particularly in science. As indicated, that idea seems, if anything, even more appropriate given the sorts of problems with which philosophy is concerned. But philosophers can be quite individualistic, focused on developing a vision they can regard as authentically their own. So some who hear my proposal may be inclined to resist its communitarian thrust. Why shouldn’t someone who *doesn’t* consciously identify with, and function as a member of, the

wider human philosophical community in the ways I've outlined still count as engaging in the practise of philosophy, so long as she is actively working on philosophical problems?

Well, I have given reasons, based on the needs of inquiry which anyone concerned about such problems should be able to recognize, given only a touch of humility. Here we might also apply moral reasoning that objects to the sort of self-centeredness evinced by non-communitarian philosophers. But another, and perhaps more illuminating, approach will question whether the philosophical individualist can escape my suggested inflection of the philosophical aim as easily as is here suggested. In crafting her own vision, won't she be availing herself of the resources and tools thrown up by generations of philosophizing by others, and depending most on those that have won consensus? Won't she want to see consensus in the future, if only on the view that her own ideas are correct? Alternatively, as a philosopher, mustn't she care whether her ideas are *true*, and take consensus on them as at any rate increasing the likelihood that this is the case? If no answer here is 'yes' then I would surmise that we have *another* reason for saying that our individualist isn't doing philosophy, a more fundamental one; namely, that in the development of her own vision she isn't really engaged in inquiry (or at least not inquiry aimed at answers to fundamental questions) but rather doing art or engaged in a project of self-discovery or some such thing.

In any case, as I've noted it is up to us as humans to decide how we will understand philosophy, and in that spirit I have put forward and justified my proposal. Let's consider now its implications.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF THE COMMUNAL CONDITION

The Communal Condition has consequences. Consider first that one could hardly be functioning consciously as a member of the human philosophical community in the manner indicated if one

were not seeking solutions to philosophical problems *that others in the community too would regard as such when informed of them*. This is because of the goal of achieving consensus within that community. Given the Communal Condition, if at a time one isn't seeking solutions that others in the community too would regard as such when informed of them, one has in effect, at least for the moment, removed oneself from philosophical activity and its goals – and so there is reason to regard one as not then functioning as a member of the philosophical community.

From here it is easy to see that, to be functioning as a member of this community in the manner indicated, one's proposed solution to a philosophical problem – if one has such a thing as a result of philosophical activity and is proposing it in one's capacity as a philosopher – must be *shareable* within the philosophical community. More precisely, it has to be the case that, in principle at least, anyone else in the community could assimilate the intellectual results that are put forward and get to the conclusion that the problem has been solved. More precisely still (and with special attention to that word 'could'), a reason or set of reasons to accept the proposed solution is needed, for the understanding of which and appreciation of whose force no capacities are required, and no conditions need to be satisfied, beyond those possessed and satisfied by everyone in the community.

Of course, whether others in the community do accept one's reasons depends on whether they are found forceful. A capacity to accept does not require actual acceptance. And the understanding, the assimilation, of some reasons may be a difficult business, taking a long time. Assimilability does not entail immediate or swift understanding. In an extreme case it might even, due to the length of time required, not be practically possible. But it must in principle be possible. Furthermore, it should be noted that nothing in what I have said commits me to the

view that solutions to problems must in fact be shared. To be *shareable* they need not be shared. Perhaps life – or death – interferes in a way that prevents this.

Why is shareability so significant here? Well, suppose that in this or that case special conditions do need to be satisfied. Someone announces their results but with the proviso that to understand them or to accept them, being a member of the philosophical community, with what is available to its members, is not enough. Then whoever it is to whom the results are being announced, it cannot be the philosophical community! It cannot be with the aim of contributing to consensus in *this* community that the purported solution was developed and is now announced. And so what one is doing, even if philosophical skills are exhibited and philosophical resources are drawn upon when doing it, and even if one is a philosopher, is not philosophy. (The apparent oddness of this thought will recede if one reflects on how philosophers might use philosophical tools and resources and exercise philosophical skills in many non-philosophical contexts – e.g., when discussing a law case with other jurors or, in the midst of disagreement with a spouse, defending a lie or engaging in evasion.)

