

THOMIST ADVICE TO CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHERS

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Abstract. In *Advice to Christian philosophers* (1984) Alvin Plantinga suggested that Christians who propose to be philosophers should not limit themselves to being philosophers who happen, incidentally, to be Christians. Instead, they should develop a *Christian philosophy*. From this, however, a problem followed, which is still seen as a reason to deny that a Christian philosophy is possible. It seems implausible that the outcome of the interaction between faith and philosophy is, really, philosophy and not merely theology. Plantinga did not deal with this problem. Unlike him, thinkers of various orientations, especially scholars of Thomas Aquinas, had discussed it during the French *querelle* in the 1930s. In this article, I argue that they did not solve this problem because they did not examine the relationship between faith and philosophy by considering what faith requires in order to relate to reason. Instead, this consideration was suggested by Plantinga's *Advice* and, long before, it had been developed in detail by Thomas Aquinas. It is, therefore, time to propose *Thomist Advice to Christian Philosophers*.

I. INTRODUCTION

More than thirty-five years have passed since Alvin Plantinga published his *Advice to Christian philosophers*.¹ In it, the Reformed philosopher suggested that Christians who propose to be philosophers should not limit themselves to being philosophers who happen, incidentally, to be Christians. In contrast, they should develop a *Christian philosophy*. This means that the Christian community has its own interests, and Christian philosophers should exhibit autonomy in choosing their own topics and also in treating topics that non-Christian philosophers choose and deal with. In this way, Plantinga concentrated on the relationship between faith and philosophy by wondering how the former requires to relate to the latter. It may be said that Plantinga echoed Harry Blamires' belief that there is a Christian way of thinking, a sort of 'Christian mind.'²

Decades before Plantinga, a number of scholars had already addressed this subject of the concept of 'Christian philosophy' during the French *querelle*. (The *querelle* took place in France in the 1930s.³)

However, that debate seemed to be devoted only to understanding what philosophy, from within itself, could accept from faith. Those scholars tried to determine whether a merely rational investigation can be inspired by faith without detracting from one's autonomy. Decades later, the French Jesuit Xavier Tilliette confirmed this by stating that the French *querelle* considered 'the extent to which philosophy can tolerate Christian doctrine and, at the same time, remain free of every confessional tie.' The participants 'rather obscured the central issue, that of the relationship of Christianity with philosophy, the Christianity's ability to inspire and promote philosophy.'⁴

1 A. Plantinga, 'Advice to Christian Philosophers,' *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), 253–271. This essay was written for the inaugural lecture delivered by the Reformed philosopher at the Catholic Univ. of Notre Dame in 1983.

2 See H. Blamires, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* (Servant Books, 1963), 6.

3 See G. B. Sadler (ed.), *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation. The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France* (The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2011).

4 X. Tilliette, *Le Christ de la Philosophie* (Cerf, 1990), 21.

The problem of how faith and philosophy relate to each other has recently been re-proposed. This indicates that this problem continues to provide a reason to deny that a Christian philosophy is possible, no matter how extensive the debates on Christian philosophy have been in last decades, especially in response to the 1998 Papal Encyclical *Fides et ratio*. A 2018 book discusses various problems concerning Plantinga's *Advice*.⁵ Its editor, J. Aron Simmons, claims that 'exactly how' philosophy 'is distinct from Christian theology is often difficult to tell.'⁶ In the same book, John Schellenberg focuses on Plantinga's proposal and argues that the Christian philosophy is not really a philosophy.⁷

In this essay, I concentrate on the problem in question. As I mentioned previously, this problem was prompted by the aforementioned *querelle*. That is why I focus first on the content of this *querelle*. I show that the most influential defence of the idea of the Christian philosophy that emerged from that debate is not convincing. I refer to Jacques Maritain's proposal that we should distinguish the *nature* of philosophy from the *state* in which it exists in the human subject. I then argue that a viable solution can be found if one remembers what emerges from Plantinga's reflection, which is that we should consider what faith requires in order to relate to philosophy. My thesis is that this thought, which Plantinga's *Advice* only suggests should be considered, had been developed in detail by Thomas Aquinas. (It was on Aquinas' reflection that Maritain, also, based his proposal.) Thus, I would propose that *Thomist Advice to Christian philosophers* can provide a solution to the problem under consideration.

II. THE FRENCH QUERELLE AND MARITAIN'S PROPOSAL

It may be said that the French *querelle* — for which meetings were held between 1931 and 1935 — was devoted entirely to the concept of the 'Christian philosophy' that had been proposed by Étienne Gilson in the early 1920s.⁸ Gilson explored the thinking of several representatives about the history of Christianity — especially that of Augustine, Bonaventure, and Aquinas. His conclusion was that their thinking had given rise to authentic philosophies, and not merely theologies, as was usually maintained in those years. The prevailing view, in fact, was that the philosophical reflection should be seen as separate from faith.⁹ As Gilson pointed out two decades after the *querelle*, this view involved 'a great many Catholic professors of philosophy,¹⁰ who had become convinced, in the wake of Descartes's thought, that 'where theology begins, philosophy comes to an end. If we philosophize, we cannot theologize at the same time.'¹¹ Apparently for apologetic reasons, such Christian thinkers had become convinced that, as philosophers, they could deal only with rational evidence. (In this way, they attempted from the outset to reject any charge of confusion between philosophy and their personal views in matters of faith.) In Gilson's eyes, divine revelation had, instead, been a source of philosophical inspiration, which throughout Christianity's history had strongly characterized the reflections of such authors as Justin, Lactantius, Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, and Aquinas. Gilson argued that being Christian had offered to them 'a view of the world' that was 'perfectly satisfying to the mind' and 'incomparably more rational than the conclusions of reason.'¹² Studying how such thinkers had developed their reflection led Gilson to conclude that a Christian believer becomes a Christian philosopher 'when amongst his [Christian] beliefs he finds some that are capable of becoming objects of science.'¹³ If this prepares the believer to achieve new philosophi-

5 See J. A. Simmons (ed.), *Christian Philosophy: Conceptions, Continuations, and Challenges* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2018).

