Book Reviews

A Companion to Polish Christian Philosophy of the 20th and 21st Centuries, eds. Piotr S. Mazur, Piotr Duchlinski, Pawel Skrzydlewski. Krakow: Ignatianum University Press, 2020.

The editors of this volume recognize that there is no body of knowledge named Christian philosophy that can be reduced to or arranged in a unitary philosophical system (p. 12). Accordingly, they have recruited authors to examine Christian philosophy mainly after the model of Etienne Gilson, who judges that Christian philosophy is a historical phenomenon, resulting from the intellectual activities of individual thinkers who self-declare as Christian, working in this or that historically situated culture that specifies itself as Christian (p. 11). Since Poland is a nation historically conspicuous for its Christian identity, an exploration of Polish Christian philosophy is bound to be revealing in content. This book records in exquisite detail how Polish Christian philosophy develops over a time frame that antedates the end of the partition of Poland in 1918 to the present day.

The editors make this development evident by studying it through the different lenses "of the twelve most important areas of philosophy." So, after an instructive Introduction, the book proceeds through a series of twelve chapters, each having different authorship: Logic and Methodology of Sciences; Metaphysics; Epistemology; Philosophy of Nature; Philosophy of Man; Ethics; Axiology; Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art; Philosophy of God and Religion; Social Philosophy; Philosophy of Culture; History of Philosophy. Each chapter is informative and clearly written. They are all

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of high quality. I especially recommend the last three chapters since they are rich in historical narratives expressive of Poland's unique national experience in the last century.

By means of these sub-disciplinary perspectives, the different authors can summarize and analyze themes, trends, schools, and researchers that exhibit the movement of Polish Christian Philosophy since the beginnings of the last century. Before the end of the partition of Poland, Christian philosophy was presumptively an exercise in peripatetic-Thomistic philosophy, applied to different philosophical specialties, fortified by a motivation for apologetics. Christian philosophy was revived by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* as a call to challenge the skepticism and atheism of modernism, a challenge which would further be encouraged by Pius XI a generation later. The commitment to Thomism prevailed during the interwar years as Neo-Scholasticism became influential in Europe, especially because many Catholic philosophers, including Poles, matriculated through the Thomistic curriculum at Louvain. Until the end of the War, the Catholic University at Lublin (KUL), founded in 1918, taught Christian philosophy largely under the influence of Louvain. During this time the faculty of theology at Jagiellonian University and the faculty at the Academy of Catholic Theology (ATK, which became Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in 1999) also reflected the influence of Louvain. Nonetheless, the authors show that, while the Thomistic worldview was dominant, there was still enough engagement by Polish Christian philosophers with scientific change and discovery that Neo-scholasticism was responsive to diverse influences, such as those active in the philosophy of science. A disposition for research in methodology, logic, and science had already had a provenance in the Lvov-Warsaw school founded by Kazimierz Twardowski (1866–1938).

After the war, the faculty at KUL transcended Louvain Thomism by promulgating a new interpretation of Thomism through existentialist metaphysics. In the 1960's, philosophers like Stefan Swiezawski, Stanislaw Kamiński, and Mieczyslaw Krąpiec gave life to "the so-called Lublin Philosophical School," which is distinctive for arguing that all philosophy and science must be ordered by metaphysics. Basically, metaphysics answers the question "What is ultimately real"—that is to say, "What is most valuable or significant in the universe?" Thomistic existentialism answers that the real is the actual. And the actual is that something exists. Since that something exists cannot be answered by knowing what it is, there is an intrinsic principle other than essence within an actual thing accounting for its existence. That principle is *esse*, the act of existence. Since the aim of empirical science, philosophy, and theology aim to grasp reality, all these

subjects pursue an understanding of their subject-matter through analogical considerations and applications of the act of existence, from how matter exists to how God exists. This makes metaphysics the bedrock of wisdom, as opposed to mere *ontology*, which does not give primacy to actuality but to possibility. Students of Krąpiec, like Andrzej Maryniarczyk and Piotr Jaroszyński have perpetuated existentialist Thomism and incorporated it in their research, most notably in the philosophy of God and religion, in the philosophy of culture, and in aesthetics and philosophy of art.

Existentialist Thomism did not have a monopoly on interest in and support of Christian philosophy in Poland in the twentieth century. Other researchers and educators may have championed Thomism, but they did so without cultivating their work only in the vineyard of existentialism. For example, philosophers like Piotr Lenartowicz and his colleagues at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow are notable for their legacy of challenging modernist tendencies to anti-realism and epistemological relativism. Additionally, as mentioned above, for generations Polish thinkers have had strong interests in logic, methodology, and philosophy of science. They have employed this research for the common defense and development of Thomistic philosophy. A significant player in this endeavor has been the Krakow Circle, which was inspired by a meeting on 26th September 1936 at the Scientific Catholic Institute in Kraków, which advocated the use of modern logic—"of which Poland was one of the world's leading centers" to "make Thomism remain a rational and exact philosophy" (24).

This effort by the scientific community took on new resolve in the wake of social change by the Soviet take-over of Poland in 1945. Christian philosophers were forced to cope with a political system unsympathetic with Christianity. Specifically, this involved (1) challenging, to whatever extent possible, Soviet ideology, given its commitment to atheism and materialism, and (2) encouraging scientific education for its own sake and for its value in supporting Christian philosophers' resistance to Soviet ideology. Since 1989, education in science and philosophy of science has been integrated strongly in Polish education, continuing to enrich Christian philosophy at schools like Jagiellonian University and Nicholas Copernicus University in Toruń.

