

THE UNDERSTANDING OF AQUINAS' PHILOSOPHY IN THE WORK OF TOMO VEREŠ

Anto Gavrić

UDK 1 Thomas Aquinas
141.31

In our time, any comment on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is increasingly understood and perceived as some sort of a challenge. Even the more recent studies in the history of philosophy and the history of Thomism remind that St. Thomas is a theologian and his doctrinary synthesis, a theological synthesis. Etienne Gilson, Dominique-Marie Chenu, O.P. and our contemporary Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., all point to this very fact which, in their view, has been overly neglected by neo-Scholastics. Thus, for instance, Jean-Pierre Torrell considers as profound truth Etienne Gilson's claim "that the entire theology of St. Thomas is a comment on the Bible; every conclusion finds its justification in the words of the Holy Scriptures, which is the Word of God".¹

How should we talk of the work of Aquinas then? Or, how should we talk of the understanding of Aquinas' philosophy in the work of Tomo Vereš, O.P., this being the title of our brief contribution to the celebration of his 70th anniversary. If we consider nothing else but the twelve Thomas' comments, some complete, some incomplete, on the works of Aristotle, it is obvious that Aquinas demonstrated a genuine interest in philosophy as well as in natural philosophy. This fact is clearly evident in his Prologues, in certain comments that were also translated in Croatian by Vereš, in his *Selected Work of Thomas Aquinas*.² However, even those who insist on reminding that Thomas is a theologian, such as, for instance, Etienne Gilson and Cornelio Fabro, at the same time claim that Aquinas's metaphysics, owing to the inexpressible wealth of the notion of *actus essendi*, occupies a privileged place in the history of philosophy.³

1 J.-P. Torrell, *La "Somme de théologie" de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998, p. 103.

2 Toma Akvinski, *Izabrano djelo, izabrao i preveo Tomo Vereš*, Zagreb; Globus, 1981, p. 412. It is the first and the most comprehensive collection of Thomas's philosophical and theological texts in the Croatian, with a comprehensive introduction into his life and works, and very detailed notes.

3 See T. Vereš, *Zbilja i istina u Akvinca*, in: M. Steiner (ed), *Ljepota istine*, Zbornik u čast p. Miljenka Belića SJ u povodu 75. obljetnice života, Zagreb, FTI, 1996., p. 68. But Vereš does not accept their interpretation of Aquinas's notion of *actus essendi* (act of being), "because

It is with every right that certain authors see St. Thomas primarily as a theologian. In my opinion, that is how Vereš sees him as well; as a primordial thinker, the one who seeks to penetrate being as such (*ens inquantum ens*) and that mysterious Primordial Source, from which and to which everything existent flows. Is not the very title of Vereš's work, "Primordial Thinker", indicative enough, not to mention years and years of the initiation into the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas at the Dominican College of Philosophy and Theology in Dubrovnik and the Faculty of Philosophy of the Society of Jesus in Zagreb?

The twenty books that Vereš has written or translated, as well as approximately 500 bibliographic entries — discussions, articles and polemics in Croatian and international magazines and anthologies, show a very wide field of work: from the philosophy of Aristotle, St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas, through social teaching of the Church and a dialogue with Marxists, to the question of national minorities. Vereš has not offered a comprehensive account of Thomas's philosophy, nor it may be found in any one place, but in his articles, studies and books, he has provided an introduction to Aquinas's approach to philosophical and theological problems. We shall attempt to present here a brief outline of how Vereš understands the philosophy of Aquinas, why and how, according to Aquinas, philosophy is not a goal unto itself, and how our author understands the relation between philosophy and theology, between reason and faith. Since we are discussing the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas in the Christian philosophy of 19th and 20th centuries, in the final pages we shall devote more attention to the debate on the possibility of existence and nature of Christian philosophy, and examine how Vereš approaches that question, i.e. we shall see whether Aquinas's philosophy may indeed be called Christian Philosophy.⁴

Importance of Reason

One of the central places in Vereš's work is occupied by Aquinas's understanding of the place and the task of human reason in the most important philosophical and theological problems. Namely, the entire work of Thomas

they confine their interpretation only to the interpretation of the notion of 'actus essendi', extracting it from its context of correlative notion of truth, which is how it appears in the works of Thomas".

4 The notion in question featured very prominently in the latest encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, where the term Christian philosophy is for the first time explicitly introduced in the official teaching of the Church. Differentiating among the "different states of philosophy with respect to Christian religion" (No. 75), in No. 76 the Pope uses the term "Christian philosophy".

speaks of his struggle for a full recognition of faith by nature and reason. As if Vereš's guiding principle was the favourite text from the beginning of the work of Aquinas *De ente et essentia*: For a small error in the beginning is a great one in the end. (Quia parvus error in principio magnus est in fine)! Being aware of Thomas' confidence in reason and philosophy, Vereš emphasises the openness of reason to its "countless and unlimited possibilities, its ability to discover the unknown in the known, to predict that which is ir-regular, extra-ordinary, surprising and almost impossible", its inventiveness and creative power. For him, reason is "essentially the power of dialogue, of discerning new possibilities and assembling all differences".⁵

For St. Thomas, philosophical wisdom is a perfect work of reason, perfectum opus rationis. Vereš defines philosophy as "a supreme contemplative effort of man, through the known and knowable to look for that which is unknown, and listen out for that which is incomprehensible".⁶

Apprehension of the Unknowable through the knowable, in Thomas' work is intertwined, as an attempt to reach, through that which is evidentior, the One who is omnio ignotum, the One who is Ipsum esse subsistens.

