

Bridging the internalist-Externalist Divide: A Catholic-Reformed Epistemological Synthesis of the Justification of Christian Beliefs.

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Abstract : Although the Catholic and Reformed traditions share a common baptismal heritage, they differ considerably in their epistemic stance on whether a believer can legitimately subscribe to a proposition of Christian Revelation without any evidence. Catholic tradition, which is essentially rooted in the internalist epistemology, posits that a theistic belief must be substantiated by a rational ground that is cognitively accessible to the believer. In contrast, Reformed thinkers have historically maintained a non-evidentialist stance, which has received strong criticism, including allegations of irrationality. However, recent developments in analytic philosophy, particularly the rise of externalist epistemology, have revitalized the non-evidentialist position within the Reformed tradition. The intellectual allure of this movement has led many contemporary thinkers to argue that the Catholic internalist/evidentialist position has not only been significantly challenged but has also been largely silenced by this externalism-based Reformed epistemological stance. Consequently, they argue that the non-cognitive Reformed current has established itself as the dominant, or perhaps the only, epistemological position in the philosophy of religion. This paper counters the prevailing narrative, arguing that despite the ostensible challenge posed by Reformed non-evidentialism, a synthesis is possible. By analyzing various Reformed epistemological movements within the contemporary analytic tradition, we demonstrate that externalist-based Reformed epistemology does not fundamentally undermine Catholic evidentialism. Instead, it offers a new and more promising framework for a Christian epistemology that synthesizes elements from both traditions, offering a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the justification of religion belief, incorporating both internalist and externalist perspectives.

Keywords : reformed and catholic epistemology, evidentialism, non-evidentialism, internalism, externalism

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