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"CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY"

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## THE "FOUR MEANINGS" OF "CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY"

GERMAIN G. GRISEZ

**T**HIRTY years ago the problem of Christian philosophy was whether such a thing is even possible and, if it is possible, whether a Christian philosophy ever existed.<sup>1</sup> By his brilliant and devoted scholarship in the history of medieval philosophy, Étienne Gilson has settled this question in the affirmative. True, others contributed to resolving the problem, but without Gilson it might still be arguable; because of his work, it seems to me, the possibility and actuality of Christian philosophy are no longer under reasonable doubt.

Still it is one matter to know that there *is* a Christian philosophy and it is quite another to be able to say clearly and precisely *what it is*. Of course, we cannot know that Christian philosophy exists without knowing in some mode what it is, but we can know that there is a Christian philosophy without knowing what it is in its very self and according to its own necessary and suffi-

cient requirements. Thus the present problem of Christian philosophy is a problem of definition. Since the debate of the early thirties, many definitions of Christian philosophy have been proposed. Professor Gilson's is probably the most fully developed and the best known, but unlike his argument for the existence of Christian philosophy, his analysis of its inner character has not won universal acceptance. In a review article devoted to Gilson's *Elements of Christian Philosophy*,<sup>2</sup> I have criticized his view; in this paper I intend neither to repeat that critique nor to examine other positions. Rather, I shall propose a positive view of my own.

Granted that there *is* a Christian philosophy, or Christian philosophies, we should investigate *what Christian philosophy is* first by observing the condition according to which we call a philosophy "Christian" and then by investigating what such a philosophy must be in itself and according to its own requirements if the condition for our calling it "Christian" is to be fulfilled. Since an adequate application of this method for resolving the problem would require both a justification of the method and the introduction of arguments based on long and comprehensive historical expositions of a variety of philosophies to which "Christian" is generally agreed to apply, my proposals in this paper must, of course, be a tentative outline rather than a completed analysis.

Although I cannot prove it here, I judge that virtually all discussion concerning what Christian philosophy is

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has been vitiated by a common assumption: the assumption that only one answer should be given to the question. Whether this critical judgment is correct or not, I think that, due to ambiguities which I shall indicate shortly, the question has no single answer. If my opinion is correct, no single definition will express adequately what Christian philosophy is; a series of alternative definitions will be necessary. True, these definitions, like the philosophies they signify, will have among themselves a certain order, but they will not be reducible to a simple unity. In other words, my position is that, on the one hand, the expression "Christian philosophy" is equivocal and, on the other, that the various philosophies it signifies do not share the title "Christian philosophy" by mere chance but by a community of reference to a single, central, successive realization of our human capacities for philosophic knowledge in the favorable environment of a reality being created by the Eternal Father, redeemed by the Incarnate Word, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, who elevates and unites us by dwelling within us.

As a first step toward the solution of the problem of defining Christian philosophy, therefore, I suggest the following distinctions.

In some instances we denominate a philosophy "Christian" inasmuch as it proceeds from a Christian philosopher, while in other instances we denominate a man "a Christian philosopher" inasmuch as his philosophy is properly characterized as "Christian." This is to say: In some cases a philosophy is called "Christian" from its author, while in other cases a philosopher as such is called "Christian" from his Christian philosophy. In either type

of case, both the philosopher as philosopher and his philosophy itself will be called "Christian," but the converse priorities of denomination indicate a difference in the meaning of "Christian philosophy" in these two usages of the expression. Furthermore, for each of these two usages, there are at least two distinct conditions for calling a philosophy "Christian," and the fulfillment of any one of these four or more conditions is sufficient for us to predicate "Christian" of a philosophy.

Thus there are at least four distinct meanings for the expression "Christian philosophy." If, by the one usage, we apply the qualification "Christian" primarily to the philosopher and only secondarily to his philosophy, we may do so either because the philosopher's entire interest as a philosopher is completely absorbed by his commitment to Christianity or because a philosophy is altogether unaffected by its author's Christianity, although he himself in his faith and life appears truly and fully Christian. If, by the other usage, we apply the qualification "Christian" primarily to a philosophy and only secondarily to the philosopher as a philosopher, we may do so because that philosophy achieves the fulness of the truth a philosopher seeks only in so far as it is subsumed under the transcendent Truth who Christ is and whom even the most divine philosophy is able to see only through a glass darkly, to image only inadequately, and to participate only minutely. Or, again, we may apply the qualification "Christian" primarily to a philosophy, because that philosophy has the truth that it has in itself at the close of an analysis which is intrinsically related to the Christian's wonder—wonder that initiated the inquiry preceding the

analysis—wonder upon the worlds of which he finds himself a part: the world of nature signed by the Creator's hand; the world of truth illumined by the Light of man; the world of value sanctified by the Love who abides within.

Now I shall repeat and discuss each of the four nominal definitions which I am proposing.

*First*, we call a philosophy "Christian" from its author if his whole interest in philosophy depends solely on his commitment to Christian faith.