Can philosophy really lead to the knowledge of divine actualities or, in other words, can it lead man to complete happiness?⁷ Speaking of metaphysics (philosophia prima) in the hierarchy of sciences in *Summa contra gentiles*, St. Thomas says that all other sciences depend upon it, because they receive their own principles from it. And the entire first philosophy strives for the knowledge of God as its final end, hence it is called a divine science. Thus, "the knowledge of God is the final end of all human study and activity."⁸

5 See T. Vereš, *Pružene ruke, Prilozi za dijalog između marksista i kršćana*, Zagreb, Filozofsko-teološki institut Družbe Isusove, 1989., pp. 251–252.

6 T. Vereš, *Iskonski mislilac*, Zagreb, Dominikanska naklada Istina, p. 39.

7 In the initial chapters of *Summa contra gentiles*, St. Thomas says that philosophy cannot interpret the mysteries of Incarnation and Trinity because they are beyond the natural powers of reason, but that they can be interpreted instead through the texts from the Holy Scriptures. As opposed to that, in the beginning of his comment on the Prologue to the Gospel by John, Meister Eckhart stresses that he intends to interpret the entirety of Christian faith and the Old and New Testament "per rationes naturales philosophorum", see Maitre Eckert, *Le Commentaire de l'Évangile selon Jean, Le Prologue* (chap. 1, 1–18), texte latin, avant-propos, traduction et notes par Alain de Libera, Eduard Wéber, O.P., et Emilie Zum Brunn, Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1989., (L'oeuvre latin du Maitre Eckert, vol VI), n. 2, p. 26. Ruedi Imbach dedicated an excellent study to this problem: *La Filosofia nel prologo di S. Giovanni secondo S. Agostino, S. Tommaso e Meister Eckert*, in: *Istituto San Tommaso, Studi 1995*. A cura di D. Lorenz — S. Serafini, Pontificia Università S. Tomaso, Rome, 1995., pp. 161–182, particularly pp. 171–180.

8 T. Akvinski, *Suma protiv pogana III*, 25, 6. And little further he adds (III, 25, 9, translated by Augustin Pavlović, vol II, Zagreb: KS, 1994, pp. 97–99): Man naturally desires so to know

All the lower sciences are subordinated to the higher ones. Since philosophy attains its goal only imperfectly, *cognitio Dei*, speculative sciences cannot adequately fulfill man's happiness. Aquinas claims that a thing is not perfected by something lower, except in so far as the lower partakes (*participatio*) of something higher. Thus the form of sensible things, for instance, a stone, is lower than man. Consequently, the intellect is not perfected by the form of a stone as such, but inasmuch as it partakes of a certain likeness to that which is of itself.⁹

Although complete human happiness is not found in the observation of speculative sciences, Thomas immediately continues: “*Sicut in formis sensibilibus participatur aliqua similitudo superiorum substantiarum, ita consideratio scientiarum speculativarum est quaedam participatio verae et perfectae beatitudinis*”.¹⁰

In the process of determining the place philosophy occupies in the thought of Aquinas, Vereš compares Thomas's philosophical procedure with that of St. Bonaventure.¹¹ He points out that it is certain that Thomas, who has not moved away from St. Albert the Great, recognises the autonomy of philosophy, which is not the case with St. Bonaventure.¹² Philosophy is not conceived as a path leading to theology because in its integrity, it possesses its own meaning and sense in itself, and subsequently, an inner legitimacy.

Relation Between Philosophy and Theology

The thirteenth century was marked by a fast break-through of Aristotle's philosophy into the West. In the academic debates, at the time when Aristotle's

the first cause as his last end. And human mind knows being in its entirety. Therefore, it naturally wishes to know its cause and that is solely God. And no one has achieved the last end until this natural desire is appeased. Therefore, for human happiness, which is the last end, the rational knowledge is not sufficient if there is no knowledge of God, which, as the last end, is the completion of the natural desire. Therefore, God is the happiness of every subsistent intelligence.

9 See T. Akvinski, *Summa teologiae*, I–II, q. 3, a. 6, cor.

10 Ibid. I–II, q. 1, a. 6, ad 2um.

11 The comparison of these two great authors most clearly reveals their attitude to philosophy. For Vereš, Thomas's comments on the works of Aristotle are not a mere school exercise, while it is certainly not a coincidence that St. Bonaventure did not comment on the same.

12 According to some historians of philosophy, such autonomy is relative, while the others still emphasize that Thomas recognized an absolute autonomy of philosophy. See A. Gavrić, *Doprinos Alberta Velikog dijalogu filozofije i teologije*, in: F. Prcela (ed), *Dijalog–Dialog: Na putu do istine i vjere — Auf dem Weg zur Wahrheit und zum Glauben*. An anthology in the honor of Augustin Pavlović, O.P., Zagreb–Mainz: Nakladni zavod Globus — Matthias Grünewald Verlag — Hrvatska dominikanska provincija, 1996., pp. 109–120.

philosophy is regarded as a great threat to faith, Thomas openly accepts the most radical novelty of his time, debates on it with great attention and with lot of authority, while at the same time, Bonaventure makes a radical departure from philosophy. In such openness, the status he attributes to the examination of nature is also very significant. In his comments on Aristotle's work on natural philosophy, Thomas believes it is necessary, and urgent, to study the new philosophy and observe natural reality as such, without interpreting it directly in the light of faith. In that way, Aquinas contributed to the strengthening of the position of philosophy in the Christian world.

