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Rethinking the Christian Philosophy Debate: An Old Puzzle and Some New Points of Orientation

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The "Christian philosophy" debate was one of the most important and embittered debates in Catholic philosophical circles this century. However in sifting through the comments and writings of the chief interlocutors in the debate one is often at a loss to specify what exactly was at issue. None would deny that the debate centered upon a proper understanding of the relationship of faith and reason, but what is surprising was the amount of disagreement that prevailed in the debate among individuals who as Catholics emphatically agreed to the one that faith cannot contradict reason nor reason faith. The debate, when not a matter of impassioned voices talking past one another (something far from infrequent), focused on rather fine-grained questions of intellectual method and intellectual purpose—on the scope, limits, and value of philosophic inquiry in a Catholic Christian context.

In this article I wish to underscore the relevance of this debate for the contemporary philosophic enterprise and to retail and critically discuss the views of some, though by no means all, of the important voices in the debate. My hope is to untangle some of the debate's more vexing knots and to indicate some conclusions that can be drawn from it. I thus intend this paper to be more clarificatory and suggestive than providing a definitive solution.

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1. Opening Salvos

Disputes about the proper understanding of the relationship between faith and reason are and have been in principle possible in any society or culture in which there have been individuals claiming to possess some authoritative message from the divine. But there can be no denying that the faith-reason question has taken on its greatest significance in cultures created or informed by the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition. The views of Tertullian, St. Augustine, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther on these matters are well known. However, it was not a recounting of their views, nor a re-examination of the debates in which they were engaged, which touched off the Christian philosophy debate in the early 1930's. It was rather the views of an influential French historian of philosophy, Emile Brehier, as they were presented at an historic meeting of the *Societé francaise de philosophie*[1]. Brehier's views were not new: they typified, if eloquently, a mainstay of Enlightenment historiography. But in the precise time and place in which they were presented, there were a number of able interlocutors at hand to dispute Brehier's claims—interlocutors scarcely less knowledgeable than he of the early history of Western philosophic thought.

As for Brehier, he saw in the middle ages a falling away from the grandeur and originality of Greek philosophy. For him what was and is commonly called "scholasticism" was nothing but a pastiche of warmed over Greek philosophy and Christian dogmatic theology. Between Plotinus and Descartes, Brehier argued, there was a vast philosophic abyss. The middle ages had little philosophic originality and that originality was always kept in check by unbending religious dogma. For Brehier it was simply impossible to maintain that authentic and profound philosophy could be done in an intellectual and cultural context where supposed supernatural faith and the deliverances of a supposed supernatural revelation would serve as the supreme arbiters and judges of all the truth claims of reason[2].

The responses to Brehier's depiction of medieval scholasticism were as swiftly forthcoming as they were staunchly contradictory of the French historian's claims. Preeminent among these responses, and notable for both the respect they

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[1] See *La notion de la philosophie chrétienne* (Compte rendu à la séance du 21 mars 1931), «Bulletin de la Societé Francaise de la Philosophie» 38 (1931), pp. 37-93. Brehier treated the issue at length in an article published after the March 21 *séance: Y a-t-il une philosophie chrétienne?*, «Revue de Metaphysique et Morale» 38 (1931), pp. 133-62.

[2] See BREHIER, *Y a-t-il* ..., pp. 135-40, 145-50 where he discusses the Augustinian legacy for would-be Christian philosophy: «Le christianisme va-t-il donc ... se créer à lui-meme sa philosophie, être l'initiateur d'un mouvement intellectual nouveau ... ? [T]out à l'inverse, des Chrétiens ... comme Saint Augustin annexent au christianisme tout ce qu'ils peuvent de la philosophie paienne» (p. 135). Also, « ... à partir de saint Augustin, une tradition très important que l'on pourrait croire être celle même de la philosophie chrétienne si l'on ne s'avisait que cette pretendue "philosophie chrétienne" est tout entière empruntée à Plotin et à Platon» (p. 136). In Aquinas there is no original "Christian philosophy" since for Aquinas «la foi exerce sa censure sur la philosophie, mais ne lui fournit aucune aide positive, aucune impulsion» (p. 144), and «le thomisme suppose toujours que la raison est incapable de trouver en elle même sa propre mesure et sa propre règle» (p. 147).

then commanded and their intrinsic depth and degree of development, were those of Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain. The tack of Gilson's response was frankly historical; Maritain's was largely doctrinal. The two professed substantial agreement with one another. Maritain endorsed the findings of Gilson's historical research and accepted Gilson's sweeping reading of the development of medieval thought on the faith-reason question. Gilson stated his agreement with Maritain's more technical solution to the problem and praised Maritain's philosophic work as exemplary of genuine Christian philosophy in the making[3].

Gilson founded his defence of the suitability and usefulness of the notion of "Christian philosophy" on a reading of the important Christian thinkers in the patristic and medieval period from the Latin apologist Justin up to Nicholas of Cues. It was in the course of his work on these thinkers, Gilson claimed, that he first discovered the existence of a meaningfully and distinctively *Christian* philosophic project.[4]

Agreeing, as all the important interlocutors in the debate did, that Christian philosophy did not and could not designate an abstract essence (anymore than one could speak meaningfully of a "Christian mathematics" or a "Christian physics"), Gilson nonetheless maintained that the notion of Christian philosophy was necessary and indispensable for characterizing a concrete historical reality[5]—that historical phenomenon of a certain body of philosophic truths having been arrived at according to a particular method[6]. The method Gilson had in mind was the one

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[3] Gilson: « ... peut-on ... conserver un sens à la notion de philosophie chrétienne? On le peut à la condition de ramener le problème sur le plan de l'histoire» (*La notion ...*, p. 39). Also, «La philosophie chrétienne n'est une réalité objectivement observable que pour l'histoire, et que son existence n'est positivement démonstrable que pour l'histoire, mais que, son existence étant ainsi établie, sa notion peut être analysée en elle-même et qu'elle doit l'être comme vient de la faire M. J. Maritain. Je suis donc entièrement en accord avec lui» (*L'Esprit de la Philosophie Médiévale*, Libraire Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris 1932, t. 2, p. 290). Maritain, in a work published two years after the *séance*: «M. Etienne Gilson n'a pas seulement posé la question, il en a apporté une précieuse élucidation historique dans son ouvrage *L'Esprit de la Philosophie Médiévale*. Marquons ici dès maintentant notre accord foncier avec lui. Mais tandis qu'il s'est délibérément placée au point de vue de l'histoire, ce sont les éléments d'une solution d'ordre doctrinal que nous voudrions essayer de rassemble» (*De la Philosophie Chrétienne*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1933, p. 13).

[4] One can consult Gilson's magisterial *The History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Random House, New York 1955) where he lays out some of the mature results of his historical research.

[5] «S'il existe des systèmes philosophiques, purement rationels dans leur principes et leurs méthodes, dont l'existence ne s'expliquerait pas sans l'existence de la religion chrétienne, les philosophies qu'ils définissent méritent le nom de philosophies chrétiennes. Cette notion ne correspond donc pas au concept d'une essence pure: celle de philosophie ou celle de chrétien, mais à la possibilité d'une réalité historique complexe: celle d'une révélation génératrice de raison. Les deux ordres restent distincts, bien que la relation que les unit soit intrinsèques» (GILSON, *La notion...*,p. 39).

[6] « ... cet effort de la vérité crue pour se transformer en vérité sue, c'est vraiment la vie de la sagesse chrétienne, et le corps des vérités rationelles que cet effort nous livre, c'est la philosophie chrétienne» (GILSON, *L'Esprit*, p. 33).

characteristic of medieval scholasticism itself: faith seeking as much rational comprehension of revelation as possible and pressing philosophic principles and results into the construction of the science of sacred theology in the process[7].

"Christian philosophy" designated for Gilson, then, the body of philosophic truths «discovered, explored, or simply safeguarded» by those thinkers engaged in the project of seeking to understand the contents of the Christian faith[8]. To say Christian philosophy was and is a meaningful and important expression was simply to say that many Christian thinkers, especially those in the middle ages, have pursued a more or less unique, more or less uniform approach to the practice of philosophy (purely rational philosophy that is: reason seeking knowledge according to natural evidence alone), and that they have generated in this process a number of significant and original philosophic results[9].

