

Krzysztof Stachewicz

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3867-9691>

## On Christian philosophy Several remarks from the historical and futurologist perspective

What we find important about philosophy is not that it is Christian, but that it is true. And for it to be true, it needs to be indispensably aided by Christian faith and inspiration.  
(Jacques Maritain)

We, Westerners, all remain Christian.  
(Karl Jaspers)

### Christian philosophy – a historical prelude

The nature of the encounter of Christianity with pagan philosophy was multi-faceted. Among the early Christian thinkers two options crystallised: an anti-philosophical one represented by Tertulian and a pro-philosophical one with patronage provided by Saint Justin Martyr. In this dispute over the need for philosophy within Christianity the question of the existence of Christian philosophy and its potential character surfaces in its original form. Does preaching the *kerygma* need philosophy? Does a Christian who has put his trust in Christ, the

**Krzysztof Stachewicz** – prof. dr hab., a philosopher and ethicist, a head of the Unit of Christian philosophy at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, author of 5 books and many papers on ethics, philosophical anthropology, axiology and philosophy of evil. His recent publications include: *Milczenie wobec dobra i zła. W stronę etyki sygetycznej i apofatycznej* (Poznań 2012) oraz *Życ i rozumieć. Szkice o człowieku i moralności* (Poznań 2013).

personal Truth, need in any way to think about the first principles, being and existence, meaning and the Whole? Do theory of philosophy and sotericism of religion have any common points? Do the life and thought pathways of philosophy and Christianity intersect at any place? Do they need each other? These questions both directly and indirectly feature in many places in the writings by the Church Fathers and the early Christian thinkers of the patristic era.

Already in the former period at least two basic meanings and perceptions of the Christian philosophy clearly manifest themselves. The first one, which appears to be the predominant one, is about perceiving philosophy as a way of life. This was a reference to the understanding espoused by ancient pagan thinkers, for whom it was not infrequently the ascetic and existential moment of philosophical deliberation that came to the fore. Pierre Hadot<sup>1</sup> and Juliusz Domański<sup>2</sup> highlight this issue in their excellent research papers, as they view the ancient philosophising as a manner of shaping life, spiritual exercises, learning the art of life. After all, for Plato himself embracing a specific philosophy meant a “conversion,” a change in the way of life.<sup>3</sup> When Saint John Chrysostom in his sermons (*In Kalendas* 386/387) distinguished between *χριστιανική φιλοσοφία* and *έλληνική φιλοσοφία*, he was making a clear reference to this kind of perception of philosophy. For Saint Gregory of Nyssa Christianity is in fact a philosophical life.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, Christian philosophy is about a Christian perception of the world, experiencing reality, but above all about the Christian way of life. In the medieval monastic theology we can find such an understanding of philosophy as well. For monks the monastery was like a Christian school of philosophy or even a speculative Christian philosophy (which is clearly visible in the 12th and 13th century, and exemplified by writings of William of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. P. Hadot, *Czym jest filozofia starożytna?*, trans. P. Domański, Warszawa 2000; idem, *Filozofia jako ćwiczenie duchowe*, trans. P. Domański 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Domański, *Metamorfozy pojęcia filozofii*, Warszawa 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. W. Jaeger, *Wczesne chrześcijaństwo i grecka paideia*, trans. K. Bielawski, Bydgoszcz 1997, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. ibidem, p. 101.

Newburgh), and philosophy served an ascetic and monastic lifestyles, manifesting itself in them. Erasmus of Rotterdam found Christ's philosophy to be about a number of moral recommendations and advice allowing a disciple of Jesus to realise an ethical ideal in his life. Christian philosophy is of a solely biblical, and not discursive character.

Joseph Ratzinger points out that in the earliest depictions of Christ in early Christian art, He is a shepherd and a philosopher.<sup>5</sup> The human quest for a philosopher who would provide a satisfactory answer to the question about death appeared to be fulfilled in Jesus, who conquered death and showed the way of life. A passage in *Spe Salvi* reads as follows: "Philosophy at that time was not generally seen as a difficult academic discipline, as it is today. Rather, the philosopher was someone who knew how to teach the essential art: the art of being authentically human—the art of living and dying" (no. 6). Therefore, the message of Christianity appeared to be the pinnacle of philosophical wisdom, a pure philosophy transforming life and providing an answer to man's mortality. Such a message of the ancient Christian art was alive in later patristic writings as well. Christ as a true philosopher, and Christianity as the pinnacle of pure philosophy, true philosophy (Saint Augustine's *philosophia verissima*) that teaches living and dying – that is the first, practical meaning of the term 'Christian philosophy.'

