

Anti-Christian attacks and philosophies may come from outside the Church or from within it. Both kinds must be defended against and responded to.

This polemic function of the Church may also be seen in the early Church's responses to Jewish and pagan attacks on Christianity in the second and third centuries. It may also be seen in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles*.

In J. I. Packer's foreword to Bruce Milne's *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1982), Packer speaks to the necessity of Systematic Theology:

The chaplain used to take chapel-going undergraduates for pastoral walks, which is how I came to be shambling along beside him that raw afternoon in my first term. He was urging me to read theology, the subject which he himself taught, as a sequel to the classics degree on which I had embarked. I explained to him that I would rather not, since theology was so bad for one's soul. "Nonsense!" exploded he, with what may have been the loudest snort in history; "theology's the queen of the sciences!" Then he fell silent, and so did I, and thus we finished our walk. I thought him unenlightened. What he thought about me is not on record. But he had every reason to feel miffed. He was right, and knew enough to know that he was right, and I was wrong as an opinionated ignoramus of 18 could possibly be. In my time I have dropped clangers in abundance, but none so daft or discourteous as what I said that afternoon.

Why did I talk such twaddle? The awful truth is that, as a Christian of about six weeks' standing, I was regurgitating what I had heard in the Christian Union that was nurturing me. No doubt there was some excuse for dark suspicions. In the war years Oxbridge theology was not at its best, and as sad experience shows bad theology infects the heart with misbelief and unbelief, the spiritual equivalents of multiple sclerosis. Many who ran well have been progressively paralysed through ingesting bad theology, and the danger remains. Also, theological expertise can feed intellectual pride, turning one into a person who cares more for knowing true notions than for knowing the true God, and that is disastrous too. But this only shows how a good thing can be spoiled. *Corruptio optimi pessima* (corruption of what is best is the worst corruption); nevertheless, *abusus non tollit usum* (misuse does not take away right use). Thankfully I record that by God's mercy I saw in due course that I had been talking through my hat, and I followed classics with theology, after all -- a move that I never regretted, and would not hesitate to recommend to anyone else.

It has been said that a habit of personal Bible study makes the study of theology unnecessary. But in fact you penalize yourself as a Bible student by not studying theology, for theology (that is, an overall grasp of Bible teaching) enriches Bible study enormously. How? By enabling you to see more of what is there in each passage. As the effect of knowing botany is that you notice more flora and fauna on a country walk, and the effect of knowing electronics is that you see more of what you are looking at when you take apart your TV, so the effect of knowing