

PHILOSOPHY OF THOMAS AQUINAS AND “THOMISM” IN RELATION TO BLONDEL’S UNDERSTANDING OF “CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY”

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1 Blondel, M.
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1. *Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and “Thomism”*

Considering the notion of philosophy with respect to theology, or better still, in his understanding of the relation between philosophy and theology, Thomas observed an essential difference between these two universal sciences in terms of the subject of knowledge and the method by which the knowledge of subject is attained (in philosophy: natural reality, which is accessible to reason through sense perception, and in theology: revelation of God, which is accessible to reason through pronouncement), but also an intrinsic link between the natural and the supernatural knowledge, as well as the reciprocity of these two kinds of knowledge, despite the difference in their subject-matter and the method of the discovery of truth. In the encyclical “Fides et ratio”, pope John Paul II explicitly states that Thomas introduced an important novelty, which is permanently relevant in the interpretation of the relation between philosophy and theology¹.

Thomas was the first to recognise philosophy as an independent science, its role and task in the interpretation of the supernatural reality, of revelation of God to man and of man to man, and subsequently to introduce a new approach to philosophy and theology, thus, at the same time, laying the foundation for a new direction in philosophy, Thomism. E. Gilson counts Thomas among those thinkers, whose philosophy remains for all times, not just medieval. The true, original solution to the problem of Christian philosophy, Gilson finds in the thorough knowledge of the Thomist tradition. In Gilson’s opinion, Thomas’ solution differs from that of the Augustinianism insofar as it places emphasis on the fact that Christian philosophy must be a philosophy first, in order to be possible at all².

1 John Paul II, Fides et ratio. Vjera i razum, Documents: 117, KS, Zagreb, 1999, pp. 43–48.

2 Gilson, E., Le Thomisme. Introduction au *système* de Saint Thomas d’Aquin, Vrin, Paris, pp. 9–10.

“The spirit of Thomism” relies upon Thomas’ perception of man as exceptionally capable for the knowledge of phenomena, placing the human reason into the “sensory” as its proper domain, where it trains itself by exploration and conquest, inviting man at the same time to turn from the human liking to that of God, of God’s children. As in his view philosophy must be defined by the spirit that revives it and not by the borrowed elements, Gilson believes that in such science, it is its Christianity that has to be considered first, not Platonism or Aristotelianism. As a philosophical direction, Thomism endeavours to provide in articulate terms a comprehensive definition of Christian man, continuously directing man’s steps towards those summits, from which far away on the horizon, the contours of the Promised Land may be discerned³.

Hijacint Bošković writes, in his preface to Maritain’s book: “The Angel of the Schools” that Thomism is not only a Dominican philosophy, but a system adopted by all Catholic scholars and the highest authority of the Catholic Church, and that the spirit of Thomism is in harmony with the intentions of the Church, above all an “open” system that tries to assimilate all values regardless of where they can be found; Thomism strives not to be a “dead letter”, but a spirit which is self-regenerating and constantly regenerating the face of the earth; its nature demands that it always seeks new discoveries, as well as original syntheses⁴. In the opinion of Hijacint Bošković, Thomism as a philosophical direction is capable of sustaining all attacks, as it is embedded in a solid “rock” that no storm can destroy, because it follows the path of Thomas by pursuing and deepening the mystery of being, it reconciles principles and ideas and adjusts eternal tenets to the needs of the time, by more transparent and obvious expression of the one and the same truth⁵.

In his conclusion to the interpretation of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and its extension in Thomism, Sertillanges states his opinion that Thomas’ science is concerned with the appeasement of the empirical desires to accept all thoughts, to enable them to exist together, and in that way, as a science of creation, to attain the state of equilibrium and justice. Thomas’ teachings are the central synthesis of the all-encompassing knowledge, which has its own essence and meaning, and not some sort of hotchpotch of rejected and contradictory positions.

