

ARTICLES

# Christian Philosophy, Christian Philosophers, or Christians Making Philosophy?

*Juan Manuel Burgos Velasco*

**ABSTRACT** The objective of this paper is to reflect on the proper way for Christians to do philosophy, in respect of which I have been inspired by a phrase attributed to Cardinal Newman: “We do not need Christian philosophy. We need Christians making good philosophy.” This sentence can appear controversial, but I believe it is not, if its content is made explicit in an appropriate way. To better develop what I understand Newman to be proposing here, I have added another category to his statement, with the consequence that my own text falls into three sections: 1) on Christian philosophy; 2) on Christian philosophers; 3) on Christians who do philosophy. This is the scheme that we will use to position ourselves as regards the complex issue of the relationship between philosophy and Christianity.

**KEYWORDS** Christian philosophy; Christianity; philosophy of religion; personalism; rationalism; Thomism

## 1. ON CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

### 1.1 *Christian Philosophy as Rational Thinking in the Context of Christianity*

The expression “Christian philosophy” is polysemic. Hence, a Christian philosopher, or more simply a Christian who does philosophy, can collaborate or participate in its construction in multiple ways, providing that we are dealing with a very broad understanding of what Christian philosophy itself amounts to—along the lines of *any kind of philosophical or rational thinking in the context of Christianity or, more widely, of a Christian culture*. They can, for example, *highlight the philosophical contributions of Christianity* as Gilson did, masterfully, in *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*. As is known, he irrefutably showed there how Christianity involved a *deep modification and improvement of philosophy*, introducing concepts that were not only new but unthinkable as far as the Greek mindset was concerned: the idea of creation, which led to the western radicalization of the question of being, with the parallel establishment of human contingency;<sup>1</sup> the notion of the person; the vindication of personal freedom in the face of destiny; the internalization of morality and obligation; the linear direction of history versus eternal Greek return, etc. (see Gilson 2017).

This type of reflection continues to be necessary today, as in most Western countries we are witnessing an intense process of secularization that often leads to a simplistic or even irrational vision of Christianity. Nothing could be further from the truth, of course, but the continuous pressure from the media consolidates this way of thinking, especially among young people, and perhaps also among young thinkers who, as intellectuals, should know better. Therefore, asserting the philosophical potential of Christianity is certainly a worthwhile task, and it can also represent a contribution to Christian philosophy itself.

One can also collaborate with Christian philosophy by *avoiding the contradictions between faith and reason, or between faith and science*, or, using classical terminology, by elaborating—or rather, re-elaborating—*an apologetic*. The defense of faith began at the very beginning of Christianity, with St. Paul and St. Justin, and the *fides quaerens intellectum*, but the dialogue between reason and faith has been constantly changing ever since: even if the premises that support it do not change, the concrete way in which this dialogue takes place is inseparable from a cultural context in permanent

1. See Thomas Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*.

transformation.<sup>2</sup> Problems that at a certain time may seem insoluble are, with the passage of decades or centuries, solved, while other issues considered decisive for the self-understanding of some societies may, in the course of time, become irrelevant, in that society suddenly decides to look the other way, thus closing down the debate.<sup>3</sup> More generally, as Newman already noted, even the formulations of the dogmas evolve, as the concepts are not static and both their linguistic formulation and their understanding are modified and altered—which might mean, paradoxically, that the maintenance of its essential content entails a modification of its linguistic expression, however old it might be (Newman 2005). Whoever wished to contribute to the consolidation of Christian philosophy would then have before them a delicate and important task: *to review the philosophical formulations that are related to Christianity*, such as, for example, the objectivity of truth, the existence of God, human freedom, or the principles of morality. The new epistemological theories and proposals—to focus on only the first of the topics mentioned—should be considered, evaluated, and rejected if necessary, or, on the contrary, applied to the epistemological assumptions that Christianity requires.

One could also collaborate with Christian philosophy in a manner complementary to the above, *promoting the unification or, better, integration, of philosophical and theological thought*, and, in parallel, of the man who activates that thought and who, being a philosopher and a Christian, cannot think *etsi Deus non daretur*, in the well-known expression of Grotius designed for the legal-political world. Precisely to respond to this problem, Romano Guardini designed his particular Christian *Weltanschauung* in which, somehow placing himself above the distinction between philosophy and theology, he sought to generate a comprehensive vision of the world incorporating classicism and modernity (see Riva 1975).

### *1.2 Christian Philosophy as a Unitary Means of Philosophical*

#### *Expression of the Ideas and Values that Christianity Sustains*

All the objectives that we have indicated in the previous section, and many others, can be proposed as goals for Christian philosophy whenever we consider it in a very generic way: that is, simply as a type of philosophical or rational thinking in the context of Christianity or, more widely, of

2. Two recent contributions to this always unfinished task are (Barron 2016; Aguirreamalloa 2021).

3. This could be said to have been the case, in subsequent decades, with the discussion of gender that has now become omnipresent.

a Christian culture. But this perspective, although it is not deprived of interest, it is very difficult to use from a methodological point of view due to its excessive generality. It is necessary to specify further the notion of “Christian philosophy” if we want to determine its characteristics and objectives and also respond to the criticisms that have been made of it. We need, therefore, to answer this question: *is it possible to define Christian philosophy in a more strict and precise way?* Can we describe it in more concrete terms than as the realization of some general philosophical tasks arising within the Christian cultural milieu? To try to resolve this issue I propose the following definition, which places limits on the holistic vision we have been making use of until now while also making it more precise: *Christian philosophy, strictly speaking, would be that philosophy whose main objective is to philosophically express the rationally accessible principles, ideas, and values that Christianity sustains.* Is this type of philosophy possible? And, if so, what would its value and its mission be?