Christian philosophy was not for Gilson, however, some *mere* body of philosophic truths, neutral with respect to Christianity and open to the supernatural order[10]. It was more a-body-of-particular-truths-arrived-at-according-to-a-particular-

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[7] « ... si l'oeuvre de la création n'est pas abolie, rien de plus utile pour cés theologiens que de se pencher sur elle afin de l'interroger sur son auteur, ou, comme de patients médicins, de chercher à retrouver sa forme originelle sous les maux qui la défigurent, pour lui en enseigner les remèdes. Mais ces remèdes, comment les appliquer sans connaître de l'anatomie de l'âme, et comment de l'âme sans le corps, le corps sans l'univers dont il fait partie. Assurement, il n'est pas necessaire de savoir ces choses pour prêcher le salut, ni pour le recevoir, mail s'il vient à se constituer une "science salutaire", c'est-a-dire une théologie, comment, enseignant à sauver le monde, se désentéresserait-elle du monde qu'elle veut sauver.... [L]es penseurs du moyen âge ... eussent été chargés de la double résponsabilité de maintenir une philosophie de nature, tout en édifiant une théologie de la surnature, et d'integrer la première à la seconde en un système cohérent» (GILSON, *L'Esprit*, t. 2, p. 223).

[8] «Le contenu de la philosophie chrétienne est donc le corps des vérités rationelles qui ont été découvertes, approfondies ou simplement sauvegardées, grâce à l'aide que la révélation a apportée à raison» (GILSON, *L'Esprit,* pp. 36-7).

[9] Summing up in the final chapter of *L'Esprit de la Philosophie Médiévale,* a work which stands as a massive empirical falsification of the Brehier thesis of the non-influence of Christianity on philosophy, Gilson states: «La dette du moyen âge à l'égard de la Grèce est immense, et rien n'est plus connu, mais la dette de l'hellenisme à l'egard du moyen âge n'est pas moindre et rien n'est plus méconnu; car cette religion même que le moyen âge enseignait, la philosophie grecque n'etait pas sans pouvoir en apprendre quelque chose; le Christianisme lui a permis de fournir une nouvelle carrière en lui communiquant sa propre vitalité » (t. 2, p. 224).

[10] «Une philosophie ouverte au surnaturel serait assurément une philosophie compatible avec le Christianisme, ce ne serait pas nécessairement une philosophie chrétienne. Pour qu'une philosophie méritent ce titre, il faut que le surnaturel descende, à titre d'élément constitutif, non dans sa texture, ce qui serait contradictoire, mais dans l'oeuvre de sa constitution. J'appele donc philosophie chrétienne *toute* philosophie que, bien que distinguant formellement les deux ordres, considère la révélation chrétienne comme un auxiliare indispensable de la raison» (GILSON, *L'Esprit*, p. 39). Gilson had in mind «philosophies qui n'ont été ce qu'ils furent parce qu'il a existé une religion chrétienne et qu'ils ont voluntairement subi l'influence» (*L'Esprit*, p. 39).

method[11]. He insisted that for philosophy to be Christian it would have to be generated thanks to an *intrinsic connection* between faith and the exercise of reason that constituted that philosophy[12]. Claude Tresmontant later expanded on this notion of Christian philosophy by likening it to "Newtonian" physics or "Riemannian" geometry. By right there need not have been such a philosophy: in fact there was, and is, and still can be, one[13]. History reveals, Gilson insisted, that Christian thinkers have enormously enriched the patrimony of Western philosophy[14].

Jacques Maritain, drawing on a rich personal experience with the faith-reason question and trumpeting as a motto of the spirit of Aquinas *distinguer pour unir,* began his first considered treatment of the Christian philosophy question by

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[11] According to Gilson, the typical attitude of Christian thinkers in the patristic and medieval period toward method in inquiry was the following. One would scarcely find a Christian who would maintain, «la légitimité d'un exercice de la raison qui fût purement philosophique et systematique soustrait a l'influence de la foi .... L'exercice de la raison pure leur semble assurément possible, et comment en douter après Platon et Aristote? Mais ils se tiennent toujours sur le plan des conditions de fait dans lesquelles s'exerce la raison, non sur celui de la définition. Or, c'est un fait qu'entre les philosophes grecs et nous il y a un Révélation chrétienne et qu'elle a profondément modifié les conditions dans lesquelles la raison s'exerce. Comment ceux qui ont cette révélation pouraient-ils philosopher comme s'ils ne l'avaient pas? Les erreurs de Platon et Aristote sont précisément les erreurs de la raison pure; toute philosophie qui prétendera se suffice retombera dans les mêmes, ou dans les autres qui seront pires, de sorte que la seule méthode sûre consiste désormais pour nous à prendre la révélation comme guide afin de parvenir a quelque intelligence de son contenu, et c'est cette intelligence de la révélation qui est la philosophie même. *Fides quaerens intellectum,* voilà le principe de toute spéculation médiévale ...» (*L'Esprit*, p. 5).

[12] « ... la philosophie chrétienne: sa foi le met en possession d'un critère, d'une règle de jugement, d'un principe de discernement et de sélection, qui lui permettent de rendre la verité rationelle à elle-même en la libérant de l'erreur ou elle s'embarasse» (GILSON, *L'Esprit*, p. 33).

[13] TRESMONTANT, Claude, *Christian Metaphysics*, trans. Gerard Slevin, Sheed and Ward Inc., New York 1965, p. 147.

[14] «Something happened to philosophy during the fourteen centuries which we call the middle ages. The easiest way to see what happened is to remember the general view of the world propogated by the last Greek philosophers and to compare it with the interpretation of the world common to the founders of modern philosophy, namely, Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz, Spinoza, and Locke. In the seventeenth century, the commonly received philosophical notions of God, the origin of the world, of the nature of man and of his destiny are strikingly different than those which the middle ages had inherited from the Greeks .... With Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz, the point of departure of modern philosophy coincides with the point of arrival of medieval theology. Even Spinoza cannot be fully accounted for without taking into account the speculation of the middle ages. To overlook what happened to philosophy in the thirteenth century is to deprive the history of Western thought of its continuity, and, by the same token, of its intelligibility» (GILSON, *History*, p. 542). Gilson, too, credits Christian speculation with having kept Greek philosophy alive: «In point of fact, it is not philosophy that kept Chrisitianity alive during fourteen centuries, rather, it is Christianity that did not allow philosophy to perish» (*History*, p. 6). See also «Historical Research and the Future of Scholasticism,» (*A Gilson Reader*, ed. A. Pegis, Double day and Co. Inc., Garden City, N.Y. 1957 pp. 156-67) where Gilson emphatically states: «All the decisive steps of progress made by Western philosophy in the middle ages were made in relation to points of doctrine, in which the *intellectus fidei* in some way evoked philosophical originality» (p. 162).

asking what relation a Christian's spiritual life should have to his work as a philosopher[15]. Christians have always believed, Maritain pointed out, that grace and cooperation with grace heal the wounds inflicted on the soul by original and actual sin. Grace thereby improves the quality of even the soul's natural acts. A Christian with a strong spiritual life can, thanks to the *confortations* of grace, do philosophy better[16]. And, on account of the light of faith and the revelation of certain supernatural truths, the Christian is aided by clue in his efforts to penetrate, by natural reason alone, the nature of what is[17]. Faith steers his natural lights away from blind alleys and, through the work of theology, guides natural reason along previously untrodden paths leading it to strictly rational discoveries[18]. The uniting of faith with reason in the quest for philosophic truth is thus doubly beneficial for the Christian. Not only has Christian philosophy, a body of philosophic truths not Christian in its abstract essence or *nature* ("order of specification"), but in its context and conditions of elaboration or *state* ("order of exercise") existed, Maritain argued, but such a philosophy should exist and that for the sake of philosophy itself[19].