The other perception of philosophy in the early Christian world is about pointing to its theoretical significance as a way to leading to the truth. Pagan philosophy would seek and find this truth, thereby converging with the future religion of the Christians. Saint Justin wrote about this thus: "whatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians."<sup>6</sup> Saint Justin viewed Christianity as fulfilment of pure philosophy, or even philosophy as such. The Christian teaching and message are actually about philosophy. Piotr Chojnacki has a point

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Grzeszczak, *Christus philosophicus jako aktualne przesłanie sztuki wczesnochrześcijańskiej. Uwagi na marginesie wykładu kard. Josepha Ratzingera Wiara, filozofia, teologia*, "Filozofia Chrześcijańska" 6, 2009, pp. 31–45.

<sup>6</sup> As cited in: Ph. Böhner, E. Gilson, *Historia filozofii chrześcijańskiej*, Warszawa 1962, p. 33.

when he suggests another expression in this context: “philosophy of Christianity,” as clearly distinguished from “Christian philosophy.”<sup>7</sup>

The encounter between autonomous philosophy and Christianity – which for the first time took place in a creative manner through the agency of Saint Clement of Alexandria and Origen<sup>8</sup> – gave rise to Christian philosophy (X. Tilliette). This can be clearly seen in the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who separated the cognitive orders of philosophy and theology. Both the disciplines deal with all of the world and reality in the light of the ultimate principles. The formal object of theology is Revelation, and the truths of the faith, while in philosophy is about natural, that is sensual and mental cognition. Therefore, the method of theology is faith, while the method of philosophy is reason. Given the above perspective, the question about the possible existence of Christian philosophy came to reveal its full weight. In the earlier Augustinian paradigm, the relationship between philosophical and theological thinking was simply organic, and hence speaking about Christian philosophy seemed quite natural, though it expanded perception of philosophy as such up to the acceptable limits. The Thomist paradigm problematised it.

All the above remarks generally relate to the Christian West. Because in the East Christian thinking operated beyond and in a way above the divide between philosophy and theology, constituting an organic whole in the form of religious thought. This can also be seen in the contemporary thought, which remains under the influence of the Orthodox culture. In the West, the Reformation of the 16th century severed the link between philosophy and theology, and with the pens of Luther’s and Calvin’s and reference to the Tertulian spirit, it wrote off the significance

<sup>7</sup> Cf. P. Chojnacki, *Wybór pism*, ed. M. Szyszkowska, C. Tarnogórski, Warszawa 1987, p. 147: “Philosophy of Christianity encompasses a certain set of propositions, which are more or less systematised and aimed at explication, or provision to the human mind of the theses arising from the Divine Revelation, which as such surpass human cognitive abilities. Philosophy of Christianity thus construed includes apologetics and speculative theology as its parts.” With reference to Christian philosophy he writes: “The term Christian philosophy is to be understood as rational interpretation of data, different from other interpretations – which are rational as well – in respect of the perception of the Revelation, which is included in the data, while other systems do not do it” (p. 156).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. W. Jaeger, *Wczesne chrześcijaństwo...*, op. cit., p. 59nn.

of any philosophical investigations in the domain of Christianity. Karl Barth may serve here as a 20th-century example of such attitude, but counterexamples can also be found in the Protestant thought (Calvin pastor Alvin Plantinga is just one of them).