6 J. A. Simmons, Introduction, in J. A. Simmons (ed.), *Christian Philosophy: Conceptions, Continuations, and Challenges*, 12.

7 See J. Schellenberg, 'Is Plantinga-Style Christian Philosophy Really Philosophy?' in J. A. Simmons (ed.), *Christian Philosophy: Conceptions, Continuations, and Challenges*, 229–243.

8 See for example E. Gilson, *La philosophie de saint Bonaventure* (Vrin, 1924).

9 Especially Emile Bréhier, well-known historian of philosophy, who took part in the 1931 meeting with which the *querelle* began, opposed Gilson's view that philosophy had achieved new heights because it had been exercised under Christian influences.

10 Among them, Gilson must have included Pierre Mandonnet, whom I will refer to shortly, as well as scholars such as Amato Masnovo and Fernand van Steenberghen.

11 E. Gilson, 'What is Christian Philosophy?' In *A Gilson Reader*, ed. by A. Pegis (Doubleday and C., 1957), 184.

12 E. Gilson, 'What is Christian Philosophy?', 178.

13 E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (Sheed & Ward, 1936), 36.

cal heights, the outcome can be rightly named a ‘Christian philosophy.’ As a matter of fact, such heights had been achieved:

A single God, creator of heaven and earth, Ruler of the world and its Providence, a God Who made man in His own image and revealed to him, along with his last end, the way to attain it — where, in the splendid achievements of Greek philosophy, could one find a view of the world as clear and as perfectly satisfactory to the mind as the one revealed to men by Holy Scripture?¹⁴

From his philosophico-historical approach to the subject, Gilson concluded that a Christian philosophy had existed, namely, ‘every philosophy which, although keeping the two orders [reason and faith] formally distinct, nevertheless considers Christian revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to reason.’¹⁵ According to Gilson, the philosophies, which he believed to have prevailed especially during the Middle Ages, had clearly emerged under the influence of the Christian faith.

This view was firmly opposed by Pierre Mandonnet, the famous Dominican Thomist and medievalist, as well as others. For Mandonnet, although Christianity had promoted and supported the general progress of humanity, it had not been a factor of philosophical progress. In other words, philosophy must be developed autonomously from divine revelation. Philosophical progress ‘does not take place by Scripture but by reason.’¹⁶ In this view, if philosophers who happen to be Christian are influenced by their religious convictions while developing rational arguments, the product of such an activity should be considered to be theology and not philosophy. On the other hand, if their activity includes no reference to faith (i.e., both believers and non-believers might have undertaken it), such an activity is simply philosophy, and not *Christian* philosophy.

Mandonnet also argued that, although ‘Christian philosophy’ cannot appropriately mean the reflection that philosophers who happen to be Christian developed, it must be acknowledged that those philosophers do exist. (More precisely, Mandonnet believed that there was only one scholar, among medieval thinkers, who could properly be considered to be a philosopher, namely, Aquinas.¹⁷) It is with such philosophers that a *de facto* union occurs between Christian truths and philosophical procedure. However, such a union cannot exist *de iure* because of the distinction between Christianity and philosophy. This is a distinction that, as I have shown above, was held by Mandonnet.

Gilson agreed entirely with Mandonnet’s idea that there is a union *de facto* in the person of a philosopher who is a Christian. However, he found Mandonnet’s conviction that this union should be accepted *in fact* but not *in right* to be inconsistent. For Gilson,

if there are relations of fact between faith and reason, between Revelation and philosophy in the concrete subject — if there are in fact relations, I say that it is impossible that there not be relations of right.¹⁸

Regardless of how convincing Gilson’s position might have appeared to be, many scholars criticized it in the past. Gilson’s view that faith was ‘an indispensable auxiliary to reason’ (the *in right* union that is mentioned above) did not seem reconcilable with his conviction that the influence of faith on reason was a matter of historical fact. Ralph McInerny, for example, claimed that Gilson ‘has persuaded everyone of the historical fact of the influence of the faith on philosophy.’ However, as McInerny concluded, this is a ‘far cry from holding that there is a continuing formal, objective dependence of philosophy on the faith.’¹⁹

Jacques Maritain’s approach to Christian philosophy may be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap under consideration here between historical fact and formally objective dependence. According to Maritain, from Gilson’s philosophico-historical approach to the matter, it did not follow that Gilson meant

14 E. Gilson, ‘What is Christian Philosophy?’, 178.

15 E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, 37.

16 *La philosophie chrétienne. Journée d’études de la Société Thomiste* (Cerf, 1933), 67f., cited in *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation*, 81.

17 Mandonnet decisively argued in support of this stance while reviewing Gilson’s *Le philosophie de saint Bonaventure* in *Bulletin Thomiste* 3 (1926), 50–54.