If the expression "Christian philosophy" is used under this condition, extremists deny that there can be any Christian philosophy. Sometimes Christians have asserted that philosophy is alien to truth, that it is idle speculation, that it is mere human foolishness; they have made such charges because they were considering the interest of philosophers whose commitment was incompatible with Christian faith.<sup>3</sup> Other Christians, however, realizing that they too by their commitment to Incarnate Truth have a love of wisdom, may assert that their faith itself, or the teaching and defense of the Gospel, is their philosophy, since they judge that faith serves for them the function which philosophy serves for the unfortunates who have not heard and accepted the Gospel; such Christians echo the boast of *Ecclesiasticus* that Israel too has a philosophic tradition. The reaction to this boast on the part of philosophers having a commitment incompatible with Christianity will reach the extreme opposite to that of Christians who deny that any philosopher is fit to be a Christian; such philosophers will insist that no Christian is fit to be a philosopher. They will insist that Christians are barred

from sincere participation in the philosophic community because they are cribbed by the myth of creation, blinded by the folly of the cross, and confined by the chains of an all-encompassing order of love. "Narrow-minded, superstitious, absolutistic dogmatism" is the phrase such philosophers will apply to what Christians boasted of as their own philosophy.

Nevertheless, there are men of good will, Christians and others, who also are men of culture, even if they possess only an unsophisticated culture born of necessity and experience. These men can see that the interest of each person presupposes and rests upon one overarching commitment which he personally makes. Having culture, such men are not blind to diversities among themselves; nor do they minimize their diversities. But also having good will, such men see also that their diverse commitments conceal an implicit unity, for one and all they are committed to a reality which lies outside their proper and peculiar interests and beyond their clear vision and grasp. Hence they can tolerate diversity of commitment, neither because they think it insignificant nor because they consider it the final goal of human effort but because they accept it as a significant and common evil toward whose elimination they must co-operate, using themselves in the service of that one reality beyond interest, in which all their diverse explicit commitments implicitly unite.

Among these men, some appear pre-eminent over the rest in their extraordinary intellectual competence and activity, in their detachment from both technicalities and vulgar concerns, in their universality of interest, in their indifference to praise and condemna-

tion, in their magnanimity, in their fairness to collaborators and critics, in their sagacity in appreciating the common human predicament, and in their determination to unfold their commitments to the point where their hidden community can appear in reality. While valuing what they already possess, they do not rest in it as do those who boast of a final vision and claim possession of the end of human striving. Rather, they know well their limitations, and they attend more to what they lack in community than to what they possess in diversity. Using themselves in the pursuit of wisdom, they can respect one another as co-workers, and they can agree that freedom of conscience, of inquiry, and of communication is an indispensable condition for the success of their common enterprise.

Men such as these deserve the title "philosopher" and it will be granted to them by all men of good will and culture, and the title will be qualified by the denominations of commitment—for example, they will call John Henry Newman "a Christian philosopher." The qualification does not diminish the title, nor is it a mere extrinsic addition to it; rather, "Christian" indicates the quality of the commitment which made Newman a philosopher and informed all of his work.

His outward productions, his utterances and writings, are not what such a philosopher hopes mainly to accomplish, but in so far as those works are relics of his life they will be called after him, "Christian philosophy." In this sense of the word "philosophy," philosophies express the fundamental principles of understanding and co-operation among men of good will in the central areas of human concern; such principles will vary with the commitments of those who confess them,

for they will manifest diverse unfoldings which will unite only in the reality beyond commitment.

In the first sense, then, a Christian philosophy is the work of a Christian philosopher—one who wins the title "philosopher" as a result of his efforts to establish a fundamental ground for understanding and co-operation among all men of good will. He is not given the title of "philosopher" in spite of his own Christian faith but precisely and wholly because of that faith—a faith that he affirms by a commitment that absorbs and informs his entire interest in philosophy. The interest in philosophical matters is made all the more genuine in that the Christian's commitment is not so much to the substance and evidence which he already possesses as it is to the full realization of that substance and clear vision of the Reality of which he has evidence.

I come now to the *second* of the nominal definitions of "Christian philosophy" that I am discussing. We call a philosophy "Christian" from its author if the philosophy is altogether unaffected by its author's Christianity, although he himself in his faith and life appears truly and fully Christian.

If the expression "Christian philosophy" is used under this condition, those who use the word "philosophy" solely to designate philosophic writings and utterances, even including the meaning they communicate, must deny that there can be any Christian philosophy. Certainly if the same man happens to be a married man and a physician, one can call him "a married physician"; if one man is both educated and a chess player, one can say he is "an educated chess player." Similarly, if an American is a physicist, he is an American physicist; if a Christian is a philosopher, he is a Christian

philosopher. And as we can say "American physics," meaning the physics done in America more or less by Americans, so we can say "Christian philosophy," meaning the philosophy done among Christians and more or less by persons who are in fact Christians. Yet clearly there is no such thing as a physical theory, a medical treatment, or a chess game that is peculiarly American; hence, there is no such thing as a philosophy that is distinctively Christian.

One response to this argument is that Christianity permeates all the products of culture, while marriage, education, and American citizenship do not. Especially in philosophy, it is said, Christianity enters within the philosophic product, shaping it by requirements that are inescapable in a Christocentric universe.