However, it is also true that such philosophy is not a goal unto itself and that it is directed to theology and faith. According to Thomas, it is actually the preamble to the articles of faith (*praeambula fidei*) and "contains certain similarities with the teaching of the Church".¹³ While Bonaventure believes that faith must illuminate philosophy in its very own task (the Holy Scriptures become the sole source of Christian knowledge!)¹⁴, Thomas consciously stresses that only a solid and well-developed philosophy may be a true and adequate aid to theology. Thus, in *Summa theologiae* Thomas says "that faith presupposes natural knowledge even as grace presupposes nature and perfection supposes something that can be perfected". Examining this claim of Aquinas's, Vereš adds that "precisely on the basis of this principle, Thomas envisaged theology as a science which is not separated from other human sciences, but accepts them as the interpreters of Christian truths."¹⁵ This is also the reason why philosophy is "so much" present in *Summa theologiae*. In his work *Iskonski mislilac* (Primordial Thinker), Tomo Vereš explains that Thomas' theological thought "adopts aspirations and achievements of all human sciences, the entire past theology, Christian and non-Christian, Eastern and

13 T. Vereš, Akvinčeva "Suma protiv pogana", *Filozofska istraživanja* 16 (1996) 2, p. 531; T. Akvinski, *Super Boethium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, cor.: Sic ergo in sacra doctrina philosophia possumus tripliciter uti. Primo ad demonstrandum ea quae sunt praeambula fidei, quae necesse est in fide scire, ut ea quae naturalibus rationibus de Deo probantur, ut Deum esse, Deum esse unum et alia huiusmodi vel de Deo vel de creaturis in philosophia probata, quae fides supponit. Secundo ad notificandum per aliquas similitudines ea quae sunt fidei, sicut Augustinus in libro De Trinitate utitur multis similitudinibus ex doctrinis philosophicis sumptis ad manifestandum Trinitatem. Tertio ad resistendum his quae contra fidem dicuntur sive ostendendo ea esse falsa sive ostendendo ea non esse necessaria.

14 S. Bonaventure, *Collationes XVII*, n. 7 (*Opera omnia*, vol. V, p. 410): "Pleasure is but in this knowledge and not in other sciences. Philosopher says that there is a great pleasure in the knowledge that a diameter is not measurable against a circle; let it be his pleasure; let him eat it up".

15 *Summa theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1um: Toma Akvinski, *Izabrano djelo*, p. 171, note 20. In the continuation, Vereš adds: "It should be said candidly: from Thomas' point of view, our modern world and contemporary theology are very one-sided, both in practice and in theory, while by their structure and aspirations, they are necessarily closed within some sort of non-transparent, fideistic, supernaturalistic and biblical ghetto."

Western, Greek, Jewish and Arab, and at the same time opens new horizons and discovers new paths for Christian theology. It is the first conscious and planned attempt to make Christian thought bind together the thoughts from all around the world.”¹⁶

Thomas’ claim from the beginning of *Summa theologiae*, where he discusses the sacred doctrine, stating that this science, *sacra doctrina*, makes use of the other sciences “as of the lesser and as handmaidens”, at first glance may be truly deceptive. In other words, according to some historians of philosophy, it is as if Thomas is putting philosophy into a position of being a slave to theology.

Aware that in different systems of Christian thought philosophy has been treated as “a handmaiden” (*ancilla theologiae*), both before and after Thomas Aquinas, Vereš notices a lack of organised thematic approach to this problem. It is necessary unequivocally to determine whether philosophy is the servant of revelation or theological thoughts, in other words, whether the role of philosophy envisaged in such way is to aid the sacred doctrine in better interpretation of religious truths or slavishly to execute theological instructions, i.e. whether this encompasses philosophy in general or only the philosophy of certain thinkers.¹⁷

In the light of Aquinas’s texts, Vereš views philosophy as the servant of Revelation, but not of theological thoughts. Its role is interpretative, manifestative, as St. Thomas explains in the first question of *Summa theologiae*. In its path from the Knowable, where philosophy is the mistress (*domina*), to the Unknowable, where as a servant awaiting and accepting “possible self-revelation and self-giving of the Unavailable”, philosophy remains an independent science.¹⁸

There are other instances in which Vereš consistently stresses that philosophy and theology as “two different contemplative approaches to the world” are not in opposition, nor is philosophy an anti-theological science, because history of philosophy shows that “the problem of God has been permanently present in philosophical thought”.¹⁹ Therefore, in his articles, he

16 T. Vereš, *Iskonski mislilac*, p. 15.

17 See *Ibid.*, p. 38

18 See *Ibid.*, p. 38: Toma Akvinski, *Suma teologiae I*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 2um. In that context, Vereš also quotes Kant, who claimed that “philosophy does not walk behind the coat-tails of its kind mistress, holding on to her dress, but rather walks in front of her, carrying a torch.” Jacques Maritain made a very handsome comment on the formula ‘*philosophia ancilla theologiae*’, when he said that in the Scholastics, philosophy was in the service of theology only inasmuch as theology is making use of philosophy as an instrument of truth, in order to reach theological conclusions. It is “*ancilla*, and not *serva*, because theology only makes use of it, but respects its nature: philosophy is not a slave but a minister”, *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 31 (1931), p. 69.