18 *La philosophie chrétienne*, 63f., tr. by R. McInerny, *Praeambula fidei. Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2006), 94.

19 R. McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 106.

‘to suppress the theoretical question.’ Instead, he intended ‘to leave it open.’²⁰ Maritain addressed such a theoretical question by focusing on ‘the classical distinction between the order of specification and the order of exercise.’²¹ Specifically, he examined the distinction ‘between the *nature* of philosophy, of what philosophy is in itself, and the *state* in which it is found factually, historically, in the human subject.’²² According to Maritain, when ‘considered in its pure *nature*, or essence,’ philosophy ‘depends only on the evidence and criteria of natural reason.’ However, if ‘taken concretely, in the sense of being a *habitus*,’ philosophy ‘is in a certain *state*.’ This can be Christian or a-Christian and has a decisive influence on the way that philosophy exists and develops.²³ (Maritain, however, applies this view only to theoretical philosophy. When it comes to moral philosophy, he argues that new distinctions are needed. In this case, not only the state, but also the nature of philosophy, should be related to the Christian faith. A ‘moral philosophy adequately considered,’ as Maritain describes it, ‘must be guided by the knowledge of our ultimate end, which, as Christians we cannot pretend not to know is supernatural.’²⁴)

Although not exempt from criticism,²⁵ the distinction between nature and state appears, at least initially, to offer an acceptable balance between reason and faith. John Wippel has similarly distinguished between the *moment of discovery* and the *moment of proof*.²⁶ According to Wippel, ‘in the moment of proof, his [the Christian’s] procedure cannot be described as Christian philosophy.’ In contrast,

since in the moment of discovery it was his religious belief that first suggested this particular issue to him as a possible subject for philosophical investigation, one might refer to such a procedure as Christian philosophy in the order of discovery.²⁷

In short, beliefs of various origins can contribute to philosophical discourse as suggestions and possible answers for the philosophical process to verify. This process remains ‘philosophical’ only if strictly argumentative, whereas ‘Christian’ is what Wippel names the ‘moment of discovery.’ The latter is a pre-philosophical context from which hypotheses, suggestions and possible answers are drawn.

However, there is a substantive problem with Maritain’s distinction between the nature of philosophy and the state in which the philosopher finds himself or herself. This distinction is rooted in a classical conception of philosophy as a critical and systematic assessment of the traditions, cultural productions and personal beliefs with which the philosopher comes into contact. Philosophy is seen as the criterion employed to distinguish between the true and the false and, thereby, to accept, amend or reject what emerges from the abovementioned traditions, cultures and personal beliefs.

This, however, applies entirely to all possible convictions, except those of faith. For a believer like Maritain, faith cannot be rejected by philosophy. For such a believer, ‘faith guides and orientates philosophy, *veluti stella rectorix*, without thereby violating its autonomy.’²⁸

Maritain’s theory of nature and state of philosophy, therefore, applies only in part to faith. It emphasizes the autonomy of reason with respect to any subjective state, including that of faith. However, it does not explain why, unlike any other subjective states, faith ‘guides and orients philosophy,’ whereas philosophy never rejects faith. It also does not explain why faith, unlike other states, can guide philosophy without compromising the latter’s autonomy.

20 J. Maritain, ‘La notion de philosophie chrétienne,’ *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 31 (1931), 59.

21 J. Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy* (Philosophical Library, 1955), 11.

22 J. Maritain, ‘La notion de philosophie chrétienne,’ 59. See also Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 11f.

23 See J. Maritain, *Science and Wisdom* (Sheed and Ward, 1938), 79.

24 See J. Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 38ff. Maritain says that moral philosophy is not theology, as many critics argue, but ‘a formally philosophic science subalternated to theology’ (Ibid., 86). ‘Theological truths are indispensable for the full constitution of ethics and the object of morals is only adequately known in light of these truths’ (*Science and Wisdom*, 109).

25 Peter Redpath points out that philosophy simply does not exist *in itself*, that is, apart from its state (P. Redpath, ‘Romance of Wisdom: The Friendship between Jacques Maritain and Saint Thomas Aquinas.’ In *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, ed. by Deal W. Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini (Mercer Univ. Press, 1987), 110)

26 See J. Wippel, ‘The possibility of a Christian philosophy: a Thomistic perspective,’ *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), 272–290.

27 J. Wippel, ‘The possibility of a Christian philosophy: a Thomistic perspective,’ 280.

28 J. Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, 29.

An objection may be raised. The three authors whom I have discussed so far — Gilson, Mandonnet, and Maritain — had a Thomist background and may be seen, broadly speaking, as part of the Neoscholasticism that Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* (1879) inspired. How is it that all three seem to have missed so much of the spirit of Aquinas' views of faith and reason?

However, this objection should also be addressed to the scholars in question as well as to other eminent scholars of Aquinas. They often assumed antithetic views of the problem under discussion. This means that they did not wonder how was it that equally outstanding interpreters of the medieval thinker could adopt mutually opposing readings of Aquinas' thoughts.²⁹ I have already said that Gilson accused other famous scholars of Aquinas of misunderstanding the spirit of Aquinas' thoughts on faith and reason.³⁰ As Gilson suggested, their thoughts should be seen as an attempt to avoid any accusation that their philosophy reflected too closely their personal choice of faith. This is not surprising because the assumption that the theological origin of faith should remain separate from the philosophical investigation of faith and reason was widely made by philosophers in the modern age. According to John Jenkins, this assumption, which he contends traces back to Locke's reflection on the subject, has become the dominant model in the field until recent times. Therefore, it could have influenced even scholars of Aquinas and their way of interpreting Aquinas' view of faith and reason.³¹ After all, it appears undeniable that the thinkers, whom I have studied so far did not consider what transpires once reason is related to the Christian faith, taken as granted by God and only partially responsive to rational criteria.³² Unlike Aquinas, they seemed to begin their reflections with the assumption that what may be proper to the faith (i.e., its supernatural origin) could not be considered in the context of their philosophical reflections.