The view that emerges out of the thought of Gilson and Maritain on the question can be summarized as follows: philosophy is not and cannot be essentially Christian, or Muslim, or Hindu, or anything else. Essentially it can be only itself—the attempt of natural reason, drawing on natural evidence alone in its attempted demonstrations, to arrive at a knowledge of the supreme causes and first principles of what is. But a supernatural faith like Christianity can provide a significant accidental modification of philosophy: one can with justification and the facts of history to support one, speak of philosophy and purely philosophic results discovered, explored, or safeguarded, or defended thanks to the aid granted thinkers by the Christian revelation. These results have been significant enough to indicate that, among the countless accidental or extrinsic ways the notion of philosophy can be modified, the Christian modification is a highly significant one[20]. And more than a legitimate descriptive title the notion of Christian philosophy points to a beneficial, spiritually salutary, and in

15 MARITAIN, *Philosophie Chrétienne*, p. 9.
16 *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4.
17 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
18 *Ibid.*, pp. 44-5.
19 «C'est a tous ces titres qu'il faut dire que la foi guide ou oriente la philosophie, *veluti stella rectrix*, sans léser pour cela son autonomie, car c'est toujours selon ses lois propres et ses principes propres, et en vertu des seuls critères rationelles, que la philosophie juge les choses qui, bien que naturellement accessibles à la seule raison ne seraient pas, de fait, reconnues ou gardées sans mélange d'erreur pur de la raison si celle-ci n'était à la fois rendue attentive à leur existence, et rendue plus forte elle-même par une sorte de continuité vitale avec des lumières supérieures» (MARITAIN, *Philosophie Chrétienne*, p. 54).
20 It was the continual insistence of Gilson and Maritain that, for a given bit of philosophy to be considered Christian philosophy, its production had to have been the work of faith and philosophic reason *intrinsically united.* Thus Maritain: «Nous rejoigne ainsi les conclusions de M. Gilson "Les deux ordres restent distincts, bien que la relation qui les unit soit intrinsèque" Cette relation n'est pas accidentale, elle résulte de la nature même de la philosophie, de ses aspirations naturelles à connaître ses objets propres le mieux possible, et de la vie chrétienne, des renforcements externes et internes qu'elle apportent à la raison» (MARITAIN, *Philosophie Chrétienne*, p. 56).

some sense necessary way of practicing philosophy for the Christian. It emphasizes the need and even duty a Christian has to integrate his philosophic work with his life of faith, a point we will return to later.

2. The Critics

Even in their own era the views of Maritain and Gilson on this matter fell far short of obtaining universal acceptance among Catholic philosophers and theologians. In the present day, one of the most balanced and careful criticisms has come from Fr. John Wippel[21]. Part of Fr. Wippel's criticism of Gilson has to do with an exegetical question which I wish to skirt here: that of the possibility and advisability of distilling and reconstructing, from the predominantly theological corpus of the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, a theologically unadulterated Thomistic philosophy[22]. But Fr. Wippel has expressed other reservations with Gilson's view. His central reservation would appear to be his fear that accepting Gilson's position without qualification would commit one to holding that: a) all Christians wishing to do authentic Christian philosophy would have in a very real sense to become theologians, and b) such Christians would have to become theologians *prior* to their doing any Christian philosophy[23].

A second concern of Fr. Wippel's has been, without getting rid of the notion of Christian philosophy itself, to distinguish within that notion two varieties of Christian philosophy: philosophy done in the interests of serving theology, and philosophy done for its own sake (i.e. a distinction Fr. Wippel does not see Gilson having made). On the basis of what he has expressed in print Fr. Wippel's criticism of Gilsonian Christian philosophy can be reduced to the following:

1) Even when a question of the purely instrumental study and practice of philosophy for a theological end, it is excellence in philosophy that must precede excellence in theology and not vice versa[24].

2) There is not and cannot be a Christian philosophy where supernatural truths of the Christian faith, held on faith as such, would serve as premisses from which could be deduced determinate philosophic truths. A philosophy can be truly and authentically Christian only in its moment of discovery and never in its moment of proof. Such a philosophy can and will be Christian and remain philo-

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[21] See, for example, WIPPEL, J., *Etienne Gilson and Christian Philosophy*, in RYAN, J. K. (ed.), *Twentieth Century Thinkers*, Alba House, Staten Island, N.Y. 1964, pp. 159-87; *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 1984, ch. 1, «Thomas Aquinas and the Problem of Christian Philosophy», pp. 1-33; and, *The Possibility of a Christian Philosophy: a Thomistic Perspective* «Faith and Philosophy», 3 (1984), pp. 272-90.

[22] WIPPEL, *Possibility*, ... p. 279.

[23] WIPPEL, *Metaphysical Themes*, pp. 20-1.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

sophy only if it regards the articles of the Christian faith as «antecedently probable results of rational proof.» Then, «because such proofs [would] guide ... one's [philosophic] research, he will then operate as a Christian philosopher»[25].

For Fr. Wippel, in order that a given body of philosophic thought qualify as a candidate for the title Christian philosophy it must: a) «preserve with clarity the distinction between faith ... and philosophy viewed as a rational enterprise»; b) «[maintain] with some clarity the distinction between theology and philosophy, and between the philosophical and theological components of a particular enterprise»; and, c) be associated with Christian religious belief so that the latter «enters into and even serves to define its way of philosophizing as distinctively Christian»[26].

But, and here he opposes outright what he takes to be Gilson's position, one does not need to be a theologian or to study theology in any great detail to produce such Christian philosophy. Unadorned faith is sufficient to guide a Christian philosopher's work in a meaningfully Christian direction. Such faith suggests to the Christian philosopher certain philosophical hypotheses whose truth for natural reason he can seek to ascertain and possibly demonstrate[27].

After a first superficial glance, the divergence between Fr. Wippel's position and that of Gilson's is not as great as it would seem. Fr. Wippel grants that theology must (and did for the great medieval scholastics) act as at least final cause in the construction of a philosophy that would serve the *intellectus fidei*[28]. What exactly it would mean for theology to act as final cause here is not immediately evident: we will have to return to this later. Also, Gilson nowhere maintains that the deliverances of faith as such should serve as rational bases for demonstration in the practice of Christian philosophy. In numerous places he has expressly maintained the opposite. He has maintained that if Christian philosophy is to be true philosophy it must be at least philosophy: purely rational as regards its principles, concepts, methods of demonstration etc. The Christian faith must simply serve to provide this philosophy's context.

The significant point of disagreement between Fr. Wippel and Gilson has to do with the relationship of theology to Christian philosophy. Before attempting to resolve this, the views of two other influential critics of the notion of Christian philosophy must be addressed.

In a very dense essay entitled «The Mutual Influence of Philosophy and Theology» the political philosopher Leo Strauss has formulated, if in an indirect way, a very powerful critique of the notion of a Christian philosophy[29]. He argues that an unbridgeable gap exists between the life of philosophic inquiry and a life

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[25] WIPPEL, *Etienne Gilson*, ... p. 79.
[26] WIPPEL, *Possibility*, ... p. 284.
[27] WIPPEL, *Metaphysical Themes*, p. 24.; *Etienne Gilson*, ... pp. 78-9.
[28] WIPPEL, *Metaphysical Themes*, p. 29.
[29] STRAUSS, L., *The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy*, «Independent Journal of Philosophy», 3 (1979), pp. 111-18.

qualified by belief in and adherence to a revealed religious doctrine. Strauss's essay begins with a very forthright claim:

> No one can be both a philosopher and a theologian or, for that matter, a third which is beyond the conflict between philosophy and theology, or a synthesis of both. But every one of us can and ought to be either the one or the other, the philosopher open to the challenge of theology or the theologian open to the challenge of philosophy[30].

Philosophy and theology are thus bound in a fruitful but irreconcilable opposition with one another. Strauss continues further on: «We have this radical opposition: the Bible refuses to be integrated into a philosophical framework, just as philosophy refuses to be integrated into a biblical framework»[31].