19 T. Vereš, *Pružene ruke*, p. 238.

shows the adequacy and contemporaneity of Thomas' approach to the Primordial, to God. Thomas is consistent in his comment *In librum Boethii De Trinitate*: "If in the statements of philosophers there is something opposed to faith, it is not philosophy but quite the contrary, an abuse of philosophy, which springs from the deficiency of mind. Therefore, it is possible to refute such error by adopting the principles of philosophy as a starting point."²⁰ Thus, certain objections against faith, which come from philosophy, are being resolved on the basis of philosophy, not of theology. "Philosophy as a rational science must acknowledge the Unintelligible, and revelation is nothing else but a concrete historical manifestation of the Unintelligible."²¹ Aquinas' respect for integral philosophy in integral theology, Vereš regards as "an attempt of a conscious thematisation of the historical and human meeting between God and man."²²

If one, however, is looking for real opposition, then, as far as Vereš is concerned, one may find it in religion and irreligion, and not in faith and reason or revelation and philosophy. For better understanding of Vereš's views, one should have a clear picture of the context of his writings and dialogues. In 1981, Vereš reminded that the overcoming of the antagonism between faith and reason is the primordial requirement of the social life and not merely a theoretical problem.

Tomo Vereš clearly emphasises the autonomy of both disciplines, i.e. that philosophy does not cross over into the domain of the concrete historical Revelation because that task is already in the domain of theology. To theology, he reproaches its increasing movement away from its initial subject-matter, God, and its becoming "a sort of a trade opinion on this world"²³ and "a servant of political actualities: ancilla rerum politicarum".²⁴

Philosophy is Open to Dialogue

Thomas' special concern with supporting his own attitudes by various other authorities is impressively felt in all of his works. For instance, in the commentary on the four books of *Sentences of Peter Lombard* (some 6000 pages in the current edition), Aquinas quotes Aristotle 2000 times, Augustine 1000,

20 In Boethii De Trinitate, Proemium q. 2, a. 3, cor.

21 T. Vereš, *Pružene ruke*, p. 239

22 T. Vereš, *Iskonski mislilac*, p. 61.

23 T. Vereš, *Pružene ruke*, p. 257, and adds, without making any general assumption, "that theologians constitute themselves into some sort of a new ruling class, a social elite that wishes to possess power and the final say." (p. 258).

24 *Ibid.*, p. 259.

pseudo-Denis the Aeropagite 500, etc. It is an undisputed fact that Thomas does not think in some imaginary, closed and narrow space, but in dialogue with all thinkers accessible to him. In his two summae, *Summa theologiae* and *Summa contra gentiles*, another 38000 explicit quotes were recorded, out of which 5000 of pagan authors or more specifically, 4300 quotes of Aristotle. Besides, there are additional 8000 quotes of various Christian authors, and one third or 25000 are the quotes from the Bible. I will only mention one other work of Thomas, *Catena aurea*, where 57 mentions of different Greek authors were counted, some of the authors in question being totally unknown until then.²⁵

However, let us not be misguided by these impressive numbers. Thomas frequently stresses that his goal is not to examine and disseminate the thought of Aristotle. He is less interested in what the ancient thinkers thought than in searching for truth together with them.

John of St. Thomas (1589–1644) provided a formulation which has subsequently been in much use: that a good pupil is not satisfied merely with inheriting his teacher, but always strives to overcome him. The greatness of Thomism lies, as Otto Hermann Pesch says, in the fact that it has done what it was supposed to do, i.e. bring Thomas into a dialogue with the thoughts belonging to the time other than the one in which Thomas had lived.²⁶

Vereš's work is marked by the initiation of the systematic translating of medieval philosophers and theologians to the Croatian language, as well as by the initiation of a philosophical dialogue between Christians and Marxism. By way of "overcoming" his master St. Thomas, Vereš, who as a philosopher is primarily, always and everywhere concerned with reality and being, through his work comes to dialogue with Marx (for instance, in the book *Philosophical and Theological Dialogue with Marx*²⁷), bringing up the thoughts of

25 Data from J.-P. Torrell, *La "Somme de théologie" de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, p. 16, 103 and 105. See also J.-P. Torrell, *Initiation a saint Thomas d'Aquin, Sa personne et son oeuvre*, Paris-Fribourg, 1993., p. 203; C. G. Conticello, *San Tommaso ed i Padri: La Catena aurea super Ioannem, Ahdlma* (1990), pp. 31–92.