III. PROVIDING A THOMIST SOLUTION

I have so far identified two opposing views of how faith and rational investigation can interact with each other. The first view is that faith exerts an influence on rational investigation, from which a Christian theology, rather than a Christian philosophy, follows. The second view is that faith exerts no influence on rational investigation and, therefore, the believer will develop only a philosophy. Again, no Christian philosophy will be possible. Needless to say, a Christian philosophy, if any, can be justified only by overcoming the opposition in question. Maritain's proposal was an attempt in this direction. After having shown that this attempt failed, I now argue for a different proposal.

The opposition at stake can be overcome by considering every aspect of Aquinas' concept of faith and its possible relations to philosophy. Thus, it is time to highlight exactly what Aquinas' concept of faith consists of and what consequences such a concept can have for the relation between faith and philosophy.

For Aquinas, faith is 'an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine Truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.'³³ Faith is not only due to the work of the intellect and will, but also to the gracious intervention of God. This reminds us of the tripartition that Aquinas draws on Augustine. On the basis of such partition, faith means 'believing in a God' (*credere Deum*), 'believing God' (*credere Deo*) and 'believing in God' (*credere in Deum*).³⁴ Only the first of these three dimensions of faith (*believing in*

29 This variety of interpretations does not only apply to faith and reason, which is why Fergus Kerr has devoted an entire book to 'the very many ways of contemplating Aquinas.' They are 'rival, conflicting, even incommensurable' with each other (F. Kerr, 'The Varieties of Interpreting Aquinas.' In *Contemplating Aquinas. On the Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. by Kerr (SCM Press, 2003), 40).

30 See above, notes 10f.

31 See J. Jenkins, 'Faith and Revelation,' in *Philosophy of religion. A guide to the subject*, ed. by B. Davies (Georgetown Univ. Press, 2007), 215f. Among such scholars, Jenkins mentions Terence Penelhum and his essay entitled 'The analysis of faith in St Thomas Aquinas,' *Religious Studies* 13 (1977), 133–154.

32 This resembles Tilliette's evaluation of the *querelle*. See above, note 4.

33 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, tr. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, second and revised edition [Oates and Washbourne, 1920, hereafter: *Summa theologiae*], II-II q. 2 a. 9. The Latin text of Aquinas' works is that of the Leonine Edition [Rome 1888–1948].

34 *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 2.

a God) considers God as an object of belief, thus defining the intellectual character of faith. That is to say that faith is an act of the intellect with its noetic contents, *fides quae*, (rather than *fides qua*, the act of faith that the two other aspects denote). The second aspect (*believing God*) allows us to see that the act of faith depends on God, in the sense that there is no faith without divine revelation. The third aspect (*believing in God*) allows us to see that the object in question is also the ultimate goal, as it is the greatest possible good, to look for, and not a mere truth or a person like any other. To express it differently, the first two aspects concern the content of faith (the material object: *believing in a God*) and the way in which it is proposed to the believer (the formal object: *believing God*). The third aspect determines the proper task of the will. Because it seeks the highest good, the will leads the intellect to assent to the revealed truth.

For Aquinas, therefore, faith is not a mere intellectual act. Although he insists that faith is *formally* an act of the intellect, he ‘does recognize the large part which the will plays in the act of faith.’³⁵ Moreover, faith is not limited to human activity. Aquinas points out that the faithful tend to God because of what he has revealed (*exterius*), and love him thanks to the work he does in their interiority (*interius*) to move them to assent. Of course, the believer can also provide effective arguments in support of faith, but what pushes him or her to assent to the revelation is principally ‘the inward instinct of the divine invitation.’³⁶ Aquinas is convinced that God is ‘the chief and proper cause of faith.’³⁷ God is love. He guides human beings to partake of him by generating in them the desire to love him more and more and to believe what he has revealed. According to Aquinas, love for God, which is granted by God himself, is the very center of the Christian faith. Charity is the source of faith’s perfection: ‘Charity is called the form of faith insofar as the act of faith is perfected and formed by charity.’³⁸

So far, I have concentrated on Aquinas’ concept of faith. It is now time to focus on the relation between faith so conceived and rational investigation. I intend to proceed by showing that, according to Aquinas, (1) the charity that makes faith perfect — i.e., the ‘love for the truth believed,’ as we will see Aquinas names it — cannot be put aside by believers in the context of philosophical research, and (2) rational investigation must be developed autonomously from faith, since *scientia* requires evidence and evidence is to be attained by reason alone. I will then consider how it is possible that, although the love for the truth believed does not disappear in investigations performed by believers, natural reason functions autonomously from its influence.