Judaeo-Christian theology cannot be integrated into a philosophical framework because the God of the patriarchs and prophets is not that of philosophical theology. "Philosophy", properly understood in what is for Strauss its original and classical sense, refuses to be integrated into any religious or theological framework or in any way instrumentalized by religious faith. It resists this at all costs because for the philosopher, who bases all his knowledge claims on intellectual insight into sense experience, the claims of religious wisdom have an uncertain truth value and remain «unevident, unproven possibilit[ies].» From the point of view of reason the allegedly supra-rational claims of faith are but «an indifferent possibility: possibly true, possibly false, or possibly good, possibly bad»[32]. According to Strauss, the philosophic life is premissed on a priviliged awareness of: a)the urgency of the question of the right way of life; b) the need to understand the nature of man to properly answer this question; and, c) the need to understand the nature of the Whole to understand the nature of man. Pointing to human ignorance in these matters, seeing in these matters «the most important things», and enjoining individuals to devote their life to the never-to-be-fulfilled quest of seeking complete knowledge concerning them, philosophy makes its claim to be the best way of life *tout court*. Strauss continues: «So philosophy in its original and full sense is then certainly incompatible with the biblical way of life ... Each of the two antagonists claims to know or hold the truth, the decisive truth, regarding the right way of life»[33].

Since there can be only one truth the two do and must necessarily enter into conflict. Philosophy can in no way be subordinated to faith because, «in the original sense of the term» (i.e. philosophy understood «as a way of life») it cannot admit of being treated as «an instrument or a department of human self-realization»[34].

There are a number of other interesting remarks Strauss makes on the faith-reason question in this essay, but they would take us a bit far afield. The above

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 111.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 113.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 115.
[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 113-14.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

represents in outline the essence of Strauss's position, and its relevance for the Christian philosophy question should be clear.

Our last critic is Martin Heidegger, who helps illuminate the significance of the Christian philosophy debate from a new angle. In a well-known series of lectures delivered originally in 1935 (and published in German under the title *Einführung in die Metaphysik*) Heidegger made a brief foray into the Christian philosophy debate while discussing the posture of radical philosophical questioning which is the *fons et origo* of true philosophy. Identifying as the philosophic question *par excellence* «Why are there essents rather than nothing?» Heidegger asserts that ,«In a historical setting that does not recognize questioning as a fundamental human force, the question immediately loses its rank.» He continues:

> Anyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth has the answer to [this] ... question ... even before it is asked .... [Such an individual] can in a way participate in the asking of our question, but he cannot really question without ceasing to be a believer and taking all the consequences of such a step. He will only be able to act «as if»[35].

Thus for Heidegger the words of Genesis, «In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth ...» supply no answer to this most basic philosophic question «because they are in no way related to it. Indeed, they cannot even be brought into relation with our question. From the standpoint of the faith our question is "foolishness". Philosophy is this very foolishness»[36]. Concluding his brief but pointed remarks on the subject, Heidegger adds:

> A Christian philosophy is a round square and a misunderstanding. There is, to be sure, a thinking and questioning elaboration of the world of Christian experience, i.e. of faith. That is theology. Only epochs who no longer believe in the true greatness of the task of theology arrive at the disastrous notion that philosophy can help to provide a refurbished theology if not a substitute for theology which will satisfy the needs and tastes of the time. For the original Christian faith philosophy is foolishness[37].

3. A Response to the Critics

From the sampling of views represented above it is not difficult to see that one of the main, perhaps *the* main, sticking point in the Christian philosophy deba-

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[35] HEIDEGGER, M., *An Introduction to Metaphysics,* trans. Ralph Manheim, Doubleday and Co. Inc., Garden City, N.Y., 1961, p. 6.
[36] HEIDEGGER, *Introduction*, p. 6.
[37] *Ibid.*

te has been a disagreement about how the term "philosophy" should be understood. For Christians who address this question today a promising approach might be to ascertain if first the Christian faith has anything to say about the matter. The issue, after all, of whether "Christian philosophy" is a coherent and useful notion is of greatest moment to Christians themselves.

There are certain candidates for the term philosophy that must be ruled out for the Christian from the start and reckoned among one of the many possible kinds of «philosophy and vain deceit» that St. Paul warned the Church about in his *Letter to the Colossians* (Col. 2,8). Any understanding of philosophy which sees philosophy as closed in principle to the existence of a transnatural order, or which refuses in principle to admit the existence of a higher measure of truth than the human intellect must be regarded as unacceptable. Christians, beyond pointing out what is rationally faulty in these conceptions, need simply ignore them in their attempt to discern what a Christian philosophy is or might be, or whether there has been such a thing.

The obvious candidate for the term 'philosophy' which the Christian today might elect is that understanding of philosophy, for centuries dominant in the West, with which the great Christian thinkers in the patristic and medieval period worked and were comfortable. This is the understanding of philosophy that the Greeks, stretching back to at least Parmenides, bequeathed to the West, and which stands at the beginning as the originator of the twenty-three odd century long conversation of occidental philosophy. The Christian has thus a second reason to adopt it: originators and inventors frequently have an intimacy and familiarity with their inventions that is rarely matched. For the Greeks of the classical and Hellenistic period almost uniformly, philosophy was understood as the loving search for the first and supreme causes and ultimate explanatory principles of the whole of what is[38].

What is frequently overlooked in this definition of philosophy is the reference it makes to love. Philosophy was never understood by the Greeks as a purely cerebral affair: love always has the sense of not only thinking but also *acting* in a certain way toward the object, be it person or thing, of one's love. To consider oneself a lover of wisdom was then to consider one's entire way of being qualified by that love[39]. Thus Leo Strauss's insistence that philosophy in its original and classic sense was understood to be a way of life is entirely just.

If, as has been argued, it makes sense for a Christian to accept this traditional and originative understanding of philosophy the question must now be put: «Is there, could there, or should there be a Christian one of these?» This is the question we must now address. Since, in their criticisms of the idea of Christian philosophy, both Strauss and Heidegger purport to be speaking from the vantage point of the traditional Greek view of philosophy, and both are eminent students of this tradition, we will treat their criticisms first.

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[38] A point Gilson himself notes in *What is Christian Philosophy?* published in PEGIS, A., (ed.), *A Gilson Reader*, Doubleday and Co. Inc., Garden City, N.Y. 1957, 177.

[39] WEISHEIPL, James A., *Philosophy and the God of Abraham*, (an unpublished lecture delivered at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota, 21 Feb. 1984).

It is in terms of a «way of life» that Strauss sees an irremediable opposition between philosophy and religious faith (for our purposes we will consider this religious faith to be Christian), and it must be admitted that at this level such an opposition can or could exist. But it *need* not. This is because the Greek understanding of philosophy, as we have characterized it and in historical fact, contains within it a certain open-ended ambiguity. The love of and consequent desire to possess wisdom can, but need not be, a desire to possess mere *rationally evident* wisdom. It is but too easy to forget in what a rudimentary state the distinction between nature and trans-nature or supernature was, especially in early Greek thought. In the two most eminent spokesmen for the tradition of Greek philosophy, Plato and Aristotle, we certainly see a clear awareness of, belief in, and respect for, an order that transcends the merely human-gods, muses, divinely inspired prophets and seers, *theoi logoi* handed on from of old and so on[40]. Plato and Aristotle's treatment of these matters is, to be sure, complex, but they do not seem to have feared that interest in, knowledge of, and involvement with such a divine order would taint their life profession as philosophers. On the contrary they seem willing even, in the case of Plato, *eager* to be engaged, intellectually and otherwise, with the putatively divine order precisely on account of their love of wisdom. They are ready to avail themselves of the wisdom that comes from this source even though it come by way of gift and though not all of it be susceptible of subsequent scientific demonstration or be seen as evident to human reason[41]. The desire for *episteme*, for certain knowledge of a thing through its causes by the unassisted powers of the human intellect, was an important, arguably the most important element in the Greek understanding of philosophy. But it was not the exclusive element: of additional importance was the desire for beatitude that the possession of wisdom (and here without the qualification of human or divine) brings[42]. No one would deny that the great Greek philosophers adopted a critical attitude towards the claims of the civic religious traditions and purported divine revelations. But this attitude was not one of open hostility, nor did the Greeks seek wisdom in opposition to or in isolation from the religious wisdom of old. A more accurate way of characterizing their attitude would be to say, as Josef Pieper has, that, open to divine extramundane wisdom, they sought to acquire human wisdom in «contrapuntal relation»

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[40] It would require a monograph to establish this point in detail. For a start one can consult texts in Plato such as: *Phaedrus*, 274; *Philebus*, 16; and, *Laws*, 715. In Aristotle *Metaphysics*, 983a, and 1074b come immediately to mind.