These various consequences of the Communal Condition, and particularly the need for shareability, have the further consequence that RCP should be regarded as not really being philosophy, as we will now see.

IV. WHY ‘REFORMED CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY’ IS NOT PHILOSOPHY

The central argument can be stated quite briefly. Among those in the human philosophical community are many non-Christians. So if the results of RCP involving a purported solution to a philosophical problem are to be shareable, it has to be the case that non-Christians could, at least in principle, use what is put forward by RCP to get to the conclusion that the problem has been solved. But that is not the case. The most that adherents of RCP can really share with these

others takes the form of a hypothetical: *if* Christian claim *c* (perhaps buttressed by one or another interpretation of that claim, *i*) is accepted, then a solution to this or that philosophical problem can be reached. *If* Christian Scripture is accepted as authoritative and interpreted thus, *if* the doctrine of atonement is accepted and interpreted thus, *if* the resurrection of the dead is accepted and interpreted thus (and so on), *then* a solution to problems about human fulfilment individually and in relationship, about the deepest moral truths, about personal identity (and so on), can be achieved. The actual solution proposed by RCP in such a case isn't shareable unless adherents of RCP give a reason that can be shared with the wider community for accepting not just the hypothetical but also its antecedent. Quite obviously, we need a shareable reason for propositions of the form (*c&i*). But this RCP, because of its epistemological stance, refuses to provide. Now without shareability, RCP cannot satisfy the Communal Condition. And without satisfying the Communal Condition, RCP should be regarded as not being philosophy. Therefore, RCP should be regarded as not being philosophy. (For some it will be instructive to note that the Christian philosophy of Richard Swinburne, by replacing Plantinga's Reformed epistemology with natural theology, differs precisely here and so may not be subject to this argument.)

Now it *looks* as though RCP must really be philosophy because its purveyors are philosophers located in philosophy departments, who use philosophical tools and resources, and who want to know how philosophical problems are to be solved. But there's a hitch: Reformed Christian philosophers like Plantinga only want to know how those problems are to be solved *given that Christianity is true*. They really are just seeking to determine how *Christians* should think philosophy's problems are to be solved. Their work is intended to contribute to the successful intellectual development and defense of a Christian worldview, of what we might naturally call a Christian Philosophy (which, note carefully, is something that it doesn't take the

activity of philosophy to produce). As we'll see a bit later, such activity might count as theology – even very good theology – but it is not philosophy. Its work is done for the community of Christians, not for the community of philosophers.

V. OTHER OBJECTIONS TO THE ARGUMENT

Earlier I dealt with one or two initial objections to my case. Here I intend to show that other apparent worries and counter-moves can also be dealt with.

(1) “Even if Plantinga & Co. don't make the antecedents of such conditionals as you've mentioned shareable, *other* Christian philosophers might do so (e.g., Swinburne, as you yourself suggest). So it's not the case that the whole Christian philosophical solution to this or that problem *cannot* be shared. Indeed, by hitching their wagon to that of other Christian thinkers, Christian philosophers impressed with Plantinga-style work could right now produce an entire solution that is shareable.”

Quite so. But it doesn't follow that what adherents of *RCP* put forward as a solution, purportedly in their capacity as philosophers, is shareable. So whatever *they're* doing, it isn't philosophy, because it doesn't satisfy the Communal Condition. You're thinking about how *someone else* might defend the antecedent of one of those conditionals using shareable considerations *RCP* does not employ, and if this occurred, *he or she* might indeed be doing philosophy. But, as can be seen, this point is a red herring in the present context. Notice that, given other religious intellectual commitments influencing them, Plantinga types are quite opposed to the idea that any such thing needs to be done (or would even be appropriate to do) in order to solve philosophical problems. They think their 'solutions' count as complete, just as they are, and that the activity involved in producing them counts as philosophy, just as it is. And it is these ideas that my proposal resists.