Let us focus on the passage where Aquinas reflects on how to argue with respect to the revealed truths:

Human reason in support of what we believe, may stand in a twofold relation to the will of the believer. First, as preceding the act of the will; as, for instance, when a man either has not the will, or not a prompt will, to believe, unless he be moved by human reasons: and in this way human reason diminishes the merit of faith ... Secondly, human reasons may be consequent to the will of the believer. For when a man’s will is ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof; and in this way human reason does not exclude the merit of faith but is a sign of greater merit.³⁹

Aquinas emphasizes the intellectual value of the ‘love for the truth believed,’ that is, the love for God which leads believers to reflect on him and his works in order to attain as much evidence as possible. Aquinas adds that this disposition operates also when the subject at stake can become evident. (Thomas employs the concept of ‘*evidentia*’ for what causes *certainty* and ‘*scientia*.’ According to Thomas, therefore, ‘evident’ stands for ‘*fully or conclusively evident*.’⁴⁰ Accordingly, ‘non-evident’ stands here for what

35 P. J. Riga, ‘The act of faith in Augustine and Aquinas,’ in *The Thomist* 35 (1971), 168.

36 The believer is encouraged to believe for many reasons, such as a result of miracles and arguments. However, he or she is moved mainly ‘by the inward instinct of the Divine invitation (*interiori instinctu Dei invitantis*)’ (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 9 ad 3).

37 *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 6 a. 1 ad 1.

38 *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 3.

39 *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2 a. 10.

40 For more on this, see R. Pasnau, *After Certainty. A History of Our Epistemic Ideals and Illusions* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017), 189.

is *non-fully* or *non-conclusively* evident.⁴¹) In such a case, the faith conceived as a certain amount of non-evident truths disappears, whereas the form of faith — i.e., charity — keeps operating. It is precisely the case of the so-called *praeambula fidei*:

Demonstrative reasons in support of the preambles of faith, but not of the articles of faith, diminish the measure of faith, *since they make the thing believed to be seen, yet they do not diminish the measure of charity, which makes the will ready to believe them, even if they were unseen.*⁴²

On the one hand, since non-evident sentences are no longer needed once evidence has been attained, what Aquinas calls ‘the measure of faith’ turns out to be diminished or eliminated. On the other hand, since the believer does not give up his or her love for God and the beliefs implied by such a love, what Aquinas calls ‘the measure of charity’ — the love for God conceded by God himself — keeps functioning. It can therefore be maintained that the believer can know and believe at the same time, where only at first sight should this seem to negate this well-known Thomistic passage:

In one and the same man, about the same object, and in the same respect, science is incompatible with either opinion or faith, yet for different reasons. ... The reason why science and faith cannot be about the same object and in the same respect is because the object of science is something seen, whereas the object of faith is the unseen, as stated above.⁴³

In fact, at this stage of the present essay it should be clear that to Aquinas knowing (taken as possession of rational evidence) cannot replace having faith (taken as the adherence to God’s revelation due to charity and divine grace). As a result, once philosophy has attained full evidence, which is possible when it comes to the preambles of faith, faith resides with the believer to the extent that it is conceived as adherence to God due to the love for him and what he has revealed.

According to Aquinas, therefore, faith always accompanies the rational investigation performed by the believer. Now it is necessary to clarify why the autonomy of reason does not decrease or disappear. Aquinas considers such autonomy indispensable. Let us take into account what he claims when he wonders whether or not faith is more certain than other intellectual virtues such as intellect, science, and wisdom. As a believer, Aquinas affirms that with respect to the cause of faith, faith is more certain, since the cause in question is God and not human reason. But with regard to the subject of faith (i.e., the believer), he states that ‘the more a man’s intellect lays hold of a thing, the more certain it is,’ and ‘on this way, faith is less certain.’⁴⁴ If reason searches for evidence, faith, taken as assent to non-evident statements (*credere Deum*), cannot serve this end. In the passage just quoted, Aquinas clearly affirms that the certainty of faith is determined by divine grace and not by rational evidence. It follows that from the point of view of the subject of faith, the certainty can be attained only by natural reason, which functions without being under the influence of faith.

This portrayal of the relation Aquinas sees among faith, reason, and charity can be easily found in the passage he devotes to the possibility that rational arguments negate truths of faith. For Aquinas, if reason leads to conclusions that conflict with faith, it is certainly mistaken:

If anything is found in the teachings of the philosophers contrary to faith, this error does not properly belong to philosophy, but is due to an abuse of philosophy owing to the insufficiency of reason. Therefore

41 This allows me to reject the objection according to which, by claiming that in Aquinas’ view the truths of faith are not evident, I am portraying Aquinas as a *fideist*. On the one hand, the truths of faith, with the exception of the preambles of faith, cannot be *fully* evident; on the other hand, they can be supported by arguments (see above, note 36), from which follows that these truths appear to be probable or, to use Aquinas’ words, ‘not impossible’ (see below, note 51). As Aquinas says, it is because of the arguments in question that the believers see that the truths of faith ‘*ought to be believed*’ (*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 1, a. 4, ad 2). In this connection, Winfried Löffler argues for ‘a moderately cognitive account of religious beliefs.’ These beliefs ‘are not “provable” in any strong sense, but nor are they irrational’ (W. Löffler, ‘Religious Beliefs as World-View Beliefs’ in *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10 (2018) no 3, 9).

42 *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2 a. 10 ad 2, my emphasis.

43 *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 1 a. 5 ad 4.

44 *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 4 a. 8.

also it is possible from the principles of philosophy to refute an error of this kind, either by showing it to be altogether impossible, or not to be necessary⁴⁵.