26 Quoted from J.-P. Torrell, *La "Somme de théologie" de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, p. 171.

27 Speaking of this book, emphasizing the importance of discernment and examination of sources without fashionable admixtures, according to the guidelines of the author, M. Belić writes: "Besides, frequent revoking of St. Thomas Aquinas gives to the entire book a special seal of academic seriousness and existential realism. In this sensitive area, where there is a lot — even too much! — of both the separatist reclusion into one's own gheto, and naive efforts of leveling or even identifying one with the other, we should — even when the differences in their reality are stubborn — act in a manner advised by this significant book", M. Belić, *Filozofsko-teološki dijalog s Marxom. Razmišljanja uz najnoviju knjigu Tome Vereša, Marulić XIV* (1981) 5, p. 518. As far as Vereš's pointing to the contemporaneity of Aquinas' thought, let us also mention the collection of texts from Thomas' political philosophy, prepared and translated by Vereš during the initial period of the creation of the Croatian

St. Thomas Aquinas, pointing to the astuteness of Thomas and particularly to his contemporaneity.²⁸ However, he always bears in mind the specific dialogue imposed by the environment in which he operates and rejects “any foreign or universal European and world schemes of dialogue”.

As a determined adversary of the usage of empty phrases in dialogue, as well as every anthropocentrism, Vereš stresses the importance as well as the need for an atmosphere of dialogue, an encounter with diversity in the society and a world marked by monistic and dualistic tendencies. He is not concerned only with a dialogue between Marxists and Christians, between philosophy and theology, but also urges “that dialogue should become a mode of thinking and feeling, an everyday practice of all types of human community.”²⁹ The project of dialogue is more than a social model to him because in Vereš’s thought everything that exists is in dialogue. “Dialogue is, therefore, in the first place an ontological model, the understanding of being and the reconciliation with being, which is both one and many. This means that every man should reconcile himself both with the oneness of being and its diversity: in all of his relations he should strive for the one but respect differences too.”³⁰ It is clear, however, that a dialogue is impossible without focusing on the one and the same final goal.

Is there a Christian Philosophy?

For better understanding of Vereš’s view on this question, it is useful to present the context within which the question rose on the existence and nature of Christian philosophy and the justifiability of its name, as well as the views of several, most eminent Catholic thinkers of the time who participated in the debate.

Toward the end of 19th century, St. Thomas Aquinas began to attract attention from anew, particularly his philosophical system in the form of the

state, Toma Akvinski, *Država*, preveli i priredili Tomo Vereš OP i Matej Jeličić, Zagreb: Globus, Zagreb 1990, 350 pages.

28 T. Vereš, *Filozofsko-teološki dijalog s Marxom. Misao i praksa u djelu Karla Marxa*, Zagreb: Filozofsko-teološki institut Družbe Isusove, 1981, second edition. After his dissertation on the philosophical and theological dialogue with Marx, he continued working on that dialogue for full twenty years. Owing to his contribution to the dialogue between Marxists and Christians, he was also appreciated by non-Christians and, due to his thorough knowledge of Marx’s doctrine, was held in great esteem even by Marxists themselves. In that period of his work, he emphasized the social teaching of the Church and the teaching of the Common Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, pointing to concrete opportunities that the social teaching of Thomas offers, for the resolve of the current social problems.

29 T. Vereš, *Pružene ruke*, p. 235.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 235–236.

creation of a Christian social order, with the aim of counterbalancing the strong influence of the Enlightenment. Pope Leo XIII believed that the implementation of his plan was dependent upon the creation of unity within the Christian thought, simultaneously firm and open, which would bring together the greatest minds. To that purpose, the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of 1879 proposes the restoration of Christian philosophy in the spirit of Saint Thomas. The first fruits of the Encyclical soon became evident in Italy, Belgium, France, Spain, Switzerland and even America.³¹

Nevertheless, the restoration of Christian philosophy in the spirit of Saint Thomas disturbed the Christian public in the first half of 20th century. A debate on the existence and the nature of Christian philosophy was initiated by a French historian of philosophy, Emile Bréhier, who in 1928 in Bruxelles, gave three lectures under the title “Is there a Christian Philosophy?”³² His claim that Christian philosophy did not exist, provoked extensive debates among the most prominent Catholic thinkers of the time.

Etienne Gilson starts a discussion in the French Society of Philosophy (Société française de philosophie) on 21 March 1931. He asks himself whether the very term of Christian philosophy could be given meaning and replies: “Yes, it can, but only under the condition that the problem is reduced to the historical level. In that case, it should be examined whether Christianity has played a visible role in the creation of certain philosophies. If such philosophical systems exist, purely rational in their principles and methods, the existence of which could not be interpreted without the existence of Christian religion, the philosophies that are defined by them deserve the name of Christian philosophies. This term, therefore, is not adequate for the concept of pure essence, be it philosopher’s or Christian’s, but to the possibility of a complex historical reality.”³³ In another instance, Gilson defines Christian philosophy in the following way: “I call Christian philosophy every philosophy which, although formally differentiating between the two, believes that the Christian revelation is an indispensable aid to human reason.”³⁴ For him, therefore, Christian philosophy is not only possible, but also real. It is not only implemented in the philosophy of St. Thomas, but also in the philosophies of St.

31 For more on the renewal and significance of Thomas’s thought following the promulgation of the Encyclical in question, see J.-P. Torrell, *La “Somme de théologie” de saint Thomas d’Aquin*, pp. 147–172.

32 The highlights of the lecture were published several years later, see E. Bréhier, *Y a-t-il une philosophie chrétienne?*, *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 38 (1931), pp. 133–162. The same year, the article provoked a response from Maurice Blondel, *Y a-t-il une philosophie chrétienne?*, *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 38 (1931), pp. 599–606.