The 20<sup>th</sup>-century history of philosophy witnesses a controversy – much-debated at some point – over the existence of Christian philosophy, its factuality and historical emergence. The controversy was originated by French historian Emil Brehier, who in 1927 advanced a thesis whereby Christianity did not have any significant effect on ancient philosophy, merely repeating and echoing the Platonic and Aristotelian themes in the Middle Ages. There was, there is and there will be no Christian philosophy, just like there was, there is and there will be no Christian mathematics or physics.<sup>9</sup> Notworthily, brilliant scholastics spoke out against the existence of Christian philosophy – Maurice de Wulf, Cardinal Désiré Mercier and Fernand van Steenberghen, to name but a few. The former one of these wrote: “There is no Catholic philosophy, any more than there is a Catholic science. There are only philosophers believing in some dogmas, just like there are chemists and physicians who are Catholics, Protestants, Jews.”<sup>10</sup> There are philosophers who are Christian, but there is nothing like Christian philosophy, Van Steenberghen would say. Neo-scholastics were firmly in favour of philosophy autonomously construed and rejected any apologetic encumbrances. Etienne Gilson was one of those who were opposed to viewing the matter like this, and from his mediaevalist perspective he claimed that Christian philosophy is a historical fact, a phenomenon originated in antiquity and thriving in the Middle Ages, having many iterations in the modern and contemporary times. One of the passages reads: “And so I call any philosophy Christian, which, formally demarcating the two orders of

<sup>9</sup> E. Brehier, *Histoire de la philosophie*, Paris 1927; idem, *Ya-t-il une philosophie chrétienne*, “Revue de la Mataphysique et de Morale” (1931), p. 1962.

<sup>10</sup> As cited in: P. Chojnacki, *Wybór pism*, op. cit., p. 140.

cognition, finds the Christian revelation to be necessary aid to reason.”<sup>11</sup> A Christian philosopher undertakes the effort to consolidate at least some of the religious truths he believes in; in a way he assumes that down the road that is essentially non-philosophical one can encounter important truths that are philosophical *sensu stricto*. Gilson admits that there is no Christian reason, but the Christian activity of reason needs to be posited.<sup>12</sup> The existence of Christian philosophy was also strongly advocated by Jacques Maritain, who distinguished in it an objective and subjective aspect, which would later on come to produce ripple effects in John Paul II’s encyclical *Fides et ratio*. Maritain discerned two implications of the problem of the Christian philosophy. The first one – material – means that a specific philosophy developed in the Christian climate, and the second one – formal – refers to the philosophy intrinsically in keeping with the Christian faith, tapping the truths of the faith that stimulate it.<sup>13</sup> Maritain differentiated the nature of philosophy (what it is in itself) from its state (historical determinants and specific realisations). With regard to its nature, philosophy cannot be Christian, but with regard to the actual state it is shaped in our culture by Christianity. A similar spirit informs the approach adopted by Piotr Chojnacki, who considers that philosophy perceived *in abstracto*, in isolation from the circumstances under which it operates cannot be Christian. However, as we consider the historically developed philosophical systems, we discover the undeniably formative influence of Christianity on philosophical thought.<sup>14</sup> The Christian revelation brought a number of problems and issues in the sphere of philosophy, opening up a field of radically new and original questions.

<sup>11</sup> E. Gilson, *Duch filozofii średniowiecznej*, trans. J. Rybałt, Warszawa 1958, pp. 38–39. Pages 36–37 read as follows: „The contents of Christian philosophy are a set of intellectual truths – discovered, explored or simply salvaged thanks to the succour found by the intellect in the revelation.”

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Maritain, *O filozofii chrześcijańskiej*, [in:] *idem, Pisma filozoficzne*, trans. J. Fenrychowa, Kraków 1988, p. 132.

<sup>14</sup> P. Chojnacki, *Wybór pism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 149–150. “It is an undeniable fact that Christianity became a positive contribution, having its effect on the way of philosophising, because some issues developed only on account of the influence exerted by Christianity, which next to the natural data poses certain issues, demanding that they be rationally researched” (p. 150).