Aquinas maintains that any argument that conflicts with the truth of Christian revelation, even if it appears to be rationally convincing, must be rejected as wrong.⁴⁶ However, his conviction underlies the importance of the role that reason is expected to play. Aquinas' thesis is that, once certain arguments have been rejected — because they conflict with faith — reason must begin anew from the start and 'from its own principles.' In so arguing, Aquinas promotes the idea that *scientia* needs to be grounded in arguments, but the search for arguments must be promoted by faith.

Thomas is so sure of the truths of faith that he must reject as false any rational conclusion that appears to deny them. By virtue of such a certainty, believers — at least those who experience a paradigmatic level of faith — refute any argument — even if rationally convincing — only because it negates the truths of faith. (It is maybe superfluous to repeat that precisely thanks to the love for God and everything related to him, this refusal is to be followed by further investigations to show that the argument rejected is in fact wrong; also from the speculative point of view.⁴⁷ It is not superfluous, instead, to point out that for Aquinas the fact that the faithful firmly hold the Christian beliefs does not exclude that they may mistake their own conjectures for those beliefs.⁴⁸ As a consequence, Aquinas seems to suggest that, at least in this case, believers should rethink and revise their views.⁴⁹) Faith is, therefore, surer than any rational certainty,⁵⁰ but cannot participate in the demonstrative process since it is due to love for God and not due to evidence. Believers' love for God and the consequent certainty they feel about his revelation constitutes the *orientation* of their rational inquiry, which they develop as further confirmation of the revealed truths and as a means to clear away objections and criticisms. At the same time believers take the truth believed and loved as a *criterion* of their speculative investigation, since it is on the basis of the agreement or disagreement with such truth that they either accept or reject reason's conclusions. In other words, the truths of faith can indicate possible erroneous speculative conclusions. (As I have said above, the arguments of such conclusions will then be examined from the merely rational viewpoint.)

What I have said so far seems to offer a satisfactory response to the question that the participants in the French *querelle* posed. The question was whether the Christian faith deprives philosophy of its autonomy, although it influences the philosophical activity. Aquinas believes that faith is caused by God. It follows that it is possible for faith what would be impossible for non-divinely-caused factors.⁵¹ Therefore, faith *can* influence philosophy without limiting philosophy's independence. In conclusion, a Christian philosophy is possible.

45 Aquinas, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 2, tr. by R. E. Brennan (Herder, 1946), q. 2 a. 3.

46 Aquinas claims that 'faith is more certain than any understanding [of principles] and scientific knowledge (*omni intellectu et scientia*)' (Aquinas, *On Truth*, tr. by J. V. McGlynn [Henry Regnery Company, 1953], q. 14 a. 1 ad 7). Jenkins, while commenting on this passage, suggests that according to Thomas 'the faithful hold the articles of faith with greater conviction than the principle of non-contradiction' (J. Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* [Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997], 167f.).

47 This is one of the tasks of reason with respect to faith: 'To resist those who speak against the faith, either by showing that their statements are false, or by showing that they are not necessarily true' (Aquinas, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3.)

48 As he says, 'it is possible for a believer to have a false opinion *through a human conjecture*, but it is quite impossible for a false opinion to be *the outcome of faith*.' (*Summa theologiae*, II-II q. 1 a. 3 ad 3, emphasis added).

49 However, the adoption of mistaken views and the fact that believers transmit not only faith but also 'garbage', as John Greco calls it, does not make the revision in question strictly necessary. Such revision — so Greco points out — is required 'in the context of inter-religious dialogue, or in debates with atheists', when what he arguably refers to as 'the cognitive content of faith' constitutes the main interest to religious people. The practice of religion, however, takes place at several levels, including affective and behavioural ones. In other words, religious people not only aim at professing and defending a doctrine. They also aim at salvation and reconciliation with God, and from this viewpoint it is possible that the relevant information is reliably transmitted, even if 'a lot of garbage' is also transmitted with it. (See J. Greco, 'Transmitting Faith (and Garbage)', in *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10 (2018) no 3, 101).

50 'In so far as science, wisdom and understanding are intellectual virtues, they are based upon the natural light of reason, which falls short of the certitude of God's word, on which faith is founded' (*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 4 a. 8 ad 3).

51 Aquinas employs the expression 'not impossible' to show how the truths of faith, except the preambles, can be rationally understood. For him, arguments in support of such truths 'are persuasive arguments showing that what is proposed to our faith is not impossible' (*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 1 a. 5 ad3).

From what I have said so far, however, does not follow that the ‘Christian’ character of the philosophy that I have described is only due to the love of God, which pushes the philosopher to search for reasons in favour of his or her own convictions. Another trait of a Christian philosophy is the choice of the topics to treat, a choice whose importance Plantinga emphasizes.⁵² One more trait is the employment of truths of faith as pre-philosophical affirmations that can orientate the philosophical investigation, an employment on which Gilson built his view of Christian philosophy.⁵³ In other words, the noetic contents of the Christian revelation play a role in the development of a Christian philosophy, which is a view that Aquinas clearly supports when, as I have shown above, he treats such contents as orientation and criterion of his speculative investigation.