33 *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 31 (1931), p. 39.

34 E. Gilson, *L’Esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, Paris, 1944, pp. 32–33.

Augustine, St. Bonaventure or Duns Scotus. Its forms are multiple. And faith unifies Christian philosophies by putting them in a different situation from that of the non-believers, because their mind knows what it is searching the proof of. It is, in other words, lead by faith.

During the debate on the justifiability of Christian philosophy, Thomists from Fribourg in Switzerland³⁵ and Dominicans Pierre Mandonnet, O.P., (1858–1936), Marc de Munynck and Gallus M. Manser, O.P., (1866–1950)³⁶ held very determined views against the two most eminent French Thomists, Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain, who, although in a different manner, both advocated the thesis on a specific Christian philosophy. Pierre Mandonnet from the University of Fribourg moved to the Dominican general college Le Saulchoir³⁷, near Paris, bringing along the views of the Fribourg school on Christian philosophy. In 1926 he founded Société thomiste (Thomistic Society).

On 11 September 1933 in Juvisy, Société thomiste held its second Studies Session on Christian philosophy. The gathering abounded in heated debates. After the lecture by Aimé Forest, a professor from Poitiers, on the historical problem of Christian philosophy, there followed an animated debate between Gilson and Mandonnet.³⁸ Mandonnet categorically rejected the possibility of a Christian philosophy, moreover rejecting the very term as well. “A logical question imposes itself, I dare say a fundamental logical question: let us define what we are talking about. We are talking about Christian philosophy: what is philosophy? what does it mean to be a Christian?”³⁹ It is completely clear

35 Faculty of Theology in Fribourg was founded in 1889 and the lectures on philosophy and theology were entrusted to the Dominicans. For more on the contribution of the Fribourg Thomists, see R. Imbach, *Gibt es eine christliche Philosophie? Freiburger Stimmen zur einer Kontroverse*, in: A. Schifferle (hg), *Verantwortung und Freiheit — Vocation spirituelle de l'Université, Fribourg*, 1990, pp. 251–261.

36 G. M. Manser, *Gibt es eine christliche Philosophie?*, in: *Divus Thomas 14* (1936), pp. 19–51., 123–141. See also R. Imbach, *Gallus M. Manser, O.P., (1866–1950). Thomismus und Politik*, in: B. Burki — S. Leimgruber (hg), *Theologische Profile — Portraits théologiques. Schweizer Theologen und Theologinnen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert — Théologiens et théologiennes suisses des 19e et 20e siècles, Fribourg*, 1998, pp. 110–121, particularly pp. 115–116.

37 As of 1903, the Dominican college in Paris has been known as “Le Saulchoir”. It owes its name to a place in Belgium, where for the political reasons the Dominicans founded a faculty, before their final return to France in 1937. M.–D. Chenu (1895–1990) and Cardinal Y.–M. Congar (1904–1995) are the most prominent representatives of this Dominican college.

38 *La Philosophie chrétienne, Journée d'Études de la Société thomiste II, Juvisy, 11 septembre 1933, Le Saulchoir–Kain et Juvisy*. The gathering and its most prominent views were summarized by F. van Steenberghen, *La IIe Journée d'Études de la Société thomiste et la notion de “philosophie chrétienne”*, in: *Revue néo-scholastique de philosophie 35* (1933), pp. 539–554.

39 *La Philosophie chrétienne*, p. 26.

that there are Christians who engage in philosophy, but there is no Christian philosophy because philosophy is a matter of reason. As soon as it quits the domain of reason, it finds itself on the level of faith. Mandonnet does not admit that the Christian revelation has made any sort of progress in the area of philosophy. He also believes that Thomas Aquinas as a philosopher does not belong to the history of the Church, but rather to the history of civilisation.

Having in mind that fêted Vereš, had studied for five years at the Dominican general college Le Saulchoir in Paris, where in 1958 he obtained the status of lecturer and licenciate, his determined attitude against the possibility of any Christian philosophy does not come as a surprise. He approached this subject on several occasions and unswervingly remained true to his convictions, supporting them by arguments.

Philosophy may determine itself with respect to different conceptions and different individuals, for instance, when we talk about the materialistic, idealistic, Aristotelian, Thomistic or Marxist philosophy. But the notion of Christian philosophy is problematic and unacceptable to him, because “Christianity is by its nature, due to its universalism, open to all that is human, therefore, to all cultures, civilisations and philosophies, while in this term, it is used as a separate philosophical worldview, beside the others and possibly as their rival too, as an adversary. And such particularism is in principle non-Christian, so that in that sense, Vereš is convinced, “Christian philosophy” is *contradictio in adiecto*”.⁴⁰ One of the points on which the participants of the Studies Session of the Thomistic Society in Juvisy were in agreement, is that “philosophy in the narrow sense of the word, although springing from Christian soil and the labours of Christian philosopher, formally speaking cannot bear the epithet Christian”.⁴¹ A. D. Sertillanges, O.P., himself a participant of the gathering, writes the same year: “Speaking formally and in the strictest sense of the word, there is no and there cannot be a Christian philosophy. That noun and that adjective are essentially disparate and may connect only more or less accidentally.”⁴² The same consistency we find in Vereš too, when he says that a Christian does not have “his own” philosophy, nor does he need it. In the elaboration of his claim, Vereš stresses that Christianity has been