Superficially this response is plausible, but I am afraid it proves too much if it proves anything at all. In its full force, the argument that philosophy is intrinsically affected by the existential reality of the Incarnation applies equally well to the whole range of products of culture. It follows that there is a Christian physics and a Christian medicine and a Christian chess game as well as a Christian philosophy. Even within philosophy itself, we must notice that there are whole areas of topics—in logic, in aesthetics, in theory of science, even in metaphysics—which have no more direct relationship with Christianity than do physics, medicine, and chess. The Incarnation simply is irrelevant to physics, medicine, chess, and vast areas in philosophy in so far as they are considered properly, in themselves, and according to their own requirements. To produce something in these areas is to meet their own requirements; a logician

cannot reasonably defend his logical oddities by calling them "Christian logic." To produce something in these areas does not require that they be influenced by Christianity; a logician cannot reasonably apologize for the gaps in his logic by pleading that the Redemption is not yet fully accomplished. To produce something in these areas is incompatible with the intrusion of faith into them; a logician could not do competent work if he were to inject the Incarnation as a fourth term in every syllogism.

Still we do sometimes refer to a philosophy as "Christian" even though the philosophic work is altogether unaffected by its author's Christianity. Apart from the vacuous sense in which we can talk of "Christian chess," there is a significant sense in which we speak of Christian scholarship and assess its contributions to philosophy, the sciences, and the arts. Clearly, there can be no contributions to logic by Christian scholarship if there is not in some sense a Christian logic. If, as I have just argued, we cannot locate Christian logic in the works of Christian logicians, then we must locate it in Christian logicians themselves. The same consequent will hold for any philosophy which is called "Christian" from its author, although his work does not evidence a Christian influence: the philosopher himself will be called "Christian" primarily and the philosophy inherent in him will be called "Christian" secondarily.

In such a case, what is the philosophy that I would locate in the philosopher himself? It is not the meaning of his philosophic works, for, to the extent that his effort at communication is successful, that meaning is detached from the philosopher, it is carried by

the work, and it belongs as well to anyone who grasps it as it does to the author of the work himself. Rather, the philosophy located in the philosopher is his possession; it is that aspect of his personality that he has perfected by becoming a philosopher; it is his permanent ability to do the work for which he has been educated; it is, in short, the philosophic habits whose actuations are the psychic reality of philosophic thinking processes. These habits and their acts comprise among themselves all the reality which philosophy has as a being among beings in the order of nature.

Grace perfects nature. It first perfects the person as a whole, elevating him to an order above the merely human by loosening the bonds in which human nature confines human entity. This loosening is not merely in the order of action, for although action completes the divine life shared by man, action follows entity. Grace perfects the person in all his capacities, habits, and acts not only by endowing them with a value they could not otherwise have but by endowing them in the first place with an entity they could not otherwise have; consequently, their value is their own inasmuch as it flows from an entity which is their own, in proportion to the supernature with which grace elevates human nature intrinsically.<sup>4</sup>

The cliché which refers to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual as three quite distinct spheres having quite distinct principles, developments, and objectives is a sign of confusion concerning the unity of Christian man, in whom nature and grace are integrated at the root of all capacities, habits, and actions—integrated by the entity from which they flow. Of course, there is

a distinction between theological, intellectual, and moral virtues, but this distinction is based on differences in their objects, not on differences in the subject who possesses them. Only nature can be perfected by grace, and grace perfects nature integrally. In the Christian, the intellectual and moral virtues are supernaturalized because his person is granted a share in divine entity. And as Christianity in us is not an aspect of our humanity, but the whole of it raised to a participation in divinity, so Christian life is not a sphere of human life, but it is the whole of human life lived in Christ.

It follows that the philosophic habits of the Christian become Christian philosophy by virtue of the adoption of this man by God as a son. Equally, all his other habits become Christian, unless they cannot be integrated in his own personality. Thus there is a Christian science of physics and a Christian art of medicine and a Christian skill of chess playing, not in the products but in the Christian personality whose capacities, habits, and acts are Christian because he is Christian by virtue of the entity he shares according to his supernature.

Consider this question: "Can philosophic habits be integrated in a Christian personality if they have no special relevance to faith and no special utility in meeting the necessities of nature?" Of course we would not ask this question seriously. We readily assume that there is nothing wrong with being a scholar in formal logic, even if the scholarship has no pragmatic value and even if nothing in the works produced can be ascribed to the Christianity of their author. Yet in practice we often seem to act on the assumption that the work of Christians in philosophy must

be either of some practical consequence or of some marked relevance to the faith. We would not exclude Peter of Spain from Christian philosophy, using "Christian philosophy" in the sense I am now exploring, but we find few Catholic scholars imitating him. We would never deny that grace perfects nature, but sometimes in practice we assume that grace does not perfect everything that perfects nature—every habit that fulfils a natural capacity and every act that fulfils an ability acquired by a man and integrated into his human personality.