[41] Maurice Nédoncelle observes: «Dès l'antiquité, on a remarqué que l'explication philosophique vient buter contre les limites et que pour échapper à une ratiocination vide ou fausée, il convient de recourir à des descriptions symboliques ou à des recits, faute de pouvoir enserrer la réalité transcendante dans une anlyse rigoureuse. Ainsi pensait Platon et son oeuvre nous offre toute une gamme de procèdes qui sont destinés à suppléer l'intelligence pure ... » (*Existe-t-il une Philosophie Chrétienne?*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris 1956, p. 85).

[42] For a treatment of the salvation concerns of Hellenic, especially pre-Socratic, philosophy one can profitably consult VOEGELIN, E., *Order and History v. 2—The World of the Polis,* Louisiana Sate University Press, Baton Rouge, LA, 1957.

to this divine wisdom[43]. They prized human wisdom not because it was more illuminating, but because it was a) more capable of being tested and thus of a more certain value, and b) based on necessities intrinsic to the things of the world and thus indefectibly certain, in its most perfect form, and seen as such.

In summary, it can be said that the Greeks, and pre-eminently Plato and Aristotle, believed in the existence of a divine order and a divine wisdom, were willing as philosophers to be instructed by it, and yet were at the same time consciously striving to acquire a purely human wisdom. They saw this tension between the divine and human counterparts of wisdom as fruitful, and, contrary to Strauss, they were perfectly willing, as is apparent from their writings and the conduct of their lives, to have their search for human wisdom qualified by the dictates of what they held to be divine wisdom. They did not see the opposition to the point of contradiction between the philosophic way of life and the life based on faith in divine revelation that Strauss claims has existed from the beginning. In fact they saw the two as existing together in a relation of potential complementarity. Strauss's criticism of the idea of a religious philosophy, of a fruitful relation between, and interpenetration of, human and divine wisdom, must then be rejected. Because the Greeks saw wisdom in its human and divine aspects they could likewise see philosophy or the love of wisdom as a human and divine enterprise. And they could thus and did subordinate natural reason and natural wisdom to divine wisdom and a kind of faith in divine revelation without at the same time making their philosophy/love of wisdom a «mere instrument or department of human self-realization» and without thinking they were doing violence to the pursuit of human wisdom. Greek philosophy was in this sense eminently religious, or, as Eric Voegelin was fond of saying, "hieratic"[44].

The presuppositions of Martin Heidegger's criticism of Christian philosophy have much in common with those of Emile Brehier. Heidegger too emphasizes that a genuine Christian comes to philosophy with a stacked deck—an array of answers that smother the posture of questioning so essential to philosophic inquiry. The faith commitments of a genuine believer (and Heidegger is aware that the weak in faith can compromise their beliefs in engaging in philosophic speculation) cannot be regarded by him as up for grabs when he practices philosophy. Thus, when he practices philosophy, the believer can only act "as if" his faith beliefs have nothing to say. But this, according to Heidegger, will not suffice for entering into the way of philosophy. Such an individual could make an excellent theologian but a philosopher not at all. True philosophy is true foolishness for the believer because it forces him to compromise about that which precisely he professes to be uncompromising. Like Strauss, Heidegger sees an irremediable opposition between philosophy and faith or theology and sees no benefit deriving for philosophy in any collaboration it might have with the two.

Heidegger's criticisms here bring to the fore the criticism many or perhaps

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[43] PIEPER, J., *The Philosophical Act*, in «Liesure as the Basis of Culture», trans. Alexander Dru, New American Library, New York 1962, pp. 112-25, esp. 118.

[44] VOEGELIN, E., *Order and History, v.2: The World of the Polis*, Louisiana Sate University Press, Baton Rouge, LA, 1957, p. 213.

most atheistic or agnostic philosophers would have of a religious or faith-inspired philosophy. They would maintain, as Heiddeger does, that to do true philosophy one must adopt a posture of radical doubt towards the entirety of one's former beliefs, and one must genuinely and in no hypothetical «for the sake of argument» way entertain their falsity. But this view of the nature of philosophic inquiry is clearly of a discredited Cartesian sort and Christians today might question whether it is an accurate description of what philosophy in the West has been about since its inception, and why it should be regarded as normative for philosophy today. Not only is this understanding of philosophy clearly different from that of the Greeks, it also leans heavily on a myth that should never have been, and need no longer be, taken seriously—the myth of a presuppositionless rational inquiry. Heidegger, in Cartesian fashion, conflates questioning and doubting.

Heidegger's assertion that one cannot come to philosophy with answers is Cartesian also in that it views philosophy not as an enterprise that critiques and in many cases ratifies, while nuancing and supplementing, the beliefs of ordinary experience (clearly the Greek approach to philosophy), but one that must *generate*, starting ex nihilo as it were, all of an individuals true beliefs. Again this conception of philosophy seems neither true to fact, true to the originating spirit of Western philosophy, nor even itself practicable. No philosopher, be he Christian or otherwise, need feel bound or constrained by it.

Given the general tenor of his thought, Heidegger's greatest fear concerning the presence of supernatural faith in philosophic inquiry appears to be that the former would banish the all-important climate of *mystery* in which philosophy must begin and ever dwell. But we must examine whether supernatural faith in any sense dims or dispels the sense of the mystery of being. There is good reason to think it does not. On the one hand, it is almost always the case that the more one knows about a particular subject matter that is complex the more one wonders about it. All questions presuppose partial knowledge, and knowledge, whether incipient or advanced, and wonder are thus directly and not inversely proportional. The more one knows about a subject matter of depth, the more keen, the more precise, the more multiple, and the more profound one's questions become. Thus metaphysical questions, to use one example, though in many senses the most obvious, take a great deal of prior knowledge, experience, and intellectual cultivation to be formulated properly and inquired about persistently. They flourish at the peak of human knowledge and seem incapable of staying alive without vital contact with subordinate forms of knowledge.

Why think then that the possession of knowledge by faith is inimical to the climate of philosophic wonder and the properly philosophic sense of mystery? In many senses a thorough knowledge of the tenets of the Christian faith gives one a head start in philosophic questioning by breaking one out of the often confining categories of ordinary experience. Believing the realm of finite being to be a gratuitous gift, the Christian is required by a consistent operative faith to marvel at its gratuitousness—its standing-outside-of-nothingness. Who more than a Christian reflecting on his beliefs is more naturally inclined to ask the philosophic question, «Why are

there beings instead of non-being?» and to see this *as a question*—as something inevident, calling for, and perhaps susceptible of, a purely rational explanation? How many non-Christian philosophers since the beginning of the modern era have dared to ask this question persistently? Heidegger's own ties, directly and through Franz Brentano, to the tradition of medieval scholasticism are well-acknowledged.

The Christian possesses an additional advantage here as Josef Pieper has noted[45]. Admitting from the beginning of his philosophic inquiry the existence of a trans-natural order (an order *essentially* beyond the comprehension of human cognitive powers in their present and unaided state), the Christian is forever relieved of the temptation to think that the whole of what is can be the subject of a complete and exhaustive rational explanation *a la* Hegel and countless, if less forthright, others. The tension a Christian must endure between the natural and transnatural orders is thus eminently fruitful for him: it keeps him from voiding the sense of the mystery of the natural order itself. And since philosophy must begin in wonder and can only advance by a progressively deeper wonder, this is no small benefit. Heidegger's claim that there is an antinomy between supernatural faith and philosophic questioning must be regarded as false.