Therefore, “the existence and meaning of Christian philosophy cannot be decided by starting with a conceptual analysis, but one should rather refer to history and stick to the facts.”<sup>15</sup>

A different metaphilosophical position opposed to the existence of Christian philosophy was espoused by Martin Heidegger, who claimed that Christian philosophy is nothing more than *hölzernes Eisen*. In *Introduction to Metaphysics* he writes: „A «Christian philosophy» is wooden iron and a misunderstanding. 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.”<sup>16</sup> In Heidegger’s view, from the standpoint of Christianity alone the existence of Christian philosophy would be a radical perversion of the idea of Christianity. Karl Jaspers viewed Christian philosophy as thinking philosophy, a principle of the unity of faith and knowledge, Augustinianism and Thomism being its best historical embodiments. In the broad sense, European philosophy appears to be philosophy springing from the biblical spirit: “The Bible and Biblical religion are a foundation of our philosophy, a lasting orientation and a source of irreplaceable contents. Western philosophy – whether we admit it or not – is always with the Bible, even when it combats it.”<sup>17</sup> Lev Shestov, while making a reference to Tertulian, saw philosophical knowledge as the effect of original sin, thereby denying any positive connections between Christianity and philosophy. The above remarks are not a summary of centuries-old controversy revived by Brehier in the 20th century, but serve only to point to its poles and the uncertainty of historians of philosophy themselves as to the factual explication of the historical Christian philosophy as well as its theoretical possibility.

An idea – Augustinian in its spirit – advanced by Józef Tischner appears to be a slightly different proposition with regard to Christian philosophy, where he proposes constructing religious thinking which in a way anticipates theology serving as its foundation, or an origin based

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 152.

<sup>16</sup> M. Heidegger, *Wprowadzenie do metafizyki*, trans. R. Marszałek, Warszawa 2000, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> K. Jaspers, *Wiara filozoficzna*, trans. collect., Toruń 1995, pp. 67–68.

on Christian thought. Religious thinking is a synthesis of the truth and salvation as the ultimate in good for man. Tischner writes: "Faith occurs in the bosom of thinking and thinking occurs in the bosom of faith. Why does it occur? Because it turns out that there is no other way of salvation for man than through the truth – the basic ideal of all thinking, and there is no other way leading to the acceptance of the dignity of thinking than through admitting that thinking serves as man's good – the good that brings him closer to his salvation."<sup>18</sup> This kind of approach makes it possible to avoid – futile in parts, admittedly – discussion of the possibility of pursuing Christian philosophy while observing the principle of the autonomy of philosophical thinking *sensu stricto*. The orientation of philosophy towards the truth meets here with the idea of salvation, which is the fulcrum of the religious message of Christianity. The synthesis is not the system of Christian philosophy, but the momentum of religious thinking which does not have to care for preserving autonomy, purity, the tiered structure of methodology, etc., *eo ipso* avoiding difficulties and aporias. Anyway, over the centuries the momentum of religious thinking, which does not regard the dichotomy of philosophy and theology, has been a fertile breeding ground for Jewish and Russian thought.

### **The semantic scope of the term "Christian philosophy" and an attempt at preliminary organisation and specification**

The above remarks show the semantic extent of the term "Christian philosophy." Gilson concluded this as follows: "there are few terms as vague and difficult to precisely define as this one."<sup>19</sup> Its existential, practical meaning, as distinct from the strictly theoretical one, seems to be of the most fundamental significance, which has already been mentioned before. The other one seems to abound in most varied, not always mutually compatible or coherent meanings. Let us dwell on this issue a bit longer.

<sup>18</sup> J. Tischner, *Myslenie według wartości*, Kraków 1982, p. 359.

<sup>19</sup> E. Gilson, *Duch filozofii...*, op. cit., p. 9.



Let us begin with the question of what kind of philosophy is Christian, leaving aside the “existential” theme and focusing only on the essential side of the controversy over the Christian philosophy. Let us pose the problem on the introductory level and look for the answer by way of the *prima vista* principle. The term ‘Christian philosophy’ has often been associated with philosophy which fulfils at least one of the following conditions: (1) uses notions and ideas developed and discovered in the Christian tradition (such as a person, creation, dignity, inalienable human rights, one personal God, free will, etc.) (2) is pursued by Christians,<sup>20</sup> (3) is pursued and taught at Church institutions (here and in item 7 philosophy thus construed is often – to this day it is common practice in American thought – referred to as “Catholic philosophy”), (4) by way of inspiration adopts theses arising from the Revelation and then substantiates them (its Christian character is therefore connected with the context of discovery, and not substantiation, to use the expressions developed by Hans Reichenbach<sup>21</sup>), believing is turned here into knowing, (5) preaches theses non-contrary to Christian truths (a negative criterion), (6) arose and is developing under the conditions created by Christianity (all European philosophy from Christian antiquity), independently of the knowledge of the Christian truths; influence does not presuppose awareness thereof as its own condition, (7) has been granted some *placet* from Christian institutions (like Thomism in Leo XIII’s *Aeterni Patris*), (8) addresses subjects inspired by theological discourse or developed by the religious dogmatics of Christianity, (9) opens up to transcendence, but above all points to transcendence as the