I have been arguing for two points in this analysis of the second nominal definition of "Christian philosophy." I have been arguing positively that every philosophic habit that is an integrated aspect of a human personality according to nature is a Christian philosophy in one whose nature is elevated by grace. I have been arguing negatively that philosophic works authored by Christians and springing from their Christian philosophic capabilities need not be intrinsically specified by their source. Perhaps the positive point may be granted, but still it may be argued that there can be nothing which is Christian philosophy solely in this sense. For I must allow that there are at least some areas in philosophy in which philosophic work is intrinsically influenced by its author's Christianity. But is it not true that philosophy is an indivisible whole, every part of which is intrinsically affected by every other? If so, then there cannot even be a logic which is not at least implicitly determined by metaphysics and ethics, and there can be no parts of these which are not at least implicitly affected by all their other parts. Granting these assumptions, there could be

no Christian philosophy which was not influenced by Christianity in its very content; consequently, there would be no opportunity to call a philosophy "Christian" solely by reference to the supernaturally elevated philosophic habits of its Christian author.

The questionable premise in this argument is that philosophy is an indivisible whole. True, according to some metaphysical positions, there can be no philosophic inquiry which does not depend upon some central metaphysical principle. Thus Professor Gilson seems to maintain that everything in Christian philosophy depends on Aquinas' notion of the act of being and that this notion is intrinsically affected by divine revelation. Yet a Christian can hold a diverse view of metaphysics and its relations to other disciplines, including other philosophic disciplines. If the proper business of metaphysics is to investigate questions which lie outside particular inquiries, if metaphysics takes as its data the principles and methods of other sciences, and if the primary objective of metaphysics is to discover the conditions of existing things which render possible other knowledges we have of them—if these conditions can express what metaphysics is, then philosophy may be a very divided whole and what belongs properly to other disciplines need not be determined by metaphysics.

Without excluding other metaphysical positions, it seems to me a Christian may assume implicitly a metaphysics that allows him to produce a great deal of philosophic work without that work revealing any influence of his Christianity. The philosophic ability required to produce such work will be called "a Christian philosophy" solely on the ground that the philos-

opher himself is a Christian whose intellectual capabilities are integral aspects of his human personality, a human personality which, as a whole and so in all its aspects, has been elevated and perfected by grace. Thus in my second sense a Christian philosophy is the personal perfection of a Christian philosopher—one who has the title "philosopher" because he has acquired the competences necessary to investigate and communicate concerning some of the problems which arise in any of the disciplines belonging to philosophy; the Christianity of the philosopher need not in any way affect the philosophic works he produces, but it does perfect his philosophic habits and activities inasmuch as they are aspects of his Christian personality. In so far as the Christian must seek the development of his complete human nature—since grace either perfects nature or has nothing to perfect—a Christian whose philosophic works show no evidence of his Christianity may nevertheless be said to have "a Christian philosophy" in a sense that is not merely coincidental—or, at least, not emptied by purely extrinsic reference, as it is when applied to a philosophic work that is irrelevant to faith.

In contrast with the first two senses of the expression "Christian philosophy," in which "Christian" applies primarily to the philosopher and only secondarily to his philosophy, we now have two other senses to consider; in these, "Christian" is said of the philosopher as such only inasmuch as his work is a Christian philosophy. I come now to the *third* of the four nominal definitions proposed at the beginning. We may call a philosophy "Christian" in itself if that philosophy achieves the fulness of the truth a philosopher seeks

only in so far as it is subsumed under the transcendent Truth who Christ is, whom even the most divine philosophy is able to see only through a glass darkly, to image only inadequately, and to participate only minutely.

The problems suggested by this meaning of "Christian philosophy" are not simple, but they have been discussed a great deal. On the one hand, those who deny the reality of God as a transcendent truth must also deny that there can be any Christian philosophy in this sense; they maintain that there can be no philosophy whatever that does not find—that is, which in principle cannot find—the whole truth it seeks within the immanent sphere of man and nature. Such philosophers have closed their minds a priori against Christianity, and so, of course, no Christian will be found among them. On the other hand, those who deny the full capacity of nature, who do not grant it full value, may deny that there is any philosophic truth available to man that can be fulfilled by subsumption under the transcendent Truth. Hence, for them too, there can be no Christian philosophy in this sense. They may hold that there is no truth relevant to God whatever that is not altogether hidden from human understanding by the inadequate and merely symbolic expressions which sacred scripture uses. Such critics, it seems to me, have closed their minds not only against philosophy but even against integral Christianity, for I cannot see how this position can grant sufficient human understanding of Christianity to allow a Christian act of faith to have any transcendent content.

In trying to locate Christian philosophy between these two extremes, we find an application for the notion that

faith functions in Christian philosophy as a negative norm. In the first two senses of "Christian philosophy" which I have discussed there was no need for this notion, since faith was either an altogether positive determinant or a completely irrelevant factor. But in this third sense, it is clear that faith does function to exclude certain extreme positions with respect to philosophy. On the one hand, it excludes a universe not ample enough—or, a universe of discourse cut a priori too narrowly—to admit any reality radically transcending nature, man, and human comprehension. On the other hand, it excludes those positions which so evacuate and devalue the immanent that nature cannot be related to God, and man cannot attain even a relative knowledge of the transcendent Other. Yet faith does not determine with precision how creatures are related to God; it does not explain how we can have a relative knowledge of Him; it does not clarify the nature of good to such an extent that the problem of evil is eliminated.