Before moving on, let me say that, given the view of faith as both assent to noetic contents and adhesion to God (and therefore to his revelation resulting from charity and grace), I can solve a possible objection to what I have argued so far. According to this objection, my proposal that we should consider what faith requires in order to relate to philosophy applies to Plantinga’s and more generally Reformers’ view, not to Aquinas’ position on faith and reason. In fact, unlike those thinkers, who argue that Christian philosophers are legitimately within their epistemic rights to begin from their (Christian) assumptions, Aquinas contends that philosophy should begin from its own principles.⁵⁴ In reply, let me say that this opposition between Plantinga and Aquinas is acceptable only once faith has been taken as an assent to the noetic contents of the Christian revelation. From this viewpoint, it can be said that the two thinkers in question promote two different kinds of Christian philosophy, which Winfried Löffler has accurately described.⁵⁵ As he points out, the two models in question emerge from Augustine’s and Aquinas’ thought, respectively. Those who adopt the Thomistic model believe that the philosophical reasoning can start only from propositions that can be known by natural reason.⁵⁶ In other words, *scientia* needs to be developed only by way of rational arguments, ‘from its own principles’, as I said above. In contrast, those who adopt the Augustinian model (among whom Plantinga openly numbers himself⁵⁷) claim that believers may, as philosophers, also start from propositions whose truth they only accept by faith. As Löffler points out, this means that, unlike the Thomistic model, the Augustinian one limits itself to ‘developing and defending a consistent, coherent and comprehensive Christian worldview’. Unlike the Thomistic model, the Augustinian one develops a reflection which ‘will be of limited relevance for external dialogue’, a reflection which will not make faith ‘externally plausible’.⁵⁸

However, Aquinas does not only consider faith as an intellectual assent to divine revelation. He looks at faith also as the adherence to God due to charity and divine grace. From this viewpoint, it can be said that for him faith promotes the search for rational arguments and is orientation and criterion of the rational investigation.⁵⁹ In this sense, it can also be said that both Aquinas and a Reformed epistemologist such as Plantinga hold that one should examine the relationship between faith and philosophy by focusing on what faith requires in order to relate to reason. Aquinas’ reflection shows that, for him, charity and trust in God require that believers refute any argument that denies the revealed truths, and promote *scientia* to support their faith. Plantinga states that trust in God requires that believers have more courage, or boldness, or strength, or perhaps Christian self-confidence.⁶⁰ This should lead them to

52 See above, notes 1f.

53 See above, notes 13ff.

54 See above, note 45.

55 See W. Löffler, ‘Two Kinds of Christian Philosophy’ in *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5 (2013) no 2, 111–127.

56 ‘The Thomistic Christian philosopher is a Christian, and as such, he sometimes has certain preferences in his philosophical interests: he tends toward philosophical opinions which seem compatible with his worldview. But as a philosopher, he would not argue for these opinions with premises from faith’ (W. Löffler, ‘Two Kinds of Christian Philosophy’, 120).

57 This is shown by the publication of A. Plantinga, ‘Augustinian Christian Philosophy’ in *The Monist* 75 (1992), 291–320. Löffler arguably calls Plantinga’s project of Reformed epistemology ‘perhaps the most prominent and influential contemporary example of an explicitly Augustinian conception of Christian Philosophy’ (W. Löffler, ‘Two Kinds of Christian Philosophy’, 122).

58 W. Löffler, ‘Two Kinds of Christian Philosophy’, 118ff.

59 For more on this, see R. Di Ceglie, *Aquinas on Faith, Reason, and Charity* (Routledge, 2022), Chapters 6–7.

60 See A. Plantinga, ‘Advice to Christian Philosophers’, 254.

display independence of the rest of the philosophical world and to promote a comprehensive Christian philosophical perspective.

IV. THREE PROSPECTIVE DEFEATERS

There are three significant defeaters of my thesis that, if one accepts the idea that faith is, among other things, adhesion to God due to charity, one can say that faith exerts an influence on reason without limiting the autonomy of the rational investigation from any external authority. Responding to such defeaters will help me to confirm my thesis.

First, there may be a claim that my thesis implies a form of *wishful thinking*. As a matter of fact, I have argued that believers *want* to show that their belief is true. This is why they regard faith as orientation and a criterion for philosophy.

In response, let me say that wishful thinking can be taken in both a bad sense and a good sense. H. McCabe describes ‘wishful thinking in a bad sense’ in terms that have nothing to do with faith as held by Aquinas. Wishful thinking in the bad sense leads people to allow ‘their desires to trespass in a field that belongs exclusively to reason.’⁶¹ In other words, those in question may be led by these desires to *reason dishonestly* and to *use poor arguments*. In contrast, what I have shown in regard to Aquinas’ view coincides with what McCabe calls wishful thinking in the good sense. It is true that in this case, also, one hopes to show that no objections to one’s belief can be found. This, however, does not lead one to spoil a rational investigation. As I have abundantly shown in Section 3, Aquinas’ thesis was that if believers have rejected arguments against their faith, reason must commence anew from the beginning - ‘from its own principles.’ Aquinas showed a noteworthy trust in the potentialities of reason.⁶² This is why, despite any mistakes it might have involved, reason should recommence its work.

Second, it may be said that my thesis is based openly on theological assumptions. It is undeniable that only the faithful can be ready to believe that faith is caused by God, a belief on which my thesis is based. As a consequence, this thesis can convince only those who believe. Furthermore, this does reinforce the view that detractors of Christian philosophy, whether believers or unbelievers, typically hold. That view is that there is no intrinsic relationship between faith and philosophy.