Although this way of understanding Christian philosophy may seem adequate and even reasonable at a first approximation, a more detailed approach reveals some very pressing problems, to the extent that the following question can be asked: *Can a Christian philosophy such as we have just defined really exist?* In fact, this does not seem simple at all, *due to the generic and diffuse character that this philosophy must necessarily possess:* a character so general, in our opinion, as to rule out *its viability as an authentic philosophy.* Any philosophy, or philosophical system, must offer concrete, technical and specialized solutions to the main problems confronting us—or, at least, to those that fall within its own field of interest. Yet it does not seem that this can happen if Christian philosophy is conceived according to the definition we have proposed. Consider, for example, the issue of freedom. Christian philosophy will testify, of course, that the human being is free. But this is not enough to make it into a philosophy, as such a finding is available to anyone. For that affirmation to acquire a truly philosophical status, it must go further, and *offer a consistent, structured, and significant answer to the question about freedom.* It should, perhaps, identify freedom with choice, or with free will, making explicit, of course, what it means by choice or free will; it could identify it with self-determining processes, or with both simultaneously, as Wojtyła did (see 2021); it can distinguish between negative and positive freedom, like Isaiah Berlin (see 1969), or opt for many other formulations. There are, indeed, numerous ways of understanding freedom, but *is there a specifically Christian philosophical way of understanding it?*

This is the decisive point of the question, because if there is no concrete Christian *philosophical* way of understanding freedom, then it does not

seem that this difficulty can be overcome. *And, in fact, it doesn't seem to be the case.* Augustine, Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, and Karol Wojtyła, to name just a few, have understood freedom in such philosophically *different* ways that it is not possible to formulate a common unitary *philosophical* position. And, of course, that diversity did not come from their behavior as Christians. Not only were all of them fervent Christians, but three of them have been canonized and the other one beatified. So, our conclusion here is straightforward: *there is no one concrete Christian way of understanding freedom philosophically, but many*, which means, by extension, that *there is not one Christian philosophical anthropology either, but many*. And the same goes for ethics and, ultimately, for *Christian philosophy*. It is not possible to affirm the existence of a concrete and unitary Christian philosophy—or, to put it another way, a *unitary philosophical formulation* of Christian values and ideas.<sup>4</sup>

Those who wish to endorse such a possibility sometimes resort to the notion of a *philosophia perennis*, which can be thought of as an ideal repository where, thanks to the efforts of countless generations, *everything that is authentic truth* is deposited. And, since the truth neither changes nor is subject to cultural variations, and Christianity is the truth (for Christians), such a repository would constitute the valid legacy and inheritance of philosophy itself, as well as, tautologically, the content of Christian philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

The existence of this repository of truths would be a wonderful thing indeed, but it does not appear that any such repository exists—or, if it does (where?), that this is something we can know of. The fact is that we philosophers have always argued among ourselves out of pride, for pleasure and for amusement, but also for the love of wisdom. And we will continue to do so. Medieval philosophers did this, as Gilson also showed, and so will philosophers of all ages, including, of course, Christian philosophers—as all the medieval ones indeed were—if they are true philosophers. And we will argue, and they will argue, because the differences that feed these

4. A similar problem, albeit of a less intractable sort, arises when trying to define a *Christian humanism*. Although this is not an easy task, certain consensuses can be reached via broad formulations such as the recognition of freedom, the human capacity to arrive at the truth, the dignity of the person and other similar ideas. These highly generic statements, as we have just indicated, do not serve to elaborate a Christian philosophy, but they may be sufficient to describe a Christian humanism, because there is no requirement for a *systematic philosophical formulation*.

5. “The *philosophia perennis*, understood in the best and widest sense of the term, which includes all genuine contributions to philosophy, but only insofar as they are true.” (Seifert 1997, 35; my translation).

discussions are not based only on personal issues, *but on solid epistemological reasons that accompany any search for the truth*. The fact is that *the full and complete truth is unattainable for man*. We can only aspire to partial and limited truths that, consequently, make it impossible to render any repository impervious to subjectivity. Such a repository neither exists, nor has existed, nor will exist. Who would determine its content? To point out just one of the many problems that its possible existence presents, then: a *philosophia perennis*, thus understood, is impossible, and in just the same way as a *unitary* Christian philosophy is. (That is, a philosophy in which Christian philosophers *agree on their philosophical positions*—not, obviously, in respect of their general worldview.)