If a philosophy can achieve some truth, but not the whole truth which the philosopher seeks except by being subsumed under transcendent Truth, then that philosophy must be of a certain sort and it must involve a certain conception of truth. It must not be a system of certified conclusions, for a conclusion cannot become more evident than it is in itself by being related to what we believe. It must not be a system of explanation, for the mysteries of faith do not show us why facts are as they are. It must not be a structure of purely formal truths, for formal truths cannot be fulfilled by truths which are not themselves formal. It must, in short, not be a system

of truths but a true view of the systems which constitute reality. Such a view of the organic structure of reality springs from a single central insight—the true understanding of what the inner essence of reality is.

The true understanding of being—but, then, what becomes of truth? If truth is required of understanding, the full reality of the object is the standard of knowledge. Understanding can be true only to the extent that it is the reality of its object; understanding is lacking to the extent that it is not yet the full reality of its object; misunderstanding occurs to the extent that one misjudges the degree of his understanding, thinking it complete when it is only partial; the truth of understanding is never perfect, for what is understood is always other than understanding itself.

If a philosopher seeks the fullest, the highest, the most universal truth of understanding, he must seek to understand the full reality of what he experiences; but he soon discovers that the full reality of experience is beyond experience itself, not within it. The very experience of the instability of experience is prime evidence of the generality of the one sure truth of experience—the truth is not here. And if understanding also changes, then it also must pass away—the truth is beyond understanding, in reality itself. But in what reality? Not in reality which is experienced, nor yet in the reality which is understood, but only in an ideal reality which is to be sought on the far side of intelligibility. The truth, in the end, may be sought by understanding but it cannot be understood; it must be loved and grasped in itself as a vision beyond knowledge.

A philosopher whose objective is be-

yond understanding can attain the truth he seeks only inasmuch as he becomes aware that he lacks it in its fulness—that is, in itself. His experience and understanding of limited reality tell him only that whatever value it has lies beyond its limits. If such a philosopher also accepts the Christian faith, the Gospel must seem addressed to him, as it did to Augustine, according to his title as philosopher; the Word clarifies what he has learned, embodies what he has sought, and realizes what he has loved in idea, for the Word Incarnate is the Truth, the Way, and the Life. The truth of human understanding is given fuller meaning by faith, since faith manifests that the truth philosophers can attain is a dark glimpse, an inadequate reflection, a minute participation in transcendent Truth. Ultimate Reality is one, but there are many participants; the first participant is Christ, who is the first-born of every creature.

Looking back upon his philosophy from the vantage point of his faith, a Christian philosopher, such as Augustine, can see that his philosophy achieves the truth he sought in it only in so far as it is subsumed under the transcendent Truth to whom faith leads him. To be sure, philosophy is not faith, except perhaps seminally, but in so far as it is genuine, it is a natural image of the Eternal Truth, illumined for us by the divine light within us. For the philosopher who has become a Christian, a new view of reality is opened, for following upon a deeper penetration of the essence of being, he achieves a clearer understanding of the system of reality and a better appreciation of the value inherent in the temporal world. Faith returns the Christian to his philosophy at a new

level of understanding; his philosophy is now Christian, and he is now a Christian philosopher. All that had concerned him before may be his concern still, but now all his knowledge is permeated by faith, which unveils the image of God in everything with which philosophic understanding begins to identify the philosopher's mind.

Thus in my third sense a Christian philosophy is an understanding of the essential nature of reality, an understanding available in its fulness only when faith removes the shade which obstructs the clear rays of the divine light within us, an understanding which permits us a just view of the systems of reality in its many levels, an understanding which directs us with clarity and guides us with certainty toward the unchangeable good beyond the development of knowledge and the hierarchies of value. It is in this sense, I believe, that Professor Gilson is a Christian philosopher, and I think it is in this good, traditional, Augustinian sense that he understands what Christian philosophy is. One who has such a philosophy is rightly called "a Christian philosopher"; nevertheless, a Christian who is a philosopher without such a philosophy still might be a Christian philosopher also.

Finally, I come to the *fourth* of the nominal definitions proposed in the beginning. We may call a philosophy "Christian" in itself—and denominate its author "a Christian philosopher" from it—inasmuch as that philosophy has the truth that it has in itself at the end of an analysis which is intrinsically related to a Christian's wonder—wonder that initiated the inquiry preceding the analysis—wonder upon the worlds of which we find ourselves a part: the world of nature

signed by the Creator's hand; the world of truth illumined by the Light of man; and the world of value sanctified by the Love who abides within.