(2) “Perhaps we could think of the situation *temporally*: what RCP contributes and makes shareable is, for now, a hypothetical, and it can be left to the future to add the rest of what is needed to make the solution complete. It’s already useful to know that *if* Christian claims are true, we can do so much with them philosophically. RCP can be seen as having taken on the limited task of exploring this Christian option, and adding it to other ideas that are presently available in philosophy and on which, in the future, philosophers might build. Precisely because philosophy is hard, we must make room for such limited contributions as well as for more thoroughgoing ones.”

Here I would first note that the implications of Christian claims for philosophical problems have been explored exhaustively over many centuries, so it’s not as though that particular data base in philosophy is lacking, or as though RCP can be seen as explicitly motivated by the need to fill any lacunae here for the benefit of the wider philosophical community. But set that aside. The main problem here is similar to the previous one: advocates of RCP think that in their capacity as philosophers they are producing *complete* solutions, not just partial ones. So if someone wants to treat what they have contributed to philosophy as partial in the manner indicated, it won’t be someone from the RCP camp. Maybe if someone did proceed in this more limited way, *they* could be seen as doing philosophy, but it doesn’t follow that advocates of RCP can legitimately be seen thus. Here note also that even if there are bits and pieces of RCP work that find their way into philosophy and prove useful there, it still doesn’t follow that what RCPers were doing when producing them was philosophy, any more than it follows from the fact that some of what academics in sociology or biology or comparative religion have done finds its way into philosophy, and proves useful there, that those academics were doing philosophy when producing it.

(3) “Many of the solutions to philosophical problems – for example, in epistemology or metaphysics – put forward by Christian philosophers such as Plantinga don’t depend on Christian claims and so can be put forward non-hypothetically. Take, for example, Plantinga’s work on warrant and proper functionalism. So clearly Plantinga types are often functioning as philosophers.”

Nothing in my argument suggests otherwise, and it is important to see this. Though it may be tempting to deplore my reasoning on the grounds that Plantinga is turned by it into something other than a philosopher, when he manifestly is a philosopher, that temptation should be resisted. Evidently, philosophers may not always function as philosophers, and all my argument adds to this obvious point is that they may not be functioning as philosophers even when using philosophical tools and resources, etc. This too should be obvious (some examples were supplied earlier in the paper). Plantinga has done much admirable work as a philosopher, and he has also done much academic work (particularly in connection with his more recent explicit advocacy for RCP) which shouldn’t count as philosophy, for the reasons I have given.

(4) “Your argument runs into a problem suggested by Wolterstorff. After the breakdown of classical foundationalism, he says, analytic philosophers today find themselves working in a situation of ‘dialogic pluralism,’ in which the idea of ‘public philosophical reason’ (‘a body of principles that all philosophers do or should accept’) no longer persuades and in which ‘the philosopher employs whatever considerations he finds true and relevant.’ The voice of the philosophical theologian, Wolterstorff claims, is just one more voice in this pluralistic mix.^{viii}”

Suppose Wolterstorff is right. This poses no problem for my argument. Though it may appear otherwise, my argument does not accept or presuppose the Enlightenment idea of a shared starting point or shared stock of premises in philosophy. Stating it oversimply: ‘shared

premises' are needed not to get started but to *get finished* in philosophy. They come to be emphasized in my argument not as some general requirement imposed from the outset but rather in connection with the satisfaction of the Communal Condition, and here only as something that must *potentially* be achievable through reasons and reasoning that can be shared with others.

(5) "What about the implications of your argument for other sorts of work in the philosophical community – feminist philosophy, Marxist philosophy, and so on – that we should be reluctant to call non-philosophical? It looks as though your argument owes us some reason for overcoming such reluctance."