### *1.3 On the Content of Christian Philosophy*

To this problem, which in our opinion is insurmountable, we can add another relevant difficulty, albeit one that is perhaps not as central: *Who defines the content and scope of Christian philosophy?* It seems that they should naturally be specified by Christianity, which, at least within Catholicism, means that ultimately they would be authorized by the Magisterium of the Church. And yet, *is this situation compatible with scientific philosophical reflection?* On the one hand, it would not seem unreasonable to admit that this control could generate an attitude of mistrust or suspicion on the part of other philosophers. How, in fact, would this hetero-regulation be made compatible with philosophical autonomy? It could be argued that this regulation would not impose internal limits on philosophy, but only *external* ones, limiting itself to indicating which paths should not be followed or those that lead to dead-end zones, which could even be interpreted as an aid to philosophy. However, since the philosopher does not reach his or her conclusions suddenly, or by magical inspiration, but rather by a process of progressive elaboration, the rejection of a conclusion not only presupposes an external limit but also implies a complete revision of the whole process and, therefore, of the assumptions that have led to it. That is to say, any such external limit has important *internal* repercussions. It is true that the philosopher could find himself or herself facing the same situation without the mediation of external agents: for example, when they themselves realize they have made a mistake, but with the great difference that, in this case, the change in their way of thinking is never produced by way of authority.

Such a difficulty could be resolved, in practice, thanks to good dispositions and qualities on the part of the Christian philosopher. Jacques Maritain, for example, decided to change his political philosophy after Pius XI prohibited Catholics from collaborating with *Action Française* and its leader

Maurras (see Maritain 1985). And that attitude led him from what was close to being a traditionalist philosophy to such innovative and valuable works as *Integral Humanism* and *Man and the State*. But external intervention can also yield bitter fruit. Pius X's interventions against modernism had positive effects on Christian philosophy and theology, but also hindered their further development and growth. And, in a similar way, the emphasis of the Magisterium on the value and principality of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, beginning with the *Aeterni Patris* of Leo XIII (see *Tommaso d'Aquino nel I Centenario dell'enciclica "Aeterni Patris"* 1981), while very useful for renewing Thomism, at the same time, because of its continuous insistence on making Thomism its reference point, also led to a closing off—in the sense of a failure to open the way for—abundant and promising research.<sup>6</sup> Naturally, these indications should not be understood as constituting a general criticism of magisterial interventions in the philosophical field. An inalienable part of the magisterial mission is to announce the truth proclaimed by Christ, which can imply that certain theoretical positions are affirmed and others rejected. But this type of decision, if not carried out in a measured and intelligent manner, can distort the philosophical investigations of Christians. Fortunately, the Church has been increasingly aware of this problem, especially after the Second Vatican Council, and so interventions in this area have been much more measured and balanced than some were in the past.

It seems, therefore, that we can conclude this section by pointing out, first of all, that we can understand Christian philosophy as any philosophical reflection connected with Christianity. In this case, there do not seem to be any major problems, except that a generic and ambiguous concept is being used. But if we understand Christian philosophy, in a more restricted way, as that philosophy whose main objective is to philosophically express the rationally accessible principles, ideas and values that Christianity upholds, two significant problems are encountered. There is no unitary Christian *philosophical* formulation of reality, and this generates a theoretical diversity incompatible with such a conception of Christian philosophy. And, furthermore, such a philosophy would necessarily *be tutored by an external authority*—a problematic position for a philosophical discourse that, by its very nature, is required to be autonomous and critical. Consequently, it seems that we must seek better ways for philosophy and Christianity to coexist—something that leads us to the second section of our paper.

6. "Exaggeration should have been avoided" (see Copleston 1996, 246).

## 2. ON CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHERS

The impossibility of establishing a *unitary* Christian philosophy—or, at least, the serious problems that can arise from attempts to construct it—oblige us to look for other modes of relationship between philosophy and Christianity. In this context, we are going to consider the intermediate position that *Christian philosophers* themselves represent: that is, those Christians who, being philosophers, wish to practice Christian philosophy. Is this possible, and if so, then to what extent? In order not to have to grope our way blindly along this path—in that, as with the notion of “Christian philosophy,” this expression can also be understood in multiple ways—we propose the following definition as a means of *restricting* our field of analysis: a Christian philosopher is that sort of philosopher, a Christian, *whose main objective is to express philosophically the principles, ideas, and values of Christianity.*<sup>7</sup>

The first thing that we can point out in relation to this new definition is that, *by shifting the emphasis from philosophy (as something abstract) to the person (as something concrete and diverse)*, the main problem posed by the restricted conception of “Christian philosophy” is solved from the very start. Now, *pluralism is automatically assured*, since each philosopher will elaborate the philosophy *they* think convenient, or join with the current most congenial to them. The key difficulty that we noted in the context of the previous model of the relationship between philosophy and Christianity is thus resolved. But are there other problems that still need to be addressed? Is this way of doing philosophy fruitful?

### 2.1 *On the Possibility of Christian Philosophy*

It might be worthwhile to begin our response by dwelling on an aspect that should not at this point require further clarification, but which nevertheless does so. It is, furthermore, an issue affecting Christian philosophy on every understanding of the latter we might wish to entertain. This is the idea of *the impossibility of Christian philosophy as such*, in that just by virtue of the mere fact of being Christian—that is, of depending on extra-philosophical sources—it ceases, right from the beginning, to be philosophy. That is not a new issue, of course, but a very old one. A good handful of philosophers, including relevant figures such as Heidegger, have put forward this criticism: “A ‘Christian philosophy’ is a round square and a misunderstanding.