Thomas had constantly sought Truth, dreamed of reaching the “comprehensive truth”, knowing the “real Truth”. Thomas advocated a common science that belonged to no one and was not reflected by any one spirit, but

3 Ibid, pp. 310–311.

4 Maritain, J., “*Andeoski Naučitelj*”, “*Istina*”, Zagreb, 1936, pp. 30–31.

5 Ibid, p. 36.

which itself reflected the “true”, whenever it was meant for man to attain it. Thomas’ philosophical and theological thought is always contemporary because his philosophy is open to all change and the knowledge of the inexpressible Reality. Philosophical system is nothing but a reliable method that serves to examine the general reality empirically given and to enable such reality to enter the frame that is provided by abstract thought.

A. D. Sertillanges is of the opinion that Thomas does not accept the method of the materialists, who consider everything through the prism of the matter, or of the idealists, who everywhere in objects see their ideal, but disregard their positive quality; equally, he does not accept the method of the objectivists, who observe everything from the outside and who wish to constitute a person from the outside, or of the subjectivists, who look at everything from inside and who believe that the so called “outside” is only a modification or a certain attribute of a person. Thomas takes the middle path and advocates a milder form of conceptualism, which, in the real and in the ideal, in matter and in spirit, in object and in subject, expresses their true part, constructs a synthetic quality, which, if it were comprehensive, would be philosophy itself, and whose author should simply be called a philosopher⁶.

Thomas was aware and knew well that the path to Truth lead through new discoveries and unification of its dispersal across the multitude of philosophical systems. Therefore, for Sertillanges it is unthinkable that Thomas, who discovered so much of what is “true” in the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Averroes, Avicenna, Albert the Great, would circumspect a Descartes, Leibnitz, Kant, Spinoza or twenty others, without finding something “true”⁷ in their philosophical discourse as well. This is the main reason why the thought of Thomas remains contemporary to this day.

Thomas critically approaches not only other authors, but his own works as well, and in such criticality he observes the progress of human spirit, accepting every science that emphasises “truth”. He thought it important to hear all opinions and examine all systems, in order for the “true” to manifest itself in the true light, and whereupon he could make a synthesis. As far as this synthetic quality is concerned, Sertillanges believes it a contradiction to regard Thomism, which is open to all views, as a closed system, because Thomas’ synthesis is equally relative to the future, as it is to the past. Neo-thomism is justified and meaningful only if it adheres to three methods. Firstly, to reach new conclusions by following the principles or temporary conclusions of the teachers, thus avoiding the mistake made by Averroes, who

6 Sertillanges, A. D., *La Philosophie de Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, I-II, Aubier, Paris 1940, Vol II, pp. 264–265.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 265–266.

saw in Aristotle some “divine being” who had concluded the science and thus made redundant all other opinions. Secondly, always to consider the most recent teachings that confirm and enrich the old teachings. Thirdly, always to bear in mind the continuation of the inner live system and to make it absorb everything that centuries have created⁸.

Considering the general notion of philosophy and its nature, it may be said that philosophy is the wisdom befitting to God (Thomas Aquinas); it is a friend of wisdom (Pitagora). Philosophy is the knowledge (wisdom) in the first and universal causes: “sapientia est cognitio per primas et universales causas”. Therefore, according to Thomas Aquinas, “there is a natural desire in man to comprehend the causes of everything that he observes around him”. In other words, after the initial wonder aroused by the object he perceives, but the cause of which remains hidden from him, man starts to philosophise. Once he discovers the cause, he is at peace again. The inquiry is terminated after the discovery of the first cause, because once it is known, it is considered known perfectly⁹.

Philosophy and theology spring from a common source, God’s Wisdom, and therefore cannot contradict each other on the same subject; there cannot be “two truths”, as the Averroists advocated more or less openly. There is only harmony between reason and faith, as Thomas Aquinas and Pope John Paul II taught. Thus, if we take into account all elements, gradually distinguishing philosophy, experience, science and theology, it may be said that philosophy is the knowledge in the first and universal causes, attained under the light of natural reason, “philosophia est cognitio per primas et universales causas sub lumine naturali rationis”¹⁰.