Some may think that the coupling of "Christian" with "wonder" is a conjunction of incompatibles. To be a Christian is at least to have faith, and faith gives certainty beyond doubt precisely concerning those points which always have interested philosophers the most: the existence and unity of God, the facts of creation and providence, the goodness of God and the order of the universe, the immortality of the soul and the freedom of will, the reality of moral obligation and the first principles of right action. Christians cannot seriously doubt any of these points. Hence, it might seem, for Christians there is little room for serious wonder. A Christian may love and seek wisdom, but the wisdom he seeks is not philosophic; and reverence for divine majesty, not wonder, is the beginning of it. Slight changes in this argument would fit it for use by one who does not accept the points in question as a proof that a Christian is barred from the gateway to philosophic inquiry by his unquestioning conviction concerning the tenets of his faith. But it seems to me that this argument, whether presented in its Christian or in its anti-Christian form, involves a misjudgment both of the function of the philosophic inquiry which proceeds from wonder and of the nature of the conviction which proceeds from faith.

The wonder from which philosophic inquiry proceeds is not doubt about facts but astonishment before facts to whose lack of immediate intelligibility one has not become hardened. Wonder is the realization in the face of facts that the multiplicity they involve is

not understood merely in accepting them, and it is a desire for a thread of insight which can knit together the elements of fact, so that the truth of an accepted fact will be included in knowledge, not merely given. Wonder sends thought for causes, the intelligible factors which unite the elements of factual situations according to their own objectively known and necessary requirements. Thus the function of the philosophic inquiry which proceeds from wonder is not to make certain of anything, nor merely to understand anything. Rather, it is to explain undoubted truths by understanding the causes of the facts to which those truths refer. Such wonder is not practical, and it has no special regard for the moral interests of man. If philosophic inquiry touches these matters at all, it is only because they involve some wondrous facts.

The conviction which proceeds from faith with respect to matters that are also within the competence of philosophy is a determination of judgment without an evident knowledge of truth. Faith assures us that God exists and that he creates, but it does not explain why the things that we understand exist otherwise than through and in themselves—for this we need essence and existence, which are not of faith; philosophy may explain this metaphysical fact, but it has no business asking whether God exists—for this we need the conviction that he does.<sup>5</sup> There is an immense difference between *Exodus* and *On Being and Essence*, a difference not lessened by the *Summa Theologica's* use of metaphysics. Moreover, the facts which faith proposes to us concerning man and nature do not remove the occasion for philosophic wonder but, rather, promote it. Perhaps

the one great effect of faith upon genuine philosophic inquiry is that natural wonder, reinforced by reverence for God, becomes all the more acute.<sup>6</sup> Because the Christian is certain that there are explanations for facts, he wonders at them all the more, just as one who is certain that there is a solution to a puzzle is more astonished by its apparent insolubility than one who doubts whether there is any solution and so can give the puzzle up as hopeless.

The constant recurrence in the same form of enduring questions, whose answers are accepted on faith not only by Christians but even by the adherents of almost every great religion, is perhaps more a tribute to the tenacity of unbelief than to the philosophic relevance of the questions as they are raised. To make of philosophy a pursuit of spurious proofs for what we believe anyway is to make nonsense of it. Philosophy is not a good substitute for faith, and it is not a good support for a faith that needs support. But solid faith can free the philosopher of his subjective need for spurious proofs and allow him to set about the inexhaustible task of explaining the facts about the things he can understand. And the Christian philosopher is encouraged by his belief that every fact he explains is restored through Christ, in whom he is incorporated, to God.

Nevertheless, there is another side to the problem of whether a Christian can indulge wonder by becoming a philosopher. Is there not a certain danger in probing further than necessary, in seeking hidden things which may be above us? Once again, we would not seriously ask this question, but we know the feeling of fear which some-

times restrains us when we approach sensitive topics. The tremendous boldness of Aquinas, who was never hesitant although he was never rash, we all admire; but who of us is not hesitant or hesitant and rash by turns?

Here, too, it seems to me, it is not my faith, but a weakness of my faith only imperfectly informed, if at all, by charity that restrains me. If I believe God because I think it is good for me to believe him, then I still feel some insecurity, since every question must seem a personal threat. My welfare is not the supreme good of the universe, and reality may be at odds with me. But if I believe God because I love him even above myself, then, believing that he is truth, I can love truth regardless of myself. If reality be at odds with me, if I be not chosen, if faith be a curse upon me, let it be so, for it is true. And if all that I believe were false, let me rather know it for false than cling to my self-deception.

Firm faith would face every question without self-conscious hesitation or rashness. An apparent conflict between some truth of faith and some conclusion of inquiry need cause no more distress than any of the innumerable apparent conflicts an inquiring mind meets every day. The difficulty would stimulate investigation, not halt it, for it would suggest at least three new questions. First, is there a genuine conflict? Second, does this conclusion truly follow from evidence? Third, is this belief really a truth of faith? The last point would be assumed no more than the other two, for the believer is aware that firm faith does not exclude a mistake on his own part. Such an investigation as this, it seems to me, is demanded by the notion of faith as a

negative norm to be used in actual philosophic inquiry. Faith here holds the preferred status accorded undeniable facts which cannot be excluded from consideration, and it functions in this role very much as does any evident fact. If I love truth above myself, I will not halt at an apparent conflict or merely try to exclude either pole of it, but I will seek a resolution with patience and serenity.