4. Philosophy or Theology?

Many of those who have reflected on the question of whether there is or can be a Christian philosophy of any sort have ended up concluding like Heidegger that what would pass for Christian philosophy is nothing but Christian theology. And almost all engaged in the Christian philosophy debate would admit that what makes the Christian philosophy question so intractable is the difficulty involved in ascertaining the precise relation that does and should obtain between philosophy and theology in inquiry. Again this is a question of greatest import for the Christian believer. For him the truth of the deliverances of faith is a given. Thus, in his attempt to come to a proper understanding of how philosophy and theology should be related, he can bracket questions concerning the warrant for the truths of the faith, the possibility and recognizability of supernatural revelation and so forth. These are important but separate questions. What he must be directly concerned with is how the deliverances of faith and theology are to influence his work as a philosopher. Here we have seen that Fr. Wippel and Gilson were in disagreement. Fr. Wippel objected especially to Gilson's view that for Christians the study of theology should precede and accompany the study of philosophy (i.e. even and perhaps especially if these Christians be aspiring professional philosophers).

If one examines Gilson's writings closely, however, one discovers that Gilson held this view in the interests of preserving, by creating anew, "scholasticism" and "scholastic philosophy", and not simply "philosophy in general". By scholasticism he understood that approach to the intellectual life that has as its explicit goal the

[45] PIEPER, *The Philosophical Act*, pp. 119-22.

coming to an ever-fuller understanding, purely rational or otherwise, of the deposit of the Christian faith, and whose method is that of faith seeking understanding[46].

In this sense all Christians who reflect on the content of their religious belief and who seek to discover its relevance and implications for their ordinary experience and their knowledge, technical or otherwise, might be called scholastics. There are differences in degree, no doubt, but taking these into account one can properly call a "scholastic" any reflective and questioning Christian, and "scholasticism" that effort made to relate any and all natural human knowledge, in all its distinct disciplines and branches, to the truths of the Christian faith. A Christian philosophy would be only one type of scholasticism, but the most important: it is the task of philosophy to ask the most ultimate questions about what is and, at least in principle, to reflect on the findings of the other branches of human learning, place these in their proper context, and discern their ultimate significance. Philosophy in this sense represents a kind of summing up of natural human knowledge, and Christian philosophy would thus be the most important and overarching kind of scholasticism.

The time has now come to specify how we should define Christian philosophy. I would suggest that Christian philosophy be understood as that form of scholasticism which seeks to integrate any and all philosophic knowledge and knowledge claims with the truths of the Christian faith. (It must be noted though that so to practice philosophy is already to engage in theology. The act whereby a believer as believer investigates how certain philosophic claims comport with the truths of the faith is an eminently *theological* act—an exercise of *ratio fide illustrata*). To practice Christian philosophy thus understood gives concrete and explicit sense to the traditional expression "philosophizing in the faith"—one is to pursue philosophic insight through, with, and in the exercise of the *habitus* of faith. Christian philosophy is then the pursuit of Christian wisdom, a unified account, both theological and philosophical, of what is. It so transcends the customary and often artificial distinction, so common since the time of Descartes, between philosophy and theology. It is philosophy in the original and classic sense of the term in that it seeks the supreme and comprehensive knowledge of what is that only the gods can be thought to possess, treasuring and pursuing especially that wisdom evident to human cognition, but remaining ever open to enlightenment from a divine source.

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[46] «To restore it to itself, let us listen to the counsel of history: scholastic philosophy must return to theology .... I am not speaking of philosophy in general, but of that kind of philosophy we call 'scholastic' .... The philosophy we call scholastic is not distinguished from the other philosophies by its essence; it is rather distinguished from them as the best way of philosophizing. That is indeed how the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* has described scholastic philosophy.... And it also is by returning to its natural place [i.e. its parent theology] that scholastic philosophy can have the hope, or rather the certitude, that it will once more bring forth flowers and fruit» (*Historical Research and the Future of Scholasticism*, in PEGIS, A., (ed.), *A Gilson Reader*, pp. 165-6).

Such a Christian philosophy satisfies the three criteria laid down by Fr. Wippel, while it avoids turning the valuable and hard-won distinction between philosophy and theology into a wall of separation or into a source of discord or, at best, disunity in the life of the individual inquirer. In Christian philosophy, as we have now come to define it, the distinction between theology and philosophy, or between the theological and philosophic components of a particular enterprise can be maintained with all clarity. The Christian philosopher must simply be cognizant of the logical ancestry of the claims he asserts. Those beliefs it maintains which have in their logical ancestry at least one premise held on supernatural faith can be regarded as theological: those without such a premise can be considered as philosophical in the stricter sense of this word (i.e. the work of unaided natural reason). Christian philosophy so understood also satisfies Fr. Wippel's third criterion: it requires of one's philosophizing that it be distinctively Christian because it establishes as the goal of one's inquiry from the very start, the integration of one's acquired philosophic knowledge or philosophic beliefs with the truths of the Catholic faith. In the next section of this paper I will try to specify what would be the exact form such integration, and, hence, such definition of the *modus philosophandi* as distinctively Christian might take.

There remains Fr. Wippel's first criterion for a Christian philosophy: that in it one be able to distinguish what pertains to faith from philosophy viewed as a rational undertaking. Though this would seem to be the easiest criterion to satisfy it is in many ways the most difficult. This is because, as we have noted, philosophy was practiced from the beginning in the West as something more than a purely intellectual affair or as an affair of unaided reason. It grew out of a desire not only for theoretical wisdom, the highest and most comprehensive form of speculative knowledge, but also for that practical from of wisdom providing knowledge of the path to salvation, or, put more mundanely, of the way to happiness and deliverance from the evils that have always been a part of the human condition.

What distinguished the first practicioners of philosophy in the West from the religious believers, or, to be more precise, from the *mere* religious believers of their time, was the former's desire to arrive at a wisdom wrung from a direct and personal encounter with the world: a wisdom produced by seeking from the world and the things of the world their reason for being in a certain way and of a certain sort *as provided by those things themselves* (aware that in many cases where philosophy's questions took them religious belief and religious wisdom had already tred).

As has been argued earlier, a Christian, in determining the possible nature and shape of a "Christian philosophy" should avail himself of this richer notion of philosophy—richer than that one in vogue since Descartes and the Enlightenment according to which philosophy would be understood as a purely mental and purely human effort to come to a knowledge of the world.

How then for a Christian to distinguish his faith from his philosophy in the animating spirit behind his strictly (i.e. non-theological) philosophic work? I would like to suggest that a Christian need not be overly concerned about making

such a distinction for himself or for others[47]. If philosophy as understood and practiced by the Greeks was always open to enlightenment from a divine source even as it strove to acquire a human wisdom, the Christian's work in philosophy can too be so qualified. It is simply that, for the Christian, the divine source and the enlightenment it provides, are very specifically identified. The Christian looks to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Who fully reveals Himself to man in the person of Jesus Christ, and Who, in the person of the Holy Spirit, presides over an oral tradition and authors a series of sacred writings whose fatihful interpretation and transmission through time He insures by his action in the community of believers.

A philosopher so open to enlightenment from the divine, where the divine is identified as the Triune God of Christianity, retains every right to call himself and be called a philosopher. He is distinguished from his brethren in the faith who are believers simply speaking and are not philosophically driven in this sense: the Christian philosopher and ordinary believer both love the truth, but the Christian philosopher, in order to be worthy of the appellation "philosopher" in the classical Hellenic sense of the term, treasures that insightful knowledge and grasp of the true in its natural and supernatural causes[48]. His life is qualified by the pursuit of a fuller and more perfect grasp of the truth. Like his pre-Christian counterpart philosophy is for the Christian nothing less than a way of life. Believing wisdom to reside fully in Christ, he seeks that wisdom out in the continuous contemplation and contemplation-in-action which is Christian life itself. But he can continue to function as a philosopher in the narrow sense of the term and in so doing satisfies Fr. Wippel's first criterion for Christian philosophy: he is capable of distinguishing his faith beliefs from his purely rational philosophic results. Open to enlightenment from the Christian

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[47] Thus does Pieper characterize Aquinas's approach to inquiry: «... Concretely the situation is that of a living man, confronted with the whole of reality—one Thomas Aquinas—as believer and thinker (and experiencer of sense perceptions), as a man reflecting upon his beliefs and at the same time observing man and the universe with all his powers of natural cognition, asks himself: What is all this about? .... To be sure, Thomas himself made a point of distinguishing between philosophy and theology. But he made the distinction to join, not to part. By their nature philosophy and theology belong together in a unity of form» (*Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, New American Library, New York 1962, p. 135).