That Thomas’ thought is still relevant today, it is confirmed by the above-mentioned encyclical “Fides et ratio” of Pope John Paul II. Gilson also does not doubt that human knowledge has its foundation in the order of sensible objects, that in theology one should start from the scientific and philosophical knowledge of the universe and thus elevate oneself to one’s proper subject, i. e. to consideration of God, because that is the only kind of knowledge that gives access to some higher wisdom and enables the man to work towards attaining it. In Gilson’s view, Thomas considered philosophy essential in order to know God, but he never practised it as a goal unto itself. He saw its place in the hierarchical structure of Christian Wisdom. It never occurred to Thomas to separate philosophy from Christianity and give it some other name. Christian philosophy may accept such name in the meantime because it had

8 Ibid, pp. 267–270.

9 Contra Gentiles, III, c. 25; see ST., I, 1, 1–3

10 Maritain, J., *Éléments de Philosophie thomiste*, I. Introduction générale a la philosophie, Paris 1920 and 1963, pp. 87–94.

existed and carried it a long time before Thomas transformed it and stamped it deeply with his mark¹¹. Here philosophy must be understood as the rational explanation of the given, the believed, whose subject is defined by Christian revelation.

The role accorded by law to reason and the place created for philosophy may be altered in another similar science. So Augustine, Bonaventure and Pascal will gladly debate on secular science as doubtful, and will expect from it a service strictly controlled; while Clement of Alexandria, John Damascene, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Roger Bacon, contrary to that, will place considerable faith in it. However, they all agree in one crucial point; there is a Christian philosophy, a philosophy directed at one subject that it cannot comprehend, but which, since it knows it exists, it can never abandon. Forced to stay on this side of the goal it strives to achieve, Christian philosophy positions itself, in a certain way, in the extension of the ideal paths that would lead it to its goal. Refusing to deform the natural view of objects and more still, the true science it possesses on them, philosophy strives to find, in that minute portion of its knowledge on the subject that is actually inaccessible, some principle of selection and order for the knowledge provided by reason.

According to Gilson, such attitude should be adopted if one wishes not to reshape the difficult historical questions and equally insoluble mysteries, i. e. the work that St. Thomas attempted to realise, i. e. to shed light on the reciprocity of philosophy and faith. Therefore, the question of what Thomistic philosophy is, still remains open. For Gilson, Thomas undoubtedly understood philosophy, he solved philosophical problems in a strictly philosophical manner, but it should also be kept in mind that all of Thomas' philosophy is consciously subordinated to the domain of revelation and faith. It is equally beyond doubt that St. Thomas clearly understood the real difference between philosophy and theology. That he realised the basic difference between the philosophical knowledge of God, which relies on the limited powers of reason, and the theological knowledge of God, which springs from the belief in the self-manifestation of God¹². Theology, in fact, is the faith that seeks to understand: "fides quaerens intellectum", while philosophy is: "intellectus quaerens fidem" — the intellect that seeks to believe¹³.

11 ST, IIa-IIae, 180, a. 4, ad Resp.

12 ST, I, q 1, a. 1, ad 2

13 Gilson, E., *Le Thomisme*, o. c., pp. 40–41.

2. *Thomas and Thomistic Notion of “Christian Philosophy”*

In Gilson’s view, philosophy and theology are the easiest to differ from the abstract point of view because philosophy has the task to explore truths by reason, while theology is concerned with faithfully communicating to human reason the truths revealed, which reason by itself otherwise could not reach, comprehend or justify¹⁴. Here we reach the point where the utmost deficiency and contempt of human reason are reconciled, which is something that Thomas discussed with such animated sympathy in his dialectic discourse and reasoning. Despite the deficiency of our reason, when it comes to the subject that does not allow us access to its essence, Thomas tirelessly applies this instrument to the most sublime subjects, which means that the most obscure discoveries, even those which could hardly merit the term “discovery”, cease to be despised when they have for subject the infinite essence of God¹⁵.