<sup>20</sup> Bp Bronisław Dembowski writes: „it became customary to call philosophising pursued by Christians as Christian philosophy” (B. Dembowski, *O filozofii chrześcijańskiej w Ameryce Północnej*, Warszawa 1989, p. 13).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. J.A. Kłoczowski, *Filozofia chrześcijańska? Dyskusja w kontekście encykliki „Fides et ratio”*, [in:] *Polska filozofia wobec „Fides et ratio”*, ed. M. Grabowski, Toruń 1999, pp. 61–62. The author advances the following proposition: “[...] one can speak about Christian philosophy solely and exclusively in the sense of the context of discovery. There are no “Christian” methods of philosophising. Philosophy is either good or bad, it can either present solid arguments to corroborate its propositions or it cannot. And nothing can be done about that” (p. 62).

direction of man's commitment, his activity and fulfilment,<sup>22</sup> and (10) acknowledges the fundamental boundaries of reason and consciously opens the philosophical thought system up to cognition arising from faith ("*intellectus quaerens intellectum per fidem*" – Maine de Biran). Depending on which of the conditions we adopt as a *conditio sine qua non*, we will take the view of a specific Christian philosophy concept as such, thereby answering the question about its existence and historical embodiments differently. The question of the criteria for demarcation between Christian and non-Christian philosophy is concerned with the problem of its identity. Do Christian philosophy and non-Christian philosophy form a field of contradiction or complement, dichotomy or complementariness? Is the differentiation here sharp at all and can it be operationalised in any way? May these questions map out further pathways for the reflection engaged in here.

In the encyclical *Fides et ratio* John Paul II stresses that the Church does not favour any philosophy, nor does it have its own philosophy (thus eliminating senses 3 and 7, i.e. that which we termed "Catholic philosophy") Also, it adopts a broad understanding of Christian philosophy which is supposed to mean: "a Christian way of philosophising, a philosophical speculation conceived in dynamic union with faith. It does not therefore refer simply to a philosophy developed by Christian philosophers who have striven in their research not to contradict the faith. The term Christian philosophy includes those important developments of philosophical thinking which would not have happened without the direct or indirect contribution of Christian faith" (no. 76).<sup>23</sup> In the above-quoted words the pope seems to be using an expression close to sense 6, pointing to – as the *proprium* of Christian philosophy – not only the direct, but also indirect contribution of Christianity to the emergence of a specific philosophy.

The Christian inspiration can be direct, when a philosopher consciously uses the truths preached within the framework of this religion, or it can be indirect, when he unconsciously draws on some

<sup>22</sup> Cf. M. Blondel, *Filozoficzne wyzwanie chrześcijaństwa*, trans. J. Fenrychowa, Kraków 1994.

<sup>23</sup> *Encyklika Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II „Fides et ratio”*, Kraków 1999, p. 94.