7. It is possible, of course, to consider as a “Christian philosopher” any philosopher with some kind of Christian background who practices philosophy, but this would be an excessively generic description for our purposes.

To be sure, one can thoughtfully question and work through the world of Christian experience, that is, the world of faith. That is then theology” (Heidegger 2014, 8–9). It is not easy, however, to seriously sustain this view, in that even a cursory epistemological analysis shows it to be founded on an outdated modern rationalism: that is, on the *belief* in the possibility of a *philosophy without presuppositions*, a philosophy capable of starting from scratch in a Cartesian or Husserlian mode (see Husserl 1982). Yet such a goal is illusory and unattainable. We could only achieve it by going back to childhood and erasing the contents of our minds, in order to look at the world, this time around, without presuppositions. That is a situation which is certainly difficult to achieve, and which, furthermore, is probably not the most appropriate context for starting to philosophize.

Our knowledge certainly can and should be subjected to critical analysis, but this critical assessment must not be confused with a radical questioning of all prior knowledge, which is anyway simply impossible and would, furthermore, undermine itself by destroying all of the premises and contents on which it would be based. Contemporary hermeneutics (see Beuchot 2015) and personalistic epistemology<sup>8</sup> have stressed this enough, so it is not necessary to revisit it again: the fact is that our thinking is always produced from a specific framework which we cannot do without as it constitutes the *humus* that makes it possible.

This means, in the end, that Christian philosophy, understood in both the generic and the restricted sense, is just as possible as atheist, Hindu or Jewish philosophy. It happens, however, that the anti-Christian trend that runs through a certain part of the West—and that can also be detected in Heidegger, perhaps as a defense mechanism against his clerical beginnings—tends to attack Christian philosophy with much more force, radicalism, and pertinacity than atheist, Jewish or Hindu philosophies, etc. No one questions—and neither do we—the philosophical value of the work of Levinas or Buber, although its Jewish roots are manifest, and sometimes explicit (see Medina 2017). And no one questions the value of a philosophy based on atheism, either. Well, for exactly the same reasons one cannot question the possibility of a philosophy carried out from within the cultural framework of Christianity as long as, obviously, it is an authentic philosophy. The way is thus cleared to establish the possibility, not only of a “Christian philosophy” (which must face, in any case, the problems

8. Integral Personalism postulates that knowledge begins in an experience that is, at the same time, objective and subjective (see Burgos 2016). For more on Integral Personalism, see (Burgos 2019).

indicated above), but of the existence of Christian philosophers: that is, of philosophers who, as their main objective, seek to give philosophical expression to the principles, ideas and values that Christianity upholds.

### 2.2 Problems and Advantages of the “Christian Philosopher”

At first glance, it seems that it could be argued that this task has all the advantages of the previous conception of Christian philosophy, without most of its drawbacks. First of all, it would be possible to work in the three directions pointed to as possible objectives within the framework of a Christian philosophy understood in a *generic way*: to highlight the philosophical contributions of Christianity, to avoid oppositions between faith and reason and, positively, to promote the integration of Christian thought. And now, furthermore, the problems derived from the strict consideration of Christian philosophy, beginning with its uniformity, would be avoided. Given that these tasks would be undertaken by individual philosophers, the problems generated by uniformity would automatically disappear, as each philosopher would work from his or her personal intellectual orientation, generating his or her own philosophical proposal. And so, for example, in front of or next to the Guardianian *Weltanschauung* we would encounter the responsible vision of Julián Marías (see 1987, 1999), that of Augustine, or that of Thomas Aquinas: all of them Christian or with Christian roots, yet different.

Nevertheless, although the problem of uniformity disappears or, at least, weakens, other problems persist, albeit to a lesser extent. There remains the problem of ecclesiastical tutelary interventions that affect, in some way, every Christian, but especially those who focus on the elaboration of “Christian philosophy,” even if only from own their particular point of view. For example, in this case what should be the reaction to the Magisterium’s insistence on the primary role of Thomas Aquinas in philosophy and, in particular, in the processes of formation, as it appears in the following text?

The research and teaching of philosophy in an Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy must be rooted in the ‘philosophical patrimony which is perennially valid,’ which has developed throughout the history, with special attention being given to the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Francis 2018, art. 64. §1).<sup>9</sup>

The extent and manner of the Magisterium’s promoting of the figure of Thomas Aquinas has been gradually changing for decades. The Second

9. As can be seen, the text is nuanced, but the relevance given to Thomas Aquinas could be a subject for philosophical discussion.