From the beginning, then, a Christian finds himself in a world in which the facts expressed by the truths of faith are included; the truth of the Gospel belongs in his mental universe; and sanctity gives meaning to good in his general hierarchy of value. When he asks why, his wonder is at once a Christian and a human reaction to the mystery and wonder of these worlds. It is only after some time and reflection that he begins to distinguish between faith and experience, and it is much later, if ever, that he distinguishes between Christian conviction and philosophic explanation. To make the latter distinction, he must become aware of the logical conditions required for explanation, and he must have the experience of terminating a philosophic analysis. If he has done this, he knows that the truth of philosophy is within knowledge and that its content does not depend on the words which may express it, or on the values which lie beyond it, or on the experiences which happen to occasion its being known, or on the psychological conditions of the act of knowledge, or on the beliefs of the philosopher himself, since the truth of philosophy is complete in the proposition itself which terminates analysis, that is, in explanation.

How, then, is a philosophy which begins in Christian wonder a Christian

philosophy? On the path of inquiry it is integrally Christian, since the truths of faith are accepted as facts. At the end of the path of analysis it is simply philosophic truth in its content, for, if it were anything else, it would not be philosophy. However, there is more to philosophic knowledge than its content; the truth also is, and it is only in so far as it is known. But the fact that philosophic truth is known by the Christian depends on the wonder with which he began his inquiry. It is not that his philosophy would not be the same if he were not a Christian; his philosophy simply would not be at all. Instead there might be another philosophy, it is true, but one can no more compare the actual with the hypothetical in this case than a child can compare the person he is with the one he might have been were he not the child of his actual parents.<sup>7</sup>

Thus in my fourth sense a Christian philosophy is an explanatory knowledge of facts whose truth is known in the understanding of their causes, a knowledge which depends for its occurrence on a process of inquiry initiated by wonder—a knowledge, therefore, which can be called "Christian" inasmuch as it proceeds from a way of inquiry which is integrally Christian. It is in this sense, I believe, that the leaders of the contemporary Dominican school are Christian philosophers, and many of those who have criticized Professor Gilson's notion of Christian philosophy maintain this view of what it is. One who has such a philosophy is rightly called "a Christian philosopher"; nevertheless, a Christian may have a philosophy without having one in this sense, for Augustinianism is a permanent and genuine alternative.

Comparing all four meanings of "Christian philosophy," I believe they are related to one another in the following way.

If one is a Christian philosopher according to the first meaning—that is, by virtue of a personal commitment to Christianity and for the sake of finding common ground for co-operation among men of good will—he will seek an intellectually articulated position from which to proceed in his own efforts to communicate with those who do not share his faith. His quest may lead him to develop a philosophy which is Christian in itself in either of the two ways that I have discussed under the third and fourth meanings of "Christian philosophy." Or he may use works called "Christian philosophy" in either or both these senses as material for an eclectic system of Christian thought. Such a system, detached from the requirements for a philosophy in either sense, may maintain a certain genuine character if it is an instrument of one who is truly a Christian philosopher according to that first meaning. Otherwise it will deteriorate to the condition of a muddled jargon—revered as though it were essential to faith, taught as though it were mathematically formal and certain, and used as a partisan weapon against all who do not share the faith which has become encumbered with it. It was such a deterioration to empty formalism and incompetent polemics which evoked the urgent call by Leo XIII for the restoration of Christian philosophy.

For this reason, it seems to me, the third and fourth meanings of "Christian philosophy" are prior to the first one. If a philosophy is Christian according to the third meaning—that is, by reflecting Christian truth which

transcends it and by achieving fulfillment in transcendent Truth—it must not exclude the truth which can be present in human knowledge according to the natural light with which God has endowed man. Such truth may be attained in fact and actually included within a more comprehensive view which faith unfolds, for a knowledge which meets in itself all the requirements for philosophic truth may in relation to faith be seen to be a participation in transcendent Truth. Thus the great Franciscans Bonaventura and John Duns Scotus recognized the valid claims of the truth attained by man according to his own nature, although their own wisdom completely subsumed philosophy under transcendent Truth, who is rather to be loved than to be objectified in knowledge.

On the other hand, the truth which can belong to philosophy according to itself may not in fact be attained by a Christian; his philosophic quest may be rewarded with faith, which promises satisfaction to his longing for supreme Truth, but not by understanding, which would satisfy his wonder. If such a Christian wisdom remains sufficiently comprehensive to allow for the truth and value of truth which man can achieve by the resources of his nature, then with the wisdom of Clement of Alexandria and of Augustine himself it proclaims human wisdom also to be Christian and stands ready to embrace it as a proto-evangelium. But if this Christian wisdom becomes narrow and exclusive, it rejects all contact with the truth which human wisdom can possess in itself; in doing so, it brands as corrupt what God created good and renders the mystery of the Incarnation an absurdity. Since nature's sin is thought to lie in having been created, nature is

irredeemable, and the truth of Christ is purely divine. Excluding philosophy, Christian wisdom soon fails either to be Christian or to be wise.