I don't think my argument has undesirable implications here. The activity of feminists and Marxists and other similar types which we should be most inclined to call philosophy includes ideas all of which can be shared. Feminists, for example, say not only that if you adopt a feminist lens, such-and-such results are achieved, but argue that the feminist lens allows us to see *truths*, and they often do so in ways that are indeed shareable, even if their work does not always lead to wide agreement. (Actually achieved consensus is not an implication of shareability.) Where this is not the case, we have a similar reason to deny that the discipline or practise of philosophy is being engaged in. And note that it would not be surprising *were* this sometimes not the case. On hot matters of social oppression and politics, just as on hot matters of religion, it is easy for human beings to veer into ideological expression or advocacy or activism, even when employing intellectual instruments such as those made available in philosophy, and it is important for us to be sensitive to this possibility.

VI. IS PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION A SPECIAL CASE?

For a last objection, more space will be required. I devote this section to it. On the view to be answered here, it should be obvious that at least in *philosophy of religion*, RCP has a home. Even

if its solutions to the great questions of philosophy don't always contribute in the right way to philosophical discussion of those questions, surely what it has to say specifically on religious matters – all its detailed and sophisticated arguments about such things – should count as philosophical work.

But appearances are deceiving. Insofar as it is *RCP* that is being done, as distinct from work that doesn't depend on Christian assumptions (and RCPers may sometimes do such work, even if not in their capacity as RCPers), we shouldn't call efforts on matters religious by Christian philosophers *philosophy* of religion. The appearance that, even given acceptance of the Communal Condition, things are otherwise is, I surmise, generated at least in part by Christianity's influence in the wider culture. The many philosophers who don't care enough about religion to participate in philosophy of religion nonetheless often assume that 'it's either Christianity or naturalism,' and so are not motivated to protest against the claim of Plantinga and his acolytes when they say they too are doing philosophy of religion. (If 'Christianity' seems too narrow here, substitute 'biblical religion.')

And one finds even non-Christian philosophers far too easily accepting Christian assumptions about God.

Even non-Christian philosophers of religion easily accept, for example, that a Divine reality would be a personal being with fairly pronounced masculine tendencies, that a personal God would create other things, that what God creates would be physical and unfold through evolutionary processes, that if God creates persons, they will be (or be like) human beings, that God would create persons with libertarian free will, that if a full revelation of God to human persons were made available, it would be to humans as early in their evolutionary career as we are, and so on. And so it can come to seem that Christians whose arguments presuppose one or another of these ideas when suggesting a solution to problems in philosophy of religion are

really *offering a solution* to the field rather than just delivering a hypothetical. But that is not the case. If one wishes without special Christian (or other religious) influence to apply metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and so on to truly *fundamental* religious questions, and to deliver back to those areas of philosophy the results of one's investigations, as we in philosophy of religion should be doing, then a much greater openness to unfamiliar ideas is needed and all those Christian assumptions I've listed should start to appear seriously questionable. Then we should ask for arguments justifying them.

Why, for example, with such openness and without the special influence of western religion, would we make the idea of a personal God the central religious idea in our philosophical reflections, assuming that an ultimate Divine reality would have to be exclusively personal? Why would we treat *this* idea as most fundamental when it so clearly is a variation on a broader theme, variously construable, whose other variations cry out for discovery and explication? Why, even if we're focusing on God, would we assume that a God would create a physical world rather than a purely spiritual one, or human persons rather than any number of other things, including persons of other sorts?

The lack of such openness, and the factors (probably including cultural influences) which prevent it, mean that RCP and its products have impacted philosophy of religion far more strongly than they should have. We have allowed work that isn't really philosophy to shape the contours of the field far more than it ought to have done. All that RCP can *really* contribute in philosophy of religion, for example on the problem of evil or the hiddenness problem, even where the existence of God is not assumed, again takes the form of a hypothetical: *if* we agree to think of God Christianly, in the way that commends itself to RCPers, *then* the problem of evil or

the hiddenness problem can be solved. And this is not enough to make the activity of RCP philosophy.