Vatican Council constituted a decisive moment, as Thomas Aquinas had already appeared in some texts as a *model of philosophizing*, but not so much as the only model qua philosophical reference point—a direction that the last three papacies have confirmed. We encounter in John Paul II, for example, a large group of Christian thinkers from different times and with different orientations who are presented as furnishing a model for reflection in philosophy and theology:

This is true of both the Fathers of the Church, among whom at least Saint Gregory of Nazianzus and Saint Augustine should be mentioned, and the Medieval Doctors with the great triad of Saint Anselm, Saint Bonaventure and Saint Thomas Aquinas. We see the same fruitful relationship between philosophy and the word of God in the courageous research pursued by more recent thinkers, among whom I gladly mention, in a Western context, figures such as John Henry Newman, Antonio Rosmini, Jacques Maritain, Étienne Gilson and Edith Stein and, in an Eastern context, eminent scholars such as Vladimir S. Soloviev, Pavel A. Florensky, Petr Chaadaev and Vladimir N. Lossky. (John Paul II 1998, n. 74)<sup>10</sup>

Even so, despite all this, Thomist philosophy still appears as the first and main source of reference in numerous normative texts of Catholic education. And this insistence constitutes, in our opinion, an important problem, as it impacts negatively on the philosophical pluralism required, and weakens intellectual creativity.

The Christian philosopher, within the framework of our definition, could also be subject to *thematic limitations*, by virtue of not including within his or her focus of activity those areas that lack any particular weight of significance in the context of Christian Revelation. *Beauty*, for example, is a topic that has traditionally had little relevance in Christian philosophy, perhaps precisely because there is no explicit content of Revelation pertaining to it, so that it is difficult to include it in the content of “Christian philosophy.” This does not mean, of course, that Christianity has had no interest in beauty. On the contrary, the Western world overflows with Christian

10. Ratzinger, for his part, affirms that “the encounter with personalism, which we later found explained with great persuasive force in the great Jewish thinker Martin Buber, was an event that profoundly marked my spiritual path, even though personalism, in my case, united almost by itself with the thought of Saint Augustine who, in the ‘Confessions,’ came out to meet me in all his passionate and profound humanity. On the other hand, I had rather difficulties in accessing the thought of Thomas Aquinas, whose crystalline logic seemed to me too closed in on itself, too impersonal and pre-packaged” (Ratzinger 2005, 68–9; my translation).

beauty, and we could even add with some pride that post-Christian societies do not seem capable of generating such a quality of beauty. But Christian thinking on beauty is scarce—starting with St. Thomas himself, in which it is barely present, and whose lack of attention to it may have influenced Christian thought in general given the relevance of his work.

The opposite is also true, of course. Christianity has, almost in its own right, *some peculiar themes*, such as hope and love, which for this very reason take center stage in the reflection of the Christian philosopher, although they may remain beyond the horizon of other philosophies, being strange to their way of understanding man. Love is a paradigmatic case. Its extreme valuation in Christianity arises from a very original statement found in Christian revelation, namely that “God is love” (1 John 4:8) and not just “thought of thought,” as Aristotle said.<sup>11</sup> And He is love to such an extent that He sacrifices Himself for man, even dying for him, as “there is no greater love than giving one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). This revelation passed over into philosophy and theology, generating some creative and original reflections on love, such as the Augustinian *ordo amoris*<sup>12</sup> and contemporary personalist thinking on this topic.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the same can be said of such notions as corporeality, inter-personality, and others.

In short, *the Christian philosopher* represents an improved model of the relationship between Christianity and philosophy, but in our view continues to face important problems such as the possibility of ecclesiastical tutelage and thematic limits and, as a joint consequence of both of the latter, a potential lack of creativity and innovation—in that the Christian philosopher could be tempted to assume that his or her main path of investigation is already mapped out.<sup>14</sup> For these reasons, it seems that a continuation of our search for an even more perspicuous model of the relationship between philosophy and Christianity could well be justified, and this brings us to the third variant that we wish to present here: the Christian who does philosophy.

11. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1074 b34.

12. “As virtue is the path that leads to true happiness, the definition of it is none other than a perfect love of God. His fourfold division expresses only several affections of the same love, and that is why I do not hesitate to define these four virtues ... as different functions of love” (Augustine 2011, 254; my translation).

13. See, among many others, (Hildebrand 2009).

14. If we understand this Christian philosopher in a generic way—that is, as a philosopher with Christian roots who does philosophy—then all these problems may disappear, but we then rather find ourselves within the framework of our third proposal: the Christian who does philosophy.

### 3. ON CHRISTIANS WHO DO PHILOSOPHY

We must start out once again from some definition or description that will serve to frame our discourse, preventing it from getting lost in the immense multiplicity of possibilities offered by the relationship between philosophy and religion. And in this context we are basically going to distinguish two of these. The first will consist in our acknowledging a *factual connection* not especially relevant to our interests: that of the Christian who in fact practices philosophy, but does so without claiming that their Christianity influences their philosophy. It is quite possible, to be sure, that Christianity, through vital and hidden ways (insofar as it has any weight in such a person's life), plays a part in their work—but, as we have said, that is not the situation that concerns us at present. We want to focus on those philosophers *who expressly wish Christianity to play some role in their philosophy*, without this entailing the elaboration of an officially Christian philosophy. So, we could describe the “Christian who does philosophy” as the philosopher *who, being a Christian, seeks to practice a kind of philosophy in which Christianity has weight and influence, but without elaborating an officially Christian philosophy.*