[48] As Gilson noted, even were the ecclesiastical magisterium to furnish the Christian community with an exhaustive list of true and false philosophical propositions this would not put the Christian philosopher at rest. Accepting with good and sufficient reason the judgment of the magisterium as infallible, he or she would press on, not to test that judgment for its validity, but to see for him or herself its truth in a transparent way—to render it evident truth. The Christian philosopher is thus distinguished in his occupation from his fellow-believers who live out their lives in other realms by his relentless pursuit of that human good—arguably one of the most ennobling and satisfying of human goods, though one almost thoroughly dispensable for salvation, of *evident* human wisdom (i.e. the light of faith generating inevident knowledge and being thus for the intellect, as St. John of the Cross noted, a «ray of darkness») See *Compte rendu ... du 21 Mars 1931*, «Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie», 38 (1931), pp. 52-3 .

revelation (i.e. as it helps the Christian discover, though it does not rationally demonstrate for him, certain philosophic truths, and avoid, while it does not rationally refute for him, certain philosophic mistakes), we must now specify more exactly, as was promised, how a Christian conscious of the claims of his religious belief, can make his philosophic work *distinctively* Christian.

5. Towards a New Characterization of Christian Philosophy

Thus far in this paper I have argued as follows:

1) In seeking to determine whether or not there is such a thing as Christian philosophy Christians should understand "philosophy" as the Greek progenitors of philosophy understood it.

2) As a cursory examination of the history of Hellenic and Hellenistic philosophy reveals, the animating spirit behind the tradition of Greek philosophy was as much what we have come to call theological as it was what we often understand by "philosophical". The great Greek philosophers were motivated in their philosophic inquiry by a desire to possess the highest wisdom and by an allied desire for beatitude. They did not see religious belief and practice as inimical to the pursuit of wisdom, and in their pursuit of an acquired human wisdom they remained open to enlightenment from divine extra-mundane wisdom.

3) Christian philosophy should be understood as that philosophic work by those philosophers who remain open to and actively seek enlightenment from the God of Christian revelation in their work, both to steer them away from philosophic mistakes and to furnish them with antecedently probable results of strictly rational insight and proof.

I would like to argue now that recent advances in Catholic theological anthropology give us resources to come to a new and more nuanced understanding of Christian philosophy which allows us to exploit the important insights of the theorists of the idea of a Christian philosophy while annuling many of their differences (a good number of which, it turns out, have been merely verbal—claims true in what they affirmed, false in what they denied). Developing a point very much a part of his earlier teaching and writing Pope John Paul II, in *Laborem Exercens*, noted how one of the greatest changes wrought by Christianity in the human person's understanding of human nature was effected in the area of our understanding of human labor or work. Conscious that God Himself in the person of Jesus Christ spent most of his earthly life engaged in unseen and unspectacular manual labor, Christians should themselves be aware and make others aware that what matters in human activities is not so much what is done (assuming the activity to be morally good in itself), but *how* it is done—not the objective dimension of the work but its subjective dimension. It is the subjective dimen-

sion, the Pope states, that is most essential to human development, human dignity, and, ultimately, to personal sanctification and salvation[49].

This suggests that in asking whether a given bit of philosophy be considered Christian philosophy or not we attend more to the subjective side of that philosophy than its objective side—granted that we exercise a certain caution. Christianity is meant to permeate, influence, and transform, by raising up to a higher end, all human acts and all the forms of human activity in a civilization from the least to the most sophisticated . But the Christian faith, believed and lived, exercises its most profound influence on a civilization's spiritual activities, among which philosophy is certainly one[50]. (I am using "spiritual" in a non-specifically religious sense here to denote that which is proper to the human spirit, as the word *geistig* is employed in German. I have in mind activities such as those involved in the practice of politics, or of the fine arts, or poetry, drama, literature etc.) These activities are capable of submitting to a more profound influence from Christianity because they are more existentially charged than others: they bear more directly on God, the things of God, and human destiny. The Christian religion has more to say with regard to these, or more to make of them. Thus we would expect Christianity to have a much more powerful influence on the practice of philosophy than on that of, say, banking. And history bears this out. Christianity has surely had a significant influence on the way these practices have been carried out, on their *how,* but in the case of philosophy, as opposed to banking (or masonry, or watchmaking) Christianity has had a significant influence on philosophy's *what*—its very subject matter. The doctrinal history of Western philosophy is vastly different because of the Christian revelation and the work of Christians in philosophy.

It will not suffice, then, for a philosophy to be reckoned Christian owing to what we have called subjective considerations, for it to be anonymously Christian—a mere body of philosophic knowledge claims which are in no apparent contradiction with the truths of Christianity. Nor will it suffice if this same body of knowledge claims be the work of a committed Christian who does his philosophic work with the explicit intention of giving glory to God. This latter might suffice to make an activity like watchmaking or banking Christian, but it cannot make the practice of philosophy in its output Christian as I have defined "Christian philosophy". This is the case because the overlap or intersection between Christianity and philosophy is simply greater than that between Christianity and many other human activities or practices[51]. Missing in the case of the philosophy done as spe-

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[49] *On Human Work*, Daughters of St. Paul, Boston 1981, see especially 11-17.

[50] A point touched on by JOURNET CH., in *The Wisdom of Faith*, trans. R.F. Smith S.J. (The Newman Press, Westminister, MD 1952), see pp. 178-85.

[51] As Claude Tresmontant has pointed out and demonstrated in his research, in the Roman Catholic tradition «[f]or over two thousand years, the Church has defined its thoughts in a certain number of solemn texts formulated by Ecumenical Councils or by Popes. A good many of these texts contain affirmations or assertions which are properly metaphysical .... [W]ith Scripture, [and] the consensus of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church ... all [this] show[s] that Christian thought involves a certain number of very exact metaphysical theses ...» (*Christian Metaphysics*, p. 21).

cified above would be an openness to enlightenment from the content of Christian revelation and absent as well would be the intellectual effort of comparing and integrating one's philosophic results with one's faith beliefs and with the understanding of the latter. Philosophy can easily undermine faith as history testifies; banking and medicine, to name two other practices, have a much more difficult time doing the same. In short to practice Christian philosophy a Christian must do more than philosophize in a Christian way: this philosophizing in a Christian way could still lead him to undermine his faith beliefs in subtle or not so subtle ways, and could leave him an intellectual schizophrenic holding inconsistent or at least unintegrated sets of beliefs—faith beliefs on the one hand knowledge claims on the other[52]. Christian philosophy can only be that philosophic work done by a committed Christian, raised up to the supernatural order, where Christian belief explicitly informs, if not every aspect of one's philosophic research, the drawing of one's philosophic conclusions and the finding of one's way to various philosophic insights. In this case one must make the active and explicit effort to integrate one's philosophic results, in those areas where they evidently overlap with Christian belief, with one's understanding of the Christian faith. I take these latter to be conditions for the raising up of the practice of philosophy to the supernatural order.

There remain as yet several issues unresolved or at least insufficiently clarified, and the best way of clearing up the remaining obscurities might be to pose and answer several overarching questions:

Is there a one Christian philosophy? There is not a one Christian philosophy because the expression "Christian philosophy" is a generic one. It designates that philosophy done in the context of the Christian faith where that faith as lived and believed provides an indispensable support (a positive stimulus, a set of positive clues, and a negative norm) for the pursuit of wisdom and for philosophical speculation. There are as many Christian philosophies as there are individuals whose philosophic results are the product of philosophy so practiced.

What constitutes the unity of Christian philosophy? Christian philosophies are one in their unreserved commitment to the truths of the Christian faith and in their unanimous desire to understand their philosophic results in the light of these truths. Fidelity to the Christian deposit of faith and desire to personally integrate philosophic results with faith beliefs are thus the two essential hallmarks of Christian philosophy.