Here there is instead a ‘missing step’ that urgently needs to be drawn to the attention of the broader community of philosophers of religion. RCP needs to be able to argue that its understanding of God represents how we *should* think about God. (As it happens, other forms of Christian philosophy, including Swinburne’s, are allowed to get away with far too thin an argumentative justification here too.) And RCP has shown itself to be uninterested in doing so in ways that are shareable across the full range of philosophers who might be expected to consider fundamental questions about religion. Thus, even in connection with philosophy of religion, RCP should not be regarded as really amounting to philosophy.

VII. THEOLOGY, NOT PHILOSOPHY

So if RCP isn’t philosophy, what is it? In a word: theology. As David Tracy puts it in a paper called ‘Theological Method,’ theologians make up “a community of inquiry grounded in a community of commitment.”^{ix} And as countless introductory theology textbooks will tell you by page 2, theology is faith seeking understanding – or at any rate a deeper or more precise understanding. What motivates the features of RCP that distinguish its work from philosophy is therefore at the same time the essential starting point of theology.

As Plantinga himself has said, what the RCPer is doing “is a specific way of working out her vocation as a Christian.”^x He of course still wants to call it philosophy, because the RCPer is working out solutions to philosophical problems. But, as we have seen, even so, it should not be identified thus. And now we can also see that, since this ‘specific way of working out her vocation as a Christian,’ using philosophical resources and techniques and aimed at philosophical questions, is part of the project of faith seeking understanding, it ought to be seen

as theology. One might even call it *philosophical* theology, but since it is occurring as part of *this other quite non-philosophical enterprise*, which has its own community, it isn't properly called philosophy. Indeed, these points about theology give us another reason to say so.

It will be good here to emphasize that those who accept this view need not take it to show up a defect or fatal flaw in theology, as so many of its sneering critics from Bertrand Russell and Walter Kaufmann to Richard Dawkins and Jerry Coyne have done.^{xi} Theology and philosophy are just different animals, and someone with intellectual gifts whose primary reflective commitment is to God and her community of faith might well be irresponsible if she did not become a theologian. (I will, of course, reserve the right to disagree with her about the existence of God; I will take issue with her religious beliefs at the level of type even if not at the level of token.) It follows that by reconceiving what she is doing as belonging to theology and not to philosophy, even though she herself is a philosopher, the philosophical theologian can be justified in proceeding confidently, without defensiveness or fear of reproach.

In his paper on philosophical theology mentioned earlier, Nicholas Wolterstorff alludes to a common criticism, namely, that the philosophical theologian lacks the "critical spirit of the true philosopher." Those who make it he regards as trying to "belittle" philosophical theology.^{xii} Well, there's a win-win solution here where Wolterstorff recognizes that he's *not* exercising the critical spirit of the true philosopher in relation to religion, and where the critic recognizes that this is not a defect but rather a choice Wolterstorff has made in order to pursue the alternative form of inquiry we call theology. At the end of that paper, Wolterstorff briefly raises the question whether philosophical theology (what he has in mind appears to be RCP) is philosophy or theology. "Is it philosophy or is it theology?," he says, and then he responds to his own question:

“what difference does it make...? Call it what you will.”^{xiii} The case here concluded suggests that it makes a very great difference, and that we should learn to call RCP theology, full stop.

VIII. WHY IT MATTERS

But is it really so great a difference – in ways that truly matter? It may seem to some that I am hung up on a fairly trivial distinction, and that the conceptual points I have been pressing don't, even if right, allow us to make much headway in philosophy.

I don't think this is true, and in this concluding section will make the point in relation to philosophy of religion. If the case I have made were accepted, then we would look at philosophy of religion very differently, and, considering it thus, would be in a position to make serious progress with it – serious progress that is now being held back by the influence of RCP. Indeed, if I'm right, then we should conclude that a great deal of what today and yesterday has gone by the name of philosophy of religion, in particular many of the religious intellectual activities of Christian philosophers, should be counted as theology (even if philosophical theology) instead. And this means that the great resurgence of philosophy of religion that everyone talks about hasn't yet happened, for that alleged resurgence, as we all know, is associated primarily with Christian philosophers such as Plantinga. Directions very different from some commonly taken today, and indeed taken for granted, may *need* to be taken if we want to provide for philosophy of religion a new birth in our time. And perhaps they soon will be taken.