For this reason, I think that a philosophy which is Christian according to the third meaning—a Christian understanding of the relativity of all reality to the Supreme Good—presupposes for its own integrity a philosophy which is Christian according to the fourth meaning: the outcome of the process of Christian wonder in a knowledge properly human which has a limited and participated but necessary and unqualified truth within itself.

Finally, however, if a philosophy is to be Christian inasmuch as it terminates Christian wonder through a process of inquiry which is integrally Christian by a knowledge that fulfils within itself the conditions necessary to be philosophy, then the philosopher who attains such a Christian wisdom, and who is denominated a "Christian philosopher" from it, must in himself fulfil the requirements for the Christian philosopher which I indicated in my second definition of "Christian philosophy." For he must have developed the competence needed to investigate some of the problems of philosophy, or the way of inquiry he follows will not lead to a genuine philosophic knowledge. And these developed capabilities also must be integral aspects of a Christian personality or the way of inquiry will not be integrally Christian. Neither well-motivated incompetence nor tech-

nical competence segregated from Christian wonder can lead to a Christian philosophy.

How, then, is a Christian to proceed in philosophy today? He will proceed from his own tradition; he will not merely adopt the most recent fashion. He will not isolate his philosophic life from his Christian life. But in sincerity and truth he will be open to all philosophic thought and ready to enter any philosophic controversy, since competent work in philosophy proceeds in a community in which every member must take turns in originating and criticizing ideas. Philosophy does not benefit when there is in this community a proud isolation of traditions or a narrow specialization of fields. We should communicate with all our colleagues who will join with us in philosophic dialogue, for the apostolate of Christian philosophers is to know all the truth available to philosophy, not to degrade the Gospel by preaching it in philosophic disguise.

The process of the Redemption is a single and successive realization of the providence and mercy of God. To this process belongs the restoration to God through Christ of all things—all things—including man's capacity for a philosophic knowledge of nature, of truth, and of value. Christian philosophy, at its center, is this aspect of the Redemption, proceeding in apparent disarray toward the fulness of time when the kingdom of God within us shall be accomplished.

NOTES

1. Maurice Nédoncelle, *Is There a Christian Philosophy?* trans. Iltyd Trethowan (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1960), traces the history of the problem and supplies bibliographical notes. A historical study even more extensive than his would be required for a definitive treatment. In this

paper I merely wish to propose an original idea concerning how the problem can be approached. I consider the problem to be a theological more than a philosophical one, and I am assuming the Catholic faith throughout. One who does not share my faith may find the dialectical substructure

ture helpful, nevertheless, in constructing a position suitable to his own commitment.

2. *The Thomist*, XXIII (July, 1960), 448-76, especially 463-72.

3. If one wishes to quote Paul in this connection, he ought not omit Phil. 4:8-9: "And now, brethren, all that rings true, all that commands reverence, and all that makes for right; all that is pure, all that is lovely, all that is gracious in the telling; virtue and merit, wherever virtue and merit are found—let this be the argument of your thoughts."

4. The distinction between nature and grace is the precise object of the two statements: "No man is an adopted son of God merely by virtue of his human nature; no adopted son of God becomes human in virtue of that adoption." The unity of nature and grace is the precise object of the two statements: "The *person* who receives grace is adopted by God; *Christ*, not he himself, lives in him whom God adopts." Both the distinction and the unity are real, not merely formal or in *ratio*, and neither an isolation of nature from grace nor an absorption of nature by grace can be accepted. However, different conditions of objectivity (one might say, "diverse levels of reality") are indicated by the two pairs of statements. I think that a logical (semantical) and metaphysical clarification with respect to the non-correspondence both of propositional structure and of logical entity to objects known by propositions might lessen the difficulties which have been encountered by recent attempts to reach a more adequate formulation of this mystery.

5. I am not insisting on a certain view of essence and existence here, but merely using it as an example to point out that the metaphysical issue is not settled by faith. Nor am I denying that

the existence of God can be demonstrated. However, it is not a question which can arise in this form in metaphysics (at least, not in a metaphysics of an Aristotelian type), since the *fact* that something exists is presupposed by any question about it. Thomas C. O'Brien has treated this question in a series of articles in *The Thomist*, XXIII (January, April, and July, 1960), 1-89, 211-85, and 362-447: "Reflexion on the Question of God's Existence in Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics."

6. I do not think that the Christian philosopher as such has any special *philosophical* problems, although problems initially are neither definitely theological nor philosophical. But, one might ask, is not the Christian philosopher made aware of some special facts—for example, concerning human nature by virtue of the doctrine of the Incarnation—which raise problems for him that he would not encounter otherwise? I think such problems either are theological or are merely called to the Christian philosopher's attention by his faith. In the example cited, it seems to me, the distinction between nature and personality is called to the Christian philosopher's attention by his faith, but it is not formally of faith, and it could have been worked out apart from the doctrine of the Incarnation; the possibility of the assumption of human nature by a divine person, on the other hand, although expressible in philosophical terms, is strictly a matter of faith and not a problem within the philosopher's proper competence.

7. This whole matter can be summed up oversimply in a neat, if paradoxical, formula: The non-Christian philosopher cannot know Christian philosophy, but Christian philosophy could be known by a non-Christian philosopher.