What are the advantages or disadvantages of this way of philosophizing? In the first instance, the position of the “Christian who does philosophy” is *much more comfortable as regards the possibility of being subject to the influence of external factors.* A Christian who does philosophy is simply someone who pursues it from their own personal position: that is, somebody who practices it just like any other philosopher who has existed or will exist, in that this is the only way of doing so. And, therefore, this person's position is completely unassailable. The atheist philosopher undertakes philosophy from an atheistic perspective, as they cannot operate without their personal stance; the Jew from that of Judaism, the rationalist from that of rationalism, and the Christian from that of their commitment to Christianity. All of them imply a certain positioning in front of existence, but none can be considered superior or neutral to the point where this could lead them to try to impose their worldview on the others. All of them can try to reasonably explain their worldview and their position, laying the foundations for a strictly philosophical debate, but none can properly claim a privileged position as rationalism and atheism have done. As MacIntyre has shown, rationalism is just *one way of using reason*, but not the only one. There are other epistemological traditions with the same or higher value (1994, 1988). And atheism, which is nothing more than a negative response to the existence of God, does not carry any superior or added epistemological value relative to the sort of reflection that starts or concludes with the affirmation

of His existence. So, the Christian who does philosophy can develop a philosophy that takes Christianity into account with either a greater or a lesser degree of intensity, according to his or her tastes or interests. And this will not stop being authentic philosophy as—we insist—all human reflection involves assumptions.

There are many ways to achieve this goal: for example, *keeping in mind the Catholic (or Christian) cultural context when philosophizing*—an attitude and mentality that can take on many forms and modalities, like *the use of the Bible for cultural purposes*. The Bible is, for Christianity, the Holy Book that contains God’s message to humanity. Hence, its content is inspired and necessarily true, and for this reason it constitutes the unchangeable starting point of Christian theology. Yet the Bible is first and foremost *simply a book*: a complex set of facts, narratives, proposals, ideas, reflections and recommendations, written by a very large group of people from very different backgrounds over the centuries. And this set of writings is of such richness and depth that it has had a decisive weight in the formation and crystallization of Western culture. So why not take it into account in philosophy, just as other philosophers do with their cultural and religious sources?<sup>15</sup>

A second, more complex step, but perhaps a more powerful one, would consist in *introducing specifically Christian themes* into philosophy itself. Saint Augustine did this when he made use of Platonism within the framework of his Christian worldview. He did not adapt himself to Platonism, but rather modified it relative to his own Christian viewpoint, introducing, for example, the *ordo amoris*, which did not exist in Plato. Moreover, Thomas Aquinas behaved in the same way with respect to Aristotelianism.<sup>16</sup> This is what contemporary personalists have also done, perhaps even more freely, not relying so directly on Greek philosophy (see Burgos 2018; Bengtsson 2006; Mortensen 2017). And we will not find here, again, anything to question from the standpoint of the critics of “Christian philosophy.” Each philosopher is free to use the sources they consider most appropriate—as long as, of course, they justify them philosophically and open them up to debate and criticism. The fact that they are Christian sources should not create any additional difficulty, except for reasons unrelated to philosophy.

15. Levinas amicably reproaches Wojtyła, that while he frequently refers to his Jewish sources the latter barely mentions his Christian sources in his philosophical writings (see Levinas 1982). This is not entirely true, because in Wojtyła, for example, numerous references to the commandment of love can be found, but it is true that direct references to Christianity are practically non-existent there.

16. Which, naturally, does not mean they were not at the same time influenced by those philosophies.

It seems, therefore, that proceeding from this position the “Christian who does philosophy” could take up the advantages of the previous models without acquiring most of the problems associated with them. They would be able to carry out the set of tasks typical for a generically Christian philosophy that we presented at the beginning of this paper. They could assert the value of Christianity for philosophy, too, showing how and to what extent it can enrich contemporary philosophical reflection. Also, they could collaborate in the elimination of paradoxes and misunderstandings between science, reason and faith, and promote the elaboration of a Christian worldview in the Guardianian style—though this last scenario, to be sure, will not be the most common one for a Christian who is pursuing *philosophy* and who, therefore, wants to stay within the framework of philosophical knowledge, without transgressing this border.

At the same time, and in parallel, the problems of the previous models would affect this one to a lesser extent. The ecclesiastical interventions, in the first place, would carry far less weight—or, rather, would carry *just that which they wish to grant them*. Since they are not engaged in elaborating an “officially” Christian philosophy, it would be they, personally, who would determine the value to be given to those orientations if presented with them. Their freedom would be greater, but without cancelling their responsibility—because, as a Christian, they would have to be attentive to these indications, value them and define their attitude in respect of them, giving consideration at the same time to the fact that these orientations, indications, or suggestions can come from voices and sources of authority that each carry a different weight and status. Nevertheless, our claim is that they would possess more freedom, which could only benefit their philosophy.