This encouragement to make Thomism open to other philosophical and scientific influences especially influenced Christian philosophy at KUL. A case in point is the achievement of Karol Wojtyla, who taught for seventeen years at KUL. Wojtyla (later Pope John Paul II) brought the refreshment of phenomenology to the Lublin school, having been influenced by Max Scheler. The work of Wojtyla, along with his associate Roman Ingarden,

encouraged many Christian philosophers in Poland to exploit phenomenology in their research. At KUL and elsewhere today, one can expect to find champions of Continental philosophy in diverse schools and publications. Phenomenology revitalized Christian philosophy there, proposing new horizons for metaphysics, ethics, and other disciplines.

A multitude of researchers in Poland still self-declare a commitment to philosophy being in service of the advance of Christian wisdom. Of course, Christian philosophers must continue to confront some of the challenges that persist as a residue of Marxist ideology. Atheism and scientism (the view that only matter exists or that only matter can be known) continue to be loud voices in the academic and wider culture and should continue to inspire Christian reaction in Poland of an apologetical kind. But in addition, Polish philosophers, today and in the future, as they have done in the past, will be a peer voice in the cultivation of and dialogue about diverse philosophical subjects.

I would like to conclude this review by volunteering an alternative characterization of Christian philosophy, an alternative that I suggest further deepens our appreciation of Polish Christian philosophy. This alternative is supported by St. Thomas' reminder that knowledge is not a body of propositions but a *habit*. Once one recognizes the significance of *habitus*, it deepens one's grasp of what Christian philosophy means. St. Thomas would agree with the editors and contributors of this volume that Christian philosophy is not a system, but he would explain it in a way that may have escaped notice. Christian philosophy can be considered historically and sociologically, as Gilson has understood it, but Aquinas would argue that such consideration does not do justice to Christian philosophy *as a distinct way of knowing*. For Aquinas, as he makes clear in his *Commentary on the de Trinitate* of Boethius, Christian philosophy is distinctive because it involves a unique habit formation. For Aquinas, Christian philosophy is grounded in how the habit of grace influences one's way of knowing. This observation reminds one of G.K. Chesterton's famous quip that a Christian "climbs a tree differently than a non-Christian." Why? Because grace elevates the knower's ability to perceive things as sacramental. The influence of grace affects all of life. This is because a human knower is an integral person. Philosophy is the exercise of our intelligence to reduce sense wonder to causal explanation. For Christian philosophy this reduction of sense wonder is influenced by grace. But since grace habituates the entire person, who is a complex of integrated faculties, grace influences all our knowledge, from external sense-perception to abstract intellection. It is the whole person who knows things. As Gilson once put it, "he thinks what he perceives."

Gilson also once expressed it this way: we intellectualize with our senses and we sense with our intellect. It is the whole person who knows things. So, if I go to a concert, it is not just my ears that go. The whole person, the concert goer, attends and has the auditory experience. While the auditory can be abstracted and analyzed as a discrete power, it is in its activity integral with the entire knower that it knows its object.

This observation by Gilson is significant, indicating how the whole person, under the influence of grace, is made a Christian, and is made a Christian philosopher, as he or she seeks to know the first principles of things. It is a curiosity that, while Gilson grasped the epistemological significance of this integral personalism, he did not realize that it could impel a re-thinking about the meaning of Christian philosophy. As a result, by this oversight, Gilson remained content throughout his writings to describe Christian philosophy as mainly a historical and sociological phenomenon.

Because he is a master historian, Gilson captivates his readers in the way that he examines the details of Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages. But as we reflect on the medieval era, another curiosity appears: Aquinas virtually never refers to Christian, Scholastic theologians as philosophers. He reserves the term philosopher for those he calls The Pagani, specifically ancient Greek thinkers whose knowledge is not informed by revelation. The Pagani know things through the habit of natural reasoning alone. But during the middle ages, scholars like Augustine began to speak of "Christian philosophy." Is Christian philosophy really philosophy? Aquinas recognizes that it is not a way of philosophizing that is limited to the natural reasoning evident in Greek thinking, represented, say, in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Aquinas understood this; hence he calls philosophers the Pagani. Christian philosophy has something these ancient Greeks did not have: a habit of knowledge informed and elevated by grace. This does not diminish Christian philosophy; it enhances it, because grace perfects nature instead of diminishing it. So Christian philosophy may rightly be called philosophy, but in an *analogical* sense. It is the *fullness* of philosophy now strengthened by the power of insight informed by grace. Grace doesn't eliminate nature, instead it completes it.

Of course, the outcome of this interpretation is that Christian philosophy is subordinate to the influence of theology, the science of revelation. Knowledge through grace is not merely natural understanding. By transcending the limits of natural reasoning, it becomes governed by theology. So, Aquinas recognizes that Christian philosophy accommodates the natural philosophy of the Pagani but alters it and elevates it to a higher key, a product known as scholastic theology. Aquinas affirmed this transformation

explicitly when he said that the scholastic theologian "converts the water of philosophy into the wine of theology."

This interpretation of Christian philosophy may be provocative in that it may cause discomfort among those Catholic philosophers who cherish their identity as unqualified philosophers and who do not want to be labeled theologians. But that is a sociological difficulty I won't address here. But if Christian philosophy is more coherent by the admission that it is ordered by grace and theology, there may be an upside, even in the academic profession, to boldly profess that Christian philosophy is really, at least as far as St. Thomas understood it, scholastic theology.

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