findings or notions developed within the framework of religious or theological discourse. Inspiration can be a positive norm, when it provides philosophical reflection with certain subjects or problems, or it can be a negative norm, when it dictates that some solutions must be rejected or even certain issues must not be addressed. It appears that the thing that connects philosophy and Christianity is the truth. As Edith Stein observed, “all those who seek truth, seek God, whether this is clear to them or not.” While philosophy pursued by non-Christians tends to seek the truth in spaces uncovered by reason, even though – and this must be particularly stressed – not without “external” inspiration of both a religious and non-religious character (e.g. the effect of poetry on Heidegger’s philosophical thought), a Christian will entertain a faith-based conviction that a religious revelation too is a carrier of the truth, and so they will draw indirect inspiration from these spaces, which of course does not exempt him from rational substantiation thereof. For one might ask why someone’s inspiration in philosophy drawn from literature or art is acceptable from the rationalist viewpoint, but Bible- or faith-based inspiration is considered contradictory to the requirements of rationality. Framing the matter like this appears to result from some ideological presuppositions, and not rational argumentation. It must be borne in mind that faith-based cognition provides “dark light” (Stein) which can prove to be immensely important for the philosophical quest for the truth. The character of this “dark light” in a way expects lightening up on the path of philosophical analysis – that is one of the tasks of Christian philosophy. The paths leading to the truth followed by a Christian philosopher will be most often shaped by both positive and negative inspiration, which will result from the belief in their metaphilosophical significance and the certainty arising from faith. Anyway, each type of philosophy will include some filters and presuppositions (the “hermeneutic circle”), not always explicated or realised by thinkers.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Karol Tarnowski speaks about accepted living inspiration (medieval philosophy serves here as an example), “parenthesised” (exemplified by neo-Scholasticism) and dead inspiration (many phenomena in modern and contemporary philosophy). Cf. K. Tarnowski, *Człowiek i Transcendencja*,

The spirits of religion and philosophy are different, sometimes alien to each other (e.g. the ritualism of religion or adoption of the epistemic institutional authority), while the axiological primacy of the truth appears to be the link between the two spheres of human spirit. This does not mean that both the paradigms fuse in the idea of Christian philosophy, but only that they are not separate worlds. Linked by the truth, they can engage in mutual creative relations, where on the one hand the history of the development of the Christian doctrine in connection with philosophy, and on the other hand the influence of Christianity on philosophy provide many interesting examples. Antoni Siemianowski is right to observe that: "Although originated by pagans, philosophy itself is by no means a product of paganism alone, but of humanity. In philosophy man seeks the truth and loves the seeking as wisdom. That is why when faced with such human effort as philosophy geared towards the quest for the truth and the love for wisdom, a Christian cannot be indifferent. He cannot disregard truth-seeking thinking."<sup>25</sup>

But will philosophy pursued by Christians be Christian philosophy in every case? Can it not be just pure philosophy, which is what the above-quoted Siemianowski would want it to be?<sup>26</sup> It appears that a Christian philosopher can philosophise, neutralising positive inspiration, while he must take negative inspiration into consideration, the result being that many contemporary thinkers find Christian philosophy to be self-contradictory, a kind of "wooden iron," or a "square circle." However, it is possible for Christians to pursue philosophy in a manner that is closed to positive inspiration, but on the other hand it must be assumed that the Gospel sheds some "metaphysical light" on man's life and the meaning of life, which is hardly negligible, irrespective of the attitude to these "illuminations." A different thing is the question of to what extent the experience of the world, life and existence *sensu largo* is linked

Kraków 1995, p. 249. Z. Gonzales, a 19th-century historian of philosophy differentiated between essentially Christian philosophy and accidentally Christian philosophy – the latter was the one which yielded to the influence of Christianity in any way. Cf. E. Gilson, *Duch filozofii...*, op. cit., p. 416.

<sup>25</sup> A. Siemianowski, *Usilnie myśleć i poszukiwać. Studia i eseje filozoficzne*, Poznań 2012, p. 51.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 53–54.

with the Christian vision of the world, and whether it is at all possible to disentangle the strings of “pure” experience with all its hermeneutic presuppositions. With regard to being Christian, thinking about the primordial, meaning, *arche*, and last but not least about faith itself appears to be an intellectual and spiritual need resulting from being human. Therefore, in the subjective order, a Christian philosopher is someone who respects positive and/or negative inspiration, and a philosopher-Christian is someone who respects at least the negative principle. In the objective order, Christian philosophy is a philosophy pursued by philosophers (not necessarily Christian ones) who respect both (*sensu largo*: at least one of) the principles.