The true philosopher is not a domestic animal: he or she needs to live in freedom. Attempts at domestication can only generate a forced submission, incompatible with creative freedom. It is philosophers themselves who must generate their intellectual itinerary—and to the extent that they do not do so they are abandoning philosophy. The union of their philosophy with the Christian path can only come from an inner critical acceptance, which is what has generated the best philosophical results. Other paths only lead to squatting and sterility. Creative freedom, of course, has risks, but there is no other intellectual path that can be followed with dignity. Creative freedom spawned the good Fra Angelico and the stormy Caravaggio, but both contributed to the richness of Christian aesthetics. Both the luminous beauty of Fra Angelico’s frescoes, and Christ’s intense call to Thomas from within the chiaroscuro of Caravaggio’s painting, continue to echo in our souls.

Nor does it seem that, from this perspective, thematic limits can appear. The Christian who practices philosophy is immersed in the philosophical flow of their time and, consequently, *open to any of the issues which their contemporaries face*. In fact, they themselves can promote them, be they “Christian issues” or not. Since their link with Christianity is not official, they are not limited to dealing with a specific set of questions typical of Christianity, as has sometimes happened in art: rather, they are open to any that make sense within the framework of philosophical reflection. Some of the latter, in fact, might not have any direct reference to Christianity (though it would be more difficult not to detect any kind of relationship at all in this regard), but this represents no problem, as their main goal as a philosopher is the creation of *philosophy*, not the dissemination of a “Christian philosophy.” In any case, any favorable repercussions for Christianity should not be disdained if they achieve significant recognition in philosophical areas not specifically linked to Christian themes—such as logic, methodology, the theory of language, or the philosophy of science or nature, etc.—as *contra* many of our contemporary mindsets, this recognition would show that living in the house of Christianity need not imply any limits to our intellectual development.

It is, furthermore, very difficult to encounter any type of reflection that does not ultimately have an impact on Christian culture in one way or another. The theory of language and, in particular, the pragmatist proposals, can be applied, as Ratzinger did, to the liturgy, pointing out its performative character; philology is essential for the preservation and interpretation of biblical writings; the philosophy of nature is decisive for reaching an adequate understanding of ecology, etc. Perhaps it would be necessary to go back to something as abstract as the philosophy of mathematics to reduce that influence to practically zero—though in this case, as we have already mentioned, Christianity could enjoy the intellectual prestige that scientists generate, which naturally has repercussions for the social value of Christianity.

The one aspect that would not completely fit into this way of doing philosophy, perhaps, is *the explicit affirmation of the philosophical value of Christianity*. Therefore, if the Christian practicing philosophy does not at any point mention the sources from which a part of their reflection has been nourished, they may, in a certain way, be betraying those sources and doing a disservice to those who could also go to them to enrich their own understanding. Such an explicit recognition need not always have to take place, but in our opinion, in a context in which Christianity is intellectually undervalued and tends to be excluded from the cultural debate, such

explicitness does show up as an inexcusable duty for the Christian engaged in the pursuit of philosophy—even if the method, place, time and frequency of its execution has to be decided individually and autonomously.<sup>17</sup>

#### CONCLUSIONS

We started from a very general view of Christian philosophy: one that proved interesting yet difficult to make use of in research. We thus proposed a restrictive definition: Christian philosophy as that philosophy whose main objective is to philosophically express the rationally accessible principles, ideas, and values that Christianity upholds. We have shown that this view is problematic and perhaps even unfeasible, as it cannot integrate within itself the pluralism inherent in human thinking and, therefore, also in Christian thought. Such a philosophy, on the contrary, can only amount to a uniform system of thought which hinders creativity, in addition to the fact that its submission to ecclesiastical tutelage threatens to damage its prestige and autonomy as a philosophy.

We then found a more appropriate model of the relationship between philosophy and Christianity by focusing not on “the Christian philosophy,” but on “the Christian philosophers,” understanding as these those Christian thinkers whose main objective is to express philosophically the principles, ideas, and values that Christianity upholds. We were able to confirm, in this case, that the shift of emphasis from the category of “the Christian philosophy” to the subject of “the Christian philosopher” is a very positive one, as it significantly enhances philosophical pluralism. The uniformity of “the Christian philosophy” disappears, and in its place we encounter the work that the Christian philosopher elaborates (either at a personal level, or as part of a philosophical current) in order to formulate their particular way of seeing how Christianity translates into philosophy. Some difficulties or problems, however, remained present: a possible limitation of topics (by having to deal, in principle, only and necessarily with Christian topics); a possible weakening of intellectual creativity, stemming from the limiting of philosophical inquiry to a restricted range of topics; and, again, the suspicion that any tutelage from external sources of authority may well generate amongst members of the philosophical profession.

17. This recognition would go hand in hand with those *non-Christian* intellectuals who have openly recognized the cultural significance of Christianity, such as Benedetto Croce, with his famous statement according to which, in the West, “non possiamo non essere Cristiani,” or those of the Jew Joseph Weiler, in his book *Una Europa Cristiana* (2003).