40 See T. Vereš, *Pružene ruke*, p. 241.

41 F. Van Steenberghen, *La IIe Journée d'Études de la Société thomiste et la notion de "philosophie chrétienne"*, in: *Revue néo-scholastique de philosophie* 35 (1933), p. 543. However, the Encyclical *Fides et ratio* emphasizes that the term Christian philosophy is “legal for as long as it does not become ambiguous; namely, it does not signify that the Church has its own official philosophy because faith as such is not philosophy. This term indicates the skill of philosophizing in a Christian way, in other words, philosophical examination that is vitally linked to faith” (No. 76).

42 A. D. Sertillanges, *De la Philosophie chrétienne*, *Vie intellectuelle* 24 (1933) 1, pp. 9–20, here p. 9.

accepting the most diverse philosophies: Plato's idealistic, Aristotle's "realistic", Epicur's "atomistic" philosophy and others, even "atheistic philosophies, as the critique of earthly gods and the twisted human picture of true God", or Marx's philosophical thought and his critique of religion. Adopting the achievements of the philosophical thought through history, a Christian "arrives to a most advantageous position, to be able to judge for himself and realistically what possibilities still remain to be thought through and realised".⁴³ In that respect, his model is Thomas Aquinas, who tried to realise "a historically all-encompassing and, at the same time, original contemplative project", inventively reconciling "nature and supernature, the spiritual and the material world, God's revelation, with all of the known Greek, Roman, Jewish, Arab and Christian thought and culture".⁴⁴

Far be it from us to seek only the contemplative sovereignty of Thomas Aquinas in Christianity, nor can or should his thought be offered as beyond reproach, as a model "Christian philosophy". For Vereš writes decidedly: "no one was further from 'Christian philosophy' than him (Thomas). For him, philosophy is philosophy and theology theology. As soon as any philosopher takes into consideration revelation, drawing inspiration from its content or developing it thematically, he becomes a theologian. It does not mean that he ceases to think, only that he continues to think in a different way. Christian philosopher is nothing but a certain kind of theologian."⁴⁵

We find a similar argument also in Marc de Munnynck, who, together with other Thomists, categorically rejected the possibility of Christian philosophy. "Philosophy is purely rational; only rational it may be, if it wishes to remain true to its definition".⁴⁶ That which many contemporaries marked as Christian philosophy, for Vereš is truly and de facto theology: "In its methods, philosophy is purely rational or it does not exist". Philosophy is a rational apprehension of the entire reality. The claim on the essential rationality of philosophies is fundamental in St. Thomas, i.e. the claim that philosophical domain in itself is accessible to natural powers of the human spirit.

Vereš does not accept the view of the Protestant theologian Roger Mehl either⁴⁷, according to whom to think philosophically, it means "to think in perspective of the entire history of salvation".

43 T. Vereš, *Pružene ruke*, p. 242.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 242.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 243.

46 M. De Munnynck, *Philosophie et "Weltanschauung"*, in *Divus Thomas* 14 (1936), p. 244.

47 See R. Mehl, *La condition du philosophe chrétien*, Neuchâtel, 1947. For him, philosophy becomes eschatological. He gives the attribute "Christian" to "philosophy of the man who knows that the Kingdom is near, when all things will be new and who, by means of philosophical contemplation, prepares himself for the coming of the Kingdom."

Vereš allows the others the possibility of creating their own particular philosophies, (Jews, Arabs, Buddhists, Marxists and atheists), but a Christian must not be a rival to them over the importance of the Christian universalism in dialogue (Catholicity), with which everything stands or fails. To theology, a “philosophical refreshment” is necessary, but not some sort of the auxiliary “Christian philosophy”. By accepting Christian philosophy in the sense of one specific philosophical direction among others, one falls into the danger of corrupting the nature of Christianity, as well as that of philosophy. Therefore, Vereš believes it is better to remain with “Catholics, collectors of the entirety”.⁴⁸ In accepting the philosophy of the entire world and of all times, the Christian is not some sort of an eclectic who has nothing on his own to offer. This is how Vereš understands eternal philosophy (*philosophia perennis*).

In the work *Iskonski mislilac* (Primordial Thinker), demonstrating that Thomas’s and Bonaventure’s respective notions of philosophy do not differ, but only differ significantly in their understanding of the relation between philosophy and theology, Vereš criticises Gilson’s interpretation of the philosophy of Bonaventure as a particular sort of Christian philosophy, i.e. a “Franciscan philosophy”, “Christocentric philosophy” or “the metaphysics of Christian mysticism”. Vereš further stresses: “Gilson’s Christian philosophy’ itself is nothing but a gaseous rock, while the Franciscan, Dominican or Jesuit philosophy is nothing but a clericalized sub-class of the modern history philosophical delusion”.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, Vereš accepts the thesis of Jacques Maritain, according to whom Christian philosophy is the philosophy, provided it is regarded in its concrete, i.e. Christian circumstances.⁵⁰ Namely, under the influence of Christianity, philosophy acquired new terms or gave totally new meanings to the already existing words. So Maritain provides several “fundamental elements of the Christian condition of philosophy”,⁵¹ for instance, the notions of nature, person, absolute nothingness, creation or *creatio ex nihilo*,⁵² the

48 Vereš derives this term from the word *hólos* = that which constitutes a whole; *kath’ holon* = in the sense of the whole, see *Pružene ruke*, p. 250. Maurice Blondel believes that the term “Catholic philosophy” is more rational and correct, see *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 31 (1931), p. 87, note 1.