In the light of the above remarks, the term Christian philosophy *sensu stricto* can be used with reference to the type of philosophy which accommodates a positive approach to the thought and intellectual heritage of Christianity. Thanks to such an attitude a philosopher can open up in a positive and direct sense to theological and religious tradition, following in his quest for the truth in the direction pointed by the metaphysical light carried by Christianity (in the context of discovery). It also serves as a negative norm that requires that radical solutions contrary to the spirit of the truth carried by Christianity should be rejected. Philosophy that allows for indirect inspiration, participates in the Christian culture and takes a positive or negative stance on the Christian thought can be termed Christian *sensu largo*. In this sense, almost all European philosophy, beginning with the turn of antiquity and the Middle Ages, through the modern times and up to the contemporary times would be Christian. Such a broad understanding appears to fit in with the spirit of the analyses by Karl Jaspers or those by John Paul II as presented in *Fides et ratio*.

An analysis of the existence and nature of Christian ethics might serve here as a good illustration of the above propositions. The questions about its character, the type of axiomatically made presuppositions, the starting point, etc. pose a problem of its philosophical and theological nature. The osmosis of the world of pure reason and the data following from the Revelation seems to take on a special character in the case of Christian

ethics. It is difficult to deny the existence of Christian ethics understood as a moral philosophy, but on the other hand it would not be easy to erect the edifice of ethics independent of religion. The controversy over the character of Saint Thomas Aquinas' ethics, where some are in favour of its independent character based on the idea of natural law (e.g. Ralph McInerny, Tadeusz Styczeń), while others claim that the indispensable biblical data make it impossible to treat it autonomously (Gilson, Maritain), is a perfect illustration of the problem. Unfortunately, there is no room here to explicate it at greater length.

### **The future of Christian philosophy**

The European philosophical thought of the 20th century witnessed a renaissance of interest in faith and religion (Judaism and Christianity), which came as a breakthrough in the coldness, indifference and not infrequently hostility of the Enlightenment. This can be discerned in both the objective dimension – the character of philosophical discourses themselves, and the subjective dimension – the outlook on life adopted by the thinkers. For many phenomenology proved to be the path to faith (Edmund Husserl, Adolf Reinach, Max Scheler, Edith Stein, Dietrich von Hildebrand), and its tools are frequently used by Christian thinkers not only in the sphere of philosophy, but also theology. Robert Sokolowski's book entitled *Obecność eucharystyczna. Studium z teologii fenomenologicznej*<sup>27</sup> may serve here as a contemporary example. The inclination of almost all French phenomenology towards religion seems to be in support of the above thesis. Furthermore, hermeneutics was built on the Christian foundation, namely it arose out of the art of interpretation of the biblical text, out of the grappling with the interpretative difficulties. On the other hand, as a mature philosophical trend, it served and still serves religious thought and theology, which can be exemplified by the work of Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Rahner. A structure of feedback clearly manifests itself here. Besides, the interest

<sup>27</sup> In the Polish language it was released as a joint translated publication in Tarnów, 1995.

in religious themes that shows in many representatives of contemporary hermeneutics, beginning with Paul Ricoeur and ending with Gianni Vattimo, is also noteworthy. The Christian spirit gave rise to personalism, which is still flourishing in a constructive manner. Religious themes are readily addressed by existentialism (which can be exemplified by Jean Paul Sartre in the negative sense, and Gabriel Marcel in the positive one), analytic philosophy (e.g. John Hick, Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne to name only three of many examples), positivist-like trends (e.g. Michał Heller; it is worth noting the Christian – in the opinion of science historians – bedrock of modern natural sciences), process philosophy, and even postmodernism. The latter example shows that Christianity provides a context for European philosophy and is its indispensable *datum*. The Capri seminar on religion, which was attended by, inter alia, postmodernists appears to fit in with the above observations. Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, which is often presented as an extremely anti-Christian philosophy, sprang from the spirit of apophatic and negative theology, which also employed a variety of techniques for deconstructing the images of God only to become convinced of His radical otherness, and thus unknowability and inexpressibility.