In the opinion of A. Horvath, Albert the Great is clear and explicit when it comes to the foundation of “Christian philosophy” or definition of the true and possible relation between philosophy and theology, which for him is utterly natural. In the entirety of human knowledge, Albert gives priority to “Christian philosophy”. Such philosophy presupposes the knowledge of philosophical trends, in order to be able to rely upon the firm foundations of the empirical knowledge, acquired through the effort of the entire human kind, as well as the universal principles that have their persistence in reality and whose value is permanent. Undoubtedly, Albert the Great dreamed of “eternal philosophy”, which would hold true for eternity — “*philosophia perennis*”. Such philosophy should encompass everything that has ever been said or proven as true; it is intended for all people and bears the mark of universality, it is the result and the expression of a joint effort of the entire human race.

Since truth is meant for all people, such philosophy carries within itself a mark of universality that is necessary for the forming of “Catholic” or all-encompassing philosophy. Because all that is universal and necessary in man is important for all and in common to all. However, the question remains open as to how to make sure that Christian philosophy is not based only on the authority of various philosophers and natural scientists, and to prevent it from becoming a mosaic of thoughts of the great minds and the admixture of various philosophies¹⁶.

14 Ibid, p. 42.

15 Ibid, pp. 55–57.

16 Horvath, A., *Albert der Grosse und der Heilige Thomas von Aquin als Begründer der christlichen Philosophie*, DT III, 1916, Vol. IV, pp. 591–631; see p. 600; see Lasić, H., *Čovjek u svjetlu transcendencije*, FTI, Zagreb 1995, pp. 113–114.

Together with his disciple Thomas, in the creation of the Christian philosophical and theological system, Albert will make use of Aristotle's philosophical system. Some think that Albert was the first to lay the foundation for "Christian philosophy", although this fact is neglected in the history of philosophy, which is why Albert is not counted among the champions of "Christian" or scholastic philosophy, as Thomas Aquinas or Augustine are. Owing to these two geniuses, Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great, in 13th century Christian thought acquired real prominence because its most profound philosophical potentials and features were articulated clearly and independently from philosophy and theology¹⁷.

3. *Neo-thomism and Blondel's Notion of "Catholic Philosophy"*

With its emergence, Christianity immediately became not only a religious, but a philosophic issue as well. Assuming that philosophy is a universal science on existence and essence, the question is posed as to the possibility and justifiability of the existence of a "Catholic" or "Christian" philosophy, the place and the role of Christianity in the development of human thought, which is in eternal pursuit of the meaning and purpose of life.

According to Aristotle's definition, philosophy is essentially metaphysics; the science of the existing as the existing or the science of the conditions of a priori existence and truth, the science of reason and universal rationality, the science of thought in itself and in objects, while "theology" is its highest peak, i. e. its most sublime subject essentially is the absolute Spirit, God. In philosophy, two different and solidary elements come to prominence: the speculative knowledge of real truth and the practical solution to the problem of human life. That problem inevitably raises the question of the unity or, so to speak, of the homogeneity of knowledge and action, i. e. whether such unity may be achieved through philosophy and under what terms, since human being is irresistibly attracted to the totality of the comprehensive truth he holds within, by the redeeming reconciliation of his being with Being¹⁸. It was precisely the question of action, human or divine, which is present in all, equally in the speculative discovery of real truth and in the pursuit of a practical solution to the definition of human life, which concerned Blondel throughout his life. This is evidenced by his central work "L'Action" (1893)¹⁹.

17 Bošković, H., *Albert Veliki*, Zagreb 1932, p. 49; Zimmerman, S., *Temelji filozofije*, *Historijsko kritička orijentacija*, Zagreb 1956, p. 237; Filipović, V., *Filozofija renesanse*, Zagreb 1957, p. 16; see Lasić, H., o. c. pp. 116–119.

18 *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Tübingen, 1961, V. Bd., pp. 1010–1021; A. Laland, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la Philosophie*, Paris, PUF, 1976, pp. 771–777.