49 T. Vereš, *Iskonski mislilac*, p. 54.

50 T. Vereš, *Pružene ruke*, pp. 265–266. In his approach to his problem, J. Maritain differentiates between the nature of philosophy (what it is in itself) and its condition, i.e. its historical manifestation in real existential circumstances of man, see *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 31 (1931), p. 59. Maritain’s influence may be noticed in the Encyclical *Fides et ratio* of John Paul II, with respect to various conditions of philosophy (see Nos. 75–79).

51 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

52 St. Thomas believes that the comprehensive notion of creation is in harmony with Aristotle’s teaching (see *Summa theologiae* I, q. 40, a. 1), although he does not state that he took the term over from Aristotle.

notion of God as *Ipsium esse subsistens* or, in the domain of ethics, the notion of sin in the full ethical meaning of the word, i.e. as an insult to God. Although these notions are of capital importance to every philosophy, Christian philosophy has given them priority. Maritain himself is convinced that “Thomistic philosophy is a philosophy insofar as it is rational and not Christian, because when we say that Thomistic philosophy is a philosophy’, we talk of that which formally makes it a philosophy, and Thomistic philosophy, I am not saying Thomistic theology, Thomistic philosophy is utterly rational”.⁵³

Instead of Conclusion

If one wishes to study the work of Tomo Vereš, one should put it into the context of its creation, where, as Vereš himself says, “in general, Thomas Aquinas is more often, on one hand enthusiastically praised, glorified, honoured, blessed and cordially recommended, and on the other, hastily and ignorantly criticised, disputed and skilfully caricatured or ignored, than honestly, rationally and practically accepted as a model searcher or co-searcher of truth”.⁵⁴ Besides, one should bear in mind that for a very long time the Croatian translations of Thomas’s works have remained inaccessible. There were none, as was the case with the translations of other great works required for scientific theology. In terms of the approach to Thomas and his work, the Croatian “scientific” scene lacked thorough, documented studies and informed debates. With the translations, introductions and scientific debates of Tomo Vereš, and later of Augustin Pavlović, O.P., Aquinas’ works became more accessible to the Croatian readers. Only in that context we can evaluate the significance of Vereš’s work for the true initiation to Aquinas’ system of thought, which as an organic whole always remains open and essentially marked by universalism. Therefore, he himself will say that Aquinas’ work is “the most universal thinking and debating forum of humankind”,⁵⁵ because his thought is a conversation with the thought of the entire world.

53 Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie 31 (1931), p. 62. E. Gilson criticized the neo-Thomists for their claims that Thomistic philosophy was a philosophy because of its rationality and not its Christianity, because the same neo-Thomists challenged the fact the term Christian philosophy had any kind of meaning (pp. 61–62).

54 T. Vereš, *Iskonski mislilac*, pp. 89–90. The author is concerned with a documented debate because “the uncritical superlatives and praises of Thomas” are meaningless (p. 111). And quick and frequent movements from one extreme to the other, in the context marked by “a clockmakers’ and calendrical notion of time, as well as the equal manner of evaluating history” (see *Ibid.*, p. 115 and 120), often provoked Vereš’s numerous and sometimes very uncompromising replies.

55 T. Vereš, *Razmišljanja jednog kršćanina. Stazama suglasja i vjere*, Zagreb: HKD Sv. Jeronima, 2000, p. 142. This book written by Vereš, as is the case with his other books and studies,

As far as Vereš is concerned, Thomas Aquinas is not some sort of an “ideological fetish”, but merely the Common Doctor (Doctor communis), who is fallible, as he himself warned in his works.⁵⁶ If one wishes seriously to approach the debate on the significance and opportunities of the thought of Thomas, it is very important indeed to know well Aquinas’ thought, as well as the context in which it had come to life. To Vereš, Thomas is a model for searching and collecting of truth, dispersed across the entire world, as well as for teaching on the truth discovered. As a philosopher, T. Vereš is aware that always and everywhere he studies reality and does not identify the ontological possibility or impossibility with his own possibilities or impossibilities, nor does he identify necessity with reality.

demonstrates that he, like his master St. Thomas, “leads his reader through a dialogue with countless individuals, behind whom one can discern the entire human race” (p. 142). Apart from Thomas Aquinas, we meet various other authors and authorities, for instance, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Avicenna, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Dante, Savonarola, Leo XIII, K. Marx, the representatives of the German social Catholicism: Franz von Baader, Franz Josef Ritter von Buss and W. E. Ketteler, J. J. Strossmayer, M. Heidegger, J.-P. Sartre and others.

56 See T. Vereš, *Pružene ruke*, p. 289. T. Vereš, *Iskonski mislilac*: “Thomas Aquinas is not an infallible thinker. If he, however, is fallible, then surely he has committed errors” (p. 110). “Therefore, his errors are also an integral part of his thought”.