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[52] Illustrating the potential harm of such a state of being, Alvin Plantinga relates the unfortunately typical story of a hypothetical Christian graduate student who goes to Harvard University to study philosophy, and after studying assiduously the work of W.V.O. Quine, draws the conclusion for herself, with the best of Christian intentions, that the God of her Christian belief is a set—perhaps the union of the set of true propositions and the set of true actions. See PLANTINGA's *Advice to Christian Philosophers*, «Faith and Philosophy», 3 (1984), pp. 254-6. The central thrust of this highly influential essay in recent anglo-american philosophy is that «Christian philosophers ... must display more autonomy—more independence of the rest of the philosophical world ... [and] more integrity—integrity in the sense of integral wholeness, of oneness, of unity, being all of one piece ... [and more] Christian courage, or boldness, or strength, or perhaps Christian self-confidence» (p. 254).

Must a Christian in philosophy be a theologian in order to practice Christian philosophy? The answer here must be no. In order to situate his philosophic insights, research, and results within the context of the Christian faith a Christian need not be a theologian, which is to say that he need not share a theologian's goals nor follow a theologian's order of procedure. (This is clearly different than saying he need not know theology and know it well.) A Christian philosopher need not have as his direct and immediate aim an improved understanding of the contents of Christian revelation or some point of revealed doctrine. Nor need he approach philosophical questions only as they emerge from within a theological problematic. No less free than his non-Christian colleagues in philosophy, he can pursue according to his own preference the philosophic questions that strike or interest him. However, in order for his work on these questions to be sufficiently Christian he must possess a knowledge of theology: rudimentary faith (for example, a catechism level understanding of the truths of the faith) is not nearly enough. The case for this is not difficult to make. Philosophy, particularly the philosophy of professional philosophers, connects with the beliefs of the Christian faith through theology. To be more precise, the relevance and implications of most philosophic results for faith can only be seen when those faith beliefs are grasped in their interconnection and each plumbed for their own meaning and significance. This is the work of theology or the work of the theological component of the Christian philosophic enterprise.

For his work then as a philosopher to be sufficiently Christian, the Christian in philosophy must devote the time and energy necessary to keep his knowledge of the Christian faith on a par with his knowledge of philosophy. The sacrifice this entails cannot be considered a matter of supererogation but of Christian duty. One thinks of that part of the great commandment Christ addressed to all Christians—to love God with one's whole mind. This is but an injunction to apply to divine things the knowledge and capacities of one's mind, or an injunction to study theology to the measure of one's speculative ability and in accord with one's personal circumstances. It does not entail that a Christian philosopher must become a practicing theologian or be concerned with the fine points or disputed questions in theology in its present state. It would seem sufficient in order to maintain a faith sophisticated enough to keep pace with one's advances in philosophic understanding that the Christian in philosophy study frequently and keep in regular contact with the theology of the Church in the form of papal and conciliar documents, documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and so forth[53].

Must all Christian philosophy be conceived as acting as the handmaiden of

[53] Gilson wistfully notes in his autobiography of 1962 *Le Philosophe et la théologie* (Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris, pp. 196-7) that, seeking to understand the formula of "Christian philosophy" which he had invented to characterize the spirit of medieval philosophy, and which had touched off such controversy, «Il [Gilson himself] decouvrit alors que, cinquante ans auparavant, le pape Léon XIII avait écrit l'encyclique *Aeterni Patris* pour en éclairer et en fixer le sens. Il n'avait donc jamais lue? Non, jamais .... Il faut d'ailleurs savoir qu'à cette epoque les philosophes ne faisaient pas des encycliques pontificales leur lecture. Peut-être la remarque est-elle encore partiellement vraie».

theology? As the Fathers and the medievals were well aware, all human knowledge, in all its diverse branches and forms can serve as the handmaiden of theology and is such *in potentia.* To interpret, apply, illustrate, and extend to its consequences the content of divine revelation the theologian can and may need to draw on any human knowledge: any and all human knowledge can be beneficial in this end. This is most the case with philosophic knowledge since philosophy is the most overarching (or undergirding) of the disciplines of human learning and its subject matter overlaps most with the area of theology's immediate concern—God and the human soul. It is thus of greatest service to theology's needs.

But Christian philosophy need not minister to theology nor need the direct and immediate aim of Christian philosophers be to serve the needs of Christian theology. Philosophy, like other human activities, has an integrity and a good proper to it, and this not only should be but must be respected by Christians for reasons intrinsic to the Christian faith itself. Philosophizing like other human activities is in need of redemption, but as with other activities, particularly intellectual ones, this redemption need not and should not take place by the mere sculpting of philosophy to suit theology's own needs. As has been argued previously, philosophizing is best redeemed by the subject of the activity, the philosopher, meeting certain conditions in his philosophic work.

Even while it is the case that Christian philosophy's greatest service to the faith, and thus its greatest glory, is the direct service it renders to theology when acting as her handmaiden, this would not in any way diminish the need or importance of redeeming, again predominantly *ex parte subjecti,* philosophy's pursuit of its own ends. There is clearly a need for there to be Christian philosophers engaged in both enterprises, and the two are distinct. (Gilson concentrated on elaborating the spirit, conditions, and methods of the former and payed considerably less attention to the latter. Hence the justness of Fr. Wippel's insistence that the latter too be considered part of Christian philosophy. Maritain has given one of the most outspoken statements on behalf of the latter[54]). One might be tempted to distinguish the two by calling the former scholastic Christian philosophy and the latter non-scholastic Christian philosophy. But in fact, to restate an earlier point, both are scholastic in the sense that both are instances of Christian scholasticism. This is because (and if the point is valid I take it to be an important modification and/or extension of the classic definition of Christian philosophy put forward by Gilson), Christian philosophy is that philosophy discovered, explored, safeguarded or *actively appropriated* by the individual philosopher thanks to the aid given him or her by Christian belief and practice[55].

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[54] «Une des cause malentendus qui séparent aujoud'hui les "scolastiques" des modernes résides, croyons-nous, dans ce fait que les admirable acroissements eux-mêmes, la pureté, la profondeur, dont celle philosophie est redevable à son rôle ministeriel à l'égard de la théologie et à son entraînement dans une lumière supérieure, ont retardé son élaboration technique en corps de doctrine autonome, menant sa vie propre hors de l'organisme théologique, et procedant en toutes ses parties exclusivement selon les méthodes propres de la philosophie» (MARITAIN, *Philosophie Chrétienne*, pp. 66-7).

[55] An excellent illustration of active integrally Christian appropriation of philosophic knowledge claims is NICHOLL, D. J., *Recent Thought in Focus*, Sheed and Ward Inc., London 1953.

Faith seeking understanding is in this sense an inadequate statement of the method that should characterize a Christian philosophic scholasticism today. If ours, in the wake of Vatican II, is the era for a new scholasticism, then this new scholasticism should not only be characterized by faith seeking understanding, but by understanding sought in the context of faith. A Christian careful to situate his philosophic thinking within the context of faith is certainly a scholastic in this new and fuller sense.

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Abstract: *In questo articolo vengono esaminate le tesi di alcuni dei principali interlocutori nel dibattito sulla "filosofia cristiana". Prendendo in considerazione diverse critiche alla nozione di "filosofia cristiana", si propone una rivalutazione del modo in cui il termine "filosofia" viene inteso dai cristiani impegnati nella ricerca filosofica oggi. L'autore sostiene che "filosofia" dev'essere presa nel pieno senso classico-ellenico (in contrasto con quello post-cartesiano e post-illuminista), e così difende la convenienza dell'espressione "filosofia cristiana". Poi, cerca di indicarne i tratti essenziali, approfittando del lavoro di pensatori precedenti.*

Nella quarta sezione dell'articolo vengono suggeriti alcuni modi di intendere e di praticare la filosofia cristiana senza abbandonare la distinzione fra filosofia e teologia.

L'ultima sezione contiene una proposta per ampliare la famosa definizione di filosofia cristiana formulata da Gilson, in modo da includere anche quel lavoro filosofico che, sebbene svolto in relativa indipendenza dalla ricerca teologica, resti sufficientemente cristiano. A mo' di conclusione, l'autore cerca di individuare e giustificare le condizioni che la filosofia deve compiere per dirsi cristiana.