19 Blondel, M., *L'Action* (1893), *Essai d'une critique de la vie et d'une science de la pratique*, PUF, Paris 1950.

Already in the early beginnings of Christianity, there were those among Christian thinkers who attempted to comprehend divine Wisdom in relation to human wisdom, and reconcile the human spirit, its aspirations and strivings with “divine Spirit”. In the 1930’s there was a great debate on “Christian philosophy” in the French Society of Philosophy (J. Maritain, E. Gilson, M. Blondel, E. Bréhier, A. D. Sertillanges). Blondel, loyal to the tradition of Augustinianism, stressed the restlessness of human heart and its orientation towards the supernatural order, and thus warned of a certain “void” in human being, which may be filled only by the higher, divine gift. In other words, that the natural requires and needs the supernatural, and that human being may be realised only through their “embrace”. Maritain, adopting a more Thomistic philosophical direction in the understanding of man and his world, takes as a starting point the fact that Christianity is a historical reality, a particular state upon which the development of human thought is equally dependent. Gilson, giving priority to the Thomistic philosophy over Augustinianism, also attempts to interpret the notion of “Christian philosophy” from a historical point of view. In his work: “The Problem of Catholic Philosophy”, Blondel expresses his attitude towards the notion of philosophy, particularly from the Christian point of view²⁰.

In his philosophical work, Blondel tried to discover the formal difference and the real integration of philosophy and Christianity. Mainly, he intended to discover whether “Catholic” philosophy was possible, under what circumstances and in which form; he wanted to know whether philosophy may, technically developed in its spontaneity, without mixing and intruding into foreign domain, co-exist with the Catholicism considered under its entirely supernatural point of view, according to the demands which juxtapose its entirety to the entirety of reason; in other words, he wanted to know not only whether it was possible, but also whether it was necessary to accept and justify such philosophy, and finally to see whether “Catholic” philosophy, in the absolute and proper terms, was indeed a comprehensive and universal Philosophy, if not “de facto” then at least “de jure”²¹.

In his doctoral dissertation “L’Action” (1893), Blondel already addressed the question of the natural in relation to the supernatural order of existence

20 Blondel, M., *Le probleme de la Philosophie catholique*, Cahiers de la Nouvelle Journée, Paris 1932. Blondel wrote this work after numerous studies and debates on Christian philosophy that were taking place during the thirties. He was particularly prompted by the debate of the French Society of Philosophy at Sorbonne, of 21 March 1931, which was held under the title: “La notion de philosophie chrétienne”, in: *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, Paris 1931, pp. 37–93; the article Bréhier, E., “Y–a–t–il une Philosophie chrétienne?”, in: *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 1931, pp. 133–162; Lasić, H., o. c., p. 125.

21 Blondel, M., *Le probleme de la philosophie catholique*, o. c., p. 6.

as the basic subject of his philosophical discourse. He was repeatedly forced to prove and explain to philosophers and theologians of his time that he had never intended, and that it did not follow from his work, to examine the problem of apologetics, that he had not intended to extract from nature and reason something of the truths revealed or to seek the reality of the order of grace, that it had never occurred to him to circumspect history or to underestimate science, or to ignore metaphysics, or to replace a psychologist's or a moralist's work, or least of all, to restrict himself to his own thought. Instead, that he directed himself towards the metaphysical problem in the highest sense of that word, in order to confirm that it was in that point precisely that the religious problem in its finest and utterly supernatural form was encountered, but not replaced or excluded, and in whose "embrace"-like encounter he discovered the same condition of philosophical comprehensiveness, spiritual freedom and devotion to faith, as well as to reason and science²².

The link between the natural and the supernatural is intrinsic and it is precisely on the basis of that link that the supernatural introduces something new into the natural. Hence in man such supernatural longing for God, for the most sublime Goal, to which spirit strives by the very development of intellect, taking the real order as its starting point. In fact, it is an inefficient desire, which is, nevertheless, the reflection of the transcendent order. The problem lies in the comprehension, permeation and interaction of the natural and the supernatural order of existence.