We thus arrived at our third modality of Christian philosophical reflection: that of the philosopher who, being a Christian, seeks to practice a philosophy in which Christianity has weight and influence. This last attitude is the one that seems to have the greatest number of advantages and the least number of problems. To start with, it does not disdain Christianity: on the contrary, it considers it a valid source of intellectual inspiration that must be taken into account. However, at the same time it does not officially link philosophy to Christianity, and in this way not only generates the desired pluralism but also frees itself from the problems that arose in the context of the other paths explored: the official tutelage of Christian authorities, thematic limitations, and a possible restriction of creativity.

Official tutelage becomes less invasive, because in this case the Christian is not undertaking any officially Christian philosophy, but rather elaborating their own philosophy, and this does not prevent them, if they so wish, from taking into account, in the way they deem appropriate, the ecclesial interventions—which, on the other hand, can be very diverse and come from different sources of authority. On the other hand, thematic limits and possible restrictions on creativity also disappear. Christians pursuing philosophy are to a large extent left alone to themselves, and therefore have, in principle, no limits to their intellectual and creative horizons other than those imposed by their belonging to a community and a culture, and by their personal capacities.

This, then, is in our opinion the most appropriate way to establish, today, the relationship between Christianity and philosophy—subject to our caveat that the relationship with Christianity be made explicit at some point. Were this not to be done, then in addition to betraying to some extent our sources themselves, it could prevent other philosophers and intellectuals from finding in the latter their own philosophical inspiration. In other words, although the Christian practicing philosophy does not have, as a priority, the manifesting of their own vital intellectual connection with Christianity, this connection should be made explicit at some point, as that recognition, in addition to doing justice to Christianity, offers a focus of transcendent orientation to a disoriented society where many questions of fundamental importance are concerned.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aguirreamalloa, Javier. 2021. *La historia de amor más grande jamás contada*. Madrid: Palabra.
- Augustine. 2011. "De las costumbres de la Iglesia Católica y de los maniqueos." In *Escritos apoloéticos (1.º)*, ed. Teófilo Prieto, 237–451. Vol. 4 of *Obras completas de San Agustín*. Madrid: BAC.
- Barron, Robert. 2016. *Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith*. New York: Random House.
- Bengtsson, Jan Olof. 2006. *The Worldview of Personalism: Origins and Early Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Berlin, Isaiah. 1969. *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beuchot, Mauricio. 2015. *Tratado de hermenéutica analógica*. 5 ed. México, D. F.: UNAM.
- Burgos, Juan Manuel. 2016. "Integral experience: A New Proposal on the Beginning of Knowledge." In *In the Sphere of the Personal: New Perspectives in the Philosophy of Persons*, edited by J. Beauregard and S. Smith, 41–58. Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press.
- . 2018. *An Introduction to Personalism*. Washington, D. C.: CUA Press.
- . 2019. "Wojtyła's Personalism as Integral Personalism. The Future of an Intellectual Project." *Questiones Disputatae* 9 (2): 91–111. <https://doi.org/10.5840/qd2019926>.
- Copleston, Frederic. 1996. *Historia de la filosofía*. Vol. 9. Barcelona: Ariel.
- Francis. 2018. "Veritatis gaudium." Accessed April 7, 2023. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/01/29/180129c.html>.
- Gilson, Étienne. 2017. *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*. Translated by A.H.C. Downes. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 2014. *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. 2 ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hildebrand, Dietrich von. 2009. *The Nature of Love*. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1982. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by F. Kersten. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- John Paul II. 1998. "Fides et Ratio." Accessed April 7, 2023. [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html).
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1982. "Notas sobre el pensamiento del cardenal Wojtyła." *Communio. Revista Católica Internacional* (2): 99–102.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1988. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* London: Duckworth.
- . 1994. *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Marías, Julián. 1987. *Antropología metafísica*. Madrid: Alianza.
- . 1999. *La perspectiva cristiana*. Madrid: Alianza.
- Maritain, Jacques. 1985. "Une opinion sur Charles Maurras et le devoir des catholiques (1926)." In *1924–1929, 739–80*. Vol. 3 of *Œuvres complètes de Jacques et Raïssa Maritain*. Fribourg Suisse: Editions Universitaires.
- Medina, Jorge. 2017. *Decir en Griego la novedad del Hebreo: Introducción a las lecturas talmúdicas de Emmanuel Levinas*. Zaragoza: Riopiedras Editores.
- Mortensen, Jonas Norgaard. 2017. *The Common Good. An Introduction to Personalism*. Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press.
- Newman, John Henry. 2005. *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. 2005. *Mi vida*. 4 ed. Madrid: Encuentro.
- Riva, Giuliano. 1975. *Romano Guardini e la katholische Weltanschauung*. Milan: EDB.

- Seifert, Joseph. 1997. "El concepto de persona en la renovación de la Teología Moral. Personalismo y personalismos." In *El primado de la persona en la moral contemporánea*, edited by Antonio Quirós, Augusto Sarmiento Franco, Enrique Molina, Jorge Enériz and Jorge Peñacoba, 33–62. Pamplona: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra.
- Tommaso d'Aquino nel I Centenario dell'enciclica "Aeterni Patris": Atti del Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*. 1981. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Weiler, Joseph. 2003. *Una Europa Cristiana*. Madrid: Encuentro.
- Wojtyła, Karol. 2021. *Person and Act*. Washington, D. C.: CUA Press.