Now such ideas might at first seem disillusioning and perhaps disheartening to some in philosophy of religion who accept them, but I think a more considered view will find them exciting and liberating – an invitation to the imagination. Philosophy of religion, genuinely resurgent, would express, in fundamental matters concerning religion, a kind of unbounded intellectual curiosity and drive to understand – a curiosity unbounded in respect of what religious

ideas and ideas about religion provoke its interest; how deeply and charitably it will want to understand them; and how widely it will spread its net in trawling for candidate understandings. It would be ethics and epistemology and metaphysics and logic as well as philosophy of religion. It would be grounded in a wide acquaintance with the religious traditions of the world but would also exercise imagination in pursuit of brand new religious conceptions and attitudes. It would certainly want to make effective use of analytical tools, but it would not sneer at the continentals or ignore the history of philosophy. There would be room in it for pragmatist and Wittgensteinian and feminist and many other proposals (and do remember that I too have offered nothing more than a proposal), though expressions and defenses of private conviction it would shun. And in this it would be supported by what can be learned from science: the overlooked insight that we exist at what may be the very beginning of an enormously long search for the deepest and most powerful intellectual and spiritual insights. We are working on profound matters with primitive minds.

Suppose that philosophy of religion thus (re)oriented begins to take shape. Then we will see the significance of accepting my case. For then the in-boxes of philosophers of religion will be stuffed with a great deal more than the arguments of RCP and similarly influenced forms of Christian philosophy, however analytically sharp they can be made to be. Who knows what conclusions will appear to be supported then, all things considered?

Call such inquiry as I have described *exploratory philosophy of religion*. Exploratory philosophy of religion has not yet found a clear place in the annals of human inquiry. (When it has, we can go back to speaking simply of ‘philosophy of religion.’) In our own time and place, real or exploratory philosophy of religion has been held back, in part, because of our tendency to

conflate philosophy of religion and the sort of work done by RCP. We should distinguish those two, and so bring *philosophy* of religion – and philosophy of *religion* – more fully into being.

NOTES

ⁱ As indicated by this sentence, when speaking of philosophy I shall have in mind the distinctive *practise* or way of *being* we associate with philosophy – a shared *form of life* embracing characteristic desires, emotions, and intentions, as well as corresponding action dispositions, primarily but not exclusively involving thought. Philosophy as practise has of course spawned various institutional realities, but the conjunction of such things I would regard as only secondarily deserving the label ‘philosophy.’

ii. Alvin Plantinga, ‘Christian philosophy at the end of the twentieth century,’ in James F. Sennett, ed., *The Analytical Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 340.

iii. Ibid., p. 335.

iv. Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘How philosophical theology became possible within the analytic tradition of philosophy,’ in Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea, eds., *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 155.

v. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 4.

vi. See Crisp and Rea, *Analytic Theology*, Introduction.

vii ‘Likeminded,’ to exclude the possibility of non-relevant partners, and ‘informed,’ to exclude non-relevant causes for consensus.

viii. Wolterstorff, ‘How philosophical theology became possible,’ pp. 164-166.

ix. David Tracy, 'Theological Method,' in Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King, eds. *Christian Theology: An Introduction to its Traditions and Tasks*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 57-58.

x. Plantinga, 'Christian philosophy,' p. 352.

xi. See, for example, Coyne's appeal to Kaufmann, here:

<http://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2013/01/15/quote-of-the-day-walter-kaufmann-defines-theology/>

xii. Wolterstorff, 'How philosophical theology became possible,' p. 156.

xiii. Ibid., p. 168.