Heidegger believed a Christian cannot philosophise, because the radical philosophical question of why there is something rather than nothing (enunciated in its classical form by Leibniz) is a folly in the light of Christian faith. Therefore, it can be concluded that in his opinion Christianity offers ready-made, dogmatised answers to basic philosophical questions, preventing further inquiring, remaining in the act of questioning as an attitude of philosophical piety. But is that really so? Joseph Ratzinger asks: "But are the Christian answers of the kind that closes the path to thinking?" Are the answers concerned with ultimate matters not by nature always open to the Unspoken and the Unspeakable? Or maybe the thing is that it is only with such answers that the questions are endowed with true profundity and drama? Maybe the thing is that they radicalise both thinking and the question, pointing

the pathway instead of blocking it.”<sup>28</sup> It appears that the issues posed here contain an answer to Heidegger’s reservations. Philosophical reflection engaged in by a Christian is possible, as the answers he has because of his faith are not strictly philosophical, but only illuminate the horizon of philosophical questioning, inspiring thinking and not hindering its possibilities. Beginning with Plato, philosophising in Europe appears to be informed by critical dialogue with the great religious tradition.<sup>29</sup> Why would emergence of Christianity change this state? It must be borne in mind that the Christian “faith hears the answer, because it sustains the question.”<sup>30</sup> Heidegger is right only with regard to the Gnostic version of Christianity. Gnosis had more profound cognitive ambitions than philosophy – it appeared as a reliable knowledge system to control reality. “Gnosis becomes a negation of philosophy, while faith defends the grandeur as well as humility of philosophy.”<sup>31</sup>

As we inquire about the future of Christian philosophy, first and foremost we need to make the effort to elucidate what we understand Christian philosophy to be, thereby realising the thing we are inquiring about. The multiple ways in which it can be understood makes many doubtful as to the identity of Christian philosophy. As we could see, its operation is polymorphic, which is jarring to the adherents of the one, long-standing philosophy of the Church, that is Thomism. However, the pluralisation of the Christian thought seems to be set to keep progressing – in theology, and even more so in Christian philosophy, and not only the one construed *sensu largo*, but also the one construed *sensu stricto*. From this perspective, the budding problem of its identity will keep on becoming compounded. Still, it does not appear to be the right course of action to delineate its boundaries, thereby yielding to the temptation to simply pointing to what is and what is not Christian philosophy; we should rather have a broad understanding of it, letting

<sup>28</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Wiara, filozofia, teologia*, [in:] idem, *Prawda w teologii*, trans. M. Mijalska, Kraków 2005, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.



the Christian thought permeate all philosophical traditions, including the ones which *prima vista* seem to be alien to Christianity. For we should remember about its universalist character. It is advisable to agree with Stefan Świeżawski, who discerns the Christian nature of philosophy in the thought that is profound contemplation of reality.<sup>32</sup> Locking oneself inside the ghetto of a specific Christian philosophy, arousing a feeling of entrapment and being surrounded by hostile philosophies is the worst of the possible options. This of course does not mean that the tasks of Christian philosophy *sensu stricto* must be regarded as less important or outdated. Still, the universalist theme appears to be set to assume the greatest significance. Generally speaking, one might boldly paraphrase Barbara Skarga's words said with reference to philosophy as such: "As for Christian philosophy there is no cause for concern!"

### Abstract

The article analyzes the concept of "Christian philosophy" from the perspective of its past and its future. First of all, there is revealed a multiplicity of senses and the meanings attributed to this concept. Their arrangement is one of the purposes of this text. Christian philosophy in the broad sense is a philosophy that permits indirect influences of Christianity; this is an idea created in Christian culture. However, strictly speaking Christian philosophy is a philosophy where we find an affirmative approach to the truth preached by Christianity. It is open to direct Christian inspiration. Twentieth-century revival of interest of religion in philosophy seems to foretell the future optimistically in the broad and narrow sense of Christian philosophy.

### Keywords

Christianity; philosophy; Christian philosophy; neotomism; contemporary philosophy

<sup>32</sup> S. Świeżawski, *O roli, jaką chrześcijaństwo wyznacza filozofii*, "Znak" 7–8 (1990), p. 20. In Świeżawski's opinion there is no Christian philosophy; there may only be Christian inspiration in philosophy. To speak about Christian philosophy presupposes blurring the boundaries between natural cognition and cognition through faith, which is characteristic of Gnostic thinking.

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