In response, it must be noted that I have accurately distinguished between the influence of faith on philosophy and how philosophy is conducted. As I have shown, Aquinas states that philosophical research should be developed from its own principles, regardless of what the believer hopes that the research will conclude. This is the only aspect of Aquinas’ reflection that should be of interest to those who claim that the philosopher should use his or her reason independently of any external authority. The fact that the believer hopes or believes, more or less firmly, that his or her faith can act appropriately as orientation and a criterion for philosophy should be of no interest to them.⁶³ In other words, they should only determine whether or not all philosophers, including those who are also believers, follow reason wherever it leads.

In this regard, and in the light of Aquinas’ view of faith and reason, believers appear to be prepared to follow reason wherever it leads. Aquinas claims that

since faith rests upon infallible truth, and since the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated, it is clear that the arguments brought against faith cannot be demonstrations, but are difficulties that can be answered.⁶⁴

61 H. McCabe, *Faith within reason*, ed. by B. Davies (Continuum, 2007), 10.

62 See below, note 64, where Aquinas says that ‘the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated.’ This obviously means that no real demonstrations can be offered in support of false beliefs. In other words, reason, if adequately employed, cannot be mistaken.

63 As Löffler points out, ‘this background assumption is theological in nature, but this is unproblematic: it is an assumption that is made only by the Christian philosopher himself and does not oblige anybody else’ (W. Löffler, ‘Two Kinds of Christian Philosophy’, 120).

64 *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1 a. 8.

In this view, the faithful are expected to believe that there are no sound and truthful arguments against divine revelation. However correct their view may be, it should help them to follow reason wherever it leads.

Third, it may be argued that rejecting available evidence for no equally evident reason is unacceptable from a philosophical viewpoint. As a matter of fact, this is precisely what, according to my thesis, Christian philosophers are required to do. As Aquinas openly suggests, one should begin to reason again from the principles of philosophy because one should begin by rejecting any evidence that seems to disprove one's religious beliefs. (In the passage that I have cited above, Aquinas does not state whether the faithful, who also are philosophers, have any rational reason to proceed in this manner. However, he arguably refers to circumstances in which faith, instead of evidence, causes them to adopt this procedure. Resuming reasoning 'from the principles of philosophy' would otherwise be superfluous.)

In response, one might note that the tenacity in sticking to one's beliefs is what all philosophers, and not merely Christian philosophers, can profitably adopt. In this regard, much can be learned from Basil Mitchell's reflection on the relationship between adhering to one's beliefs and acknowledging the difficulty raised by opposing evidence.

Mitchell argues convincingly that both 'commitment' and 'neutrality'⁶⁵ are aspects of scholarly activity. In fact, 'any philosopher (and, mutatis mutandis, any academic) has this problem of reconciling his neutrality as a philosopher with his commitment as a man...'⁶⁶ Since philosophy 'touches life, at least potentially, at all points,'⁶⁷ philosophers are expected to deal with their philosophical arguments, as well as the intuitions and commitments that emerge from their life experiences.

Furthermore, the influence of personal assumptions and commitments, whether or not one is aware of it, is not only inevitable, but also is *positive*. To highlight the influence of personal assumptions on rational investigation — both philosophically and scientifically — and their positive role in the search for truth, Mitchell makes use of the concept of 'tenacity'. A 'principle of tenacity' is a positive component of rational enquiry. It promotes research because all persons who are involved, if tenaciously committed to holding to their view, will do their best to find any possible argument that supports their position and against the opposing one:

Scientists operate what has been called a 'principle of tenacity,' in virtue of which they do not let go of their fundamental beliefs when things get difficult, but rather persevere in the hope, or — shall we say? — the *faith*, that the problem will eventually be resolved.⁶⁸

V. CONCLUSION

Tenacity in adhering to one's beliefs is an epistemically profitable procedure that all philosophers, rather than only Christian philosophers, should adopt. The fact that this adoption is due to faith in God, instead of a conviction that adhering may open new and intellectually fruitful roots is something that should not be of interest to those who wish to know if a Christian philosophy is epistemically acceptable. The only matter to check is whether being Christian causes debaters to reason dishonestly and adopt poor arguments. As I have shown, this risk is avoided because of Aquinas' firm conviction that faith cannot participate in the philosophical enterprise, although it is more reliably true than any rational certainty. Faith is due to love for God and not to evidence. Consequently, it can only act as orientation and a criterion of the philosophical investigation, whereas it is reason that must search for evidence. Furthermore, if a believer philosophizes in the light of Aquinas' conviction that reason cannot contradict faith, believing seems to be the best possible state in which to follow reason wherever it leads.

65 See B. Mitchell, *Neutrality and Commitment. An inaugural lecture delivered before the Univ. of Oxford on 14 May 1968* (Clarendon Press, 1968).

66 B. Mitchell, *Neutrality and Commitment*, 14.

67 B. Mitchell, *Neutrality and Commitment*, 10.

68 B. Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism* (Clarendon Press, 1994), 18 (my emphasis).

If my argument is correct, Aquinas' view offers a viable solution to what is perhaps the fundamental problem with Christian philosophy, i.e. the apparent incompatibility of the influence of faith on philosophy and the independence of philosophy from faith. I have shown that Aquinas' view emerges from the discussion of what faith leads to in the philosophical investigation. This discussion is precisely what Plantinga's *Advice* suggests Christians who happen to be philosophers should promote. As a result, I refer to the proposal that emerges from Aquinas' view as *Thomist Advice to Christian Philosophers*.⁶⁹

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⁶⁹ Warm thanks go to two anonymous Referees for this journal, who provided useful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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