Opinions differ as to the solution to this problem and a clash is inevitable with modern thought, which relies exclusively on the matter and which observes in immanence the only condition of philosophy, assuming that nothing can enter man, which in one way or the other does not come from him, that there is no truth that would be valid either as a historical fact, or as the traditional teaching, or as an obligation added from outside or a permissible rule, without being in some way autonomous. On the other hand, the "Christian" or the "Catholic" may only be supernatural; i. e. it is impossible for man to find in himself that which imposes itself upon his thoughts and his will. From the above, it may be concluded that the main and the only purpose to philosophy is to ensure the full freedom of spirit and an authentic life of thought, as well as to determine in its total autonomy the conditions of its own existence.

Therefore, Blondel thinks that there is a possibility for the encounter of philosophy and Christianity and that its precondition is the co-operation, which then may give birth to Christian spirit. Moreover, the supernatural is an essential element when it comes to the final definition of man invited to

22 Ibid., p. 14; see *L'Action* (1893); see Lasić, H., o. c., pp. 126–127.

the higher level of existence and partaking of divine life. Although Revelation is radically incomprehensible, Blondel is convinced that it cannot be ignored if we are fully to understand human being in its essence. Assuming that the requirements of Revelation are founded, he considers human being inherently incomplete, insufficient and powerless and that, therefore, there must be a divine mark in man, as well as its echo in the most autonomous philosophy. The demands of philosophy and Christianity permeate each other, but in such a manner that they both preserve their own autonomy²³.

In short, it is up to philosophy to legally demonstrate and accept the incompleteness of natural existence and its need for the supernatural. Therefore, the state of such pure nature does not exist, in which man would be created for eternity prior to or after the “fall”, but instead, there exists the natural in a constant relation to the supernatural. In other words, mutual permeation of the natural and the supernatural order of existence of two different realities in space and in time. It is therefore necessary to re-examine the entire philosophical problem in the service of the idea, given to us by Christianity and its rational reality, on the most sublime definition of human being, which binds him to his realisation. In that sense, philosophy cannot develop its own and full freedom independently of the solution to the religious question. By mutual revival of philosophical and religious perspectives, certain truths are being clarified by the advancement of religious awareness, but not in themselves, because in themselves they are immutable. It should be demonstrated how, on one hand, philosophy has gradually reshaped itself under the unknown influence of Christian thought, and on the other, how the religious requirements have become more transparent, owing to the development of philosophical scientific directions²⁴.

4. *Historical Approach to the Notion of “Christian Philosophy”*

Blondel also addressed the question of “Christian philosophy” from the historical point of view, as well as the conditions of such philosophy, which, from the historical point of view, may be called “Christian”. In his opinion, this problem has never been studied systematically; moreover, the term “Christian philosophy” itself was often avoided in the past. It was only during the thirties of 20th century that philosophy addressed this problem in a more serious and critical manner. Some historians attempted to prove that “Christian philosophy” was only a historical expression of an entirely notional

23 Lasić, H., o. c., p. 128.

24 Ibid, pp. 129–130.

meaning and that Christian philosophy could not exist, either in real or in legal terms, any more than Christian physics or mathematics or a round square could. In the Middle Ages it was considered worthless to speak of Christian philosophy. In his work "Lettre", Blondel intended to address this problem, but after serious consideration, he came to the conclusion that Christian philosophy truly did not exist yet, at least not in the full and strict meaning of the word. Those who re-addressed this issue forty years later would criticise him for this fact.

As to the opinion of some historians and philosophers, who see the very alliance of the words "Christian philosophy" as speculatively illegal cross-breeding of species, as well as the opinion of the narrow-minded rationalists, who condemn such closer contact of the two terms, or the opinion of the interpreters of Thomas' thought, who believe the notion of "Christian philosophy" to be meaningless and impossible, Blondel regarded them all as unfounded. Equally, he rejected Gilson's claim that such opinions were opposed by the Augustinian point of view, which had used the controversial term in various manners, defining the philosophy of Christians, as opposed to various philosophies of the pagans, and that this term for a number of Augustinians represented the philosophy of Augustine, or at least that which had been ascribed to him by his followers, and which was in opposition with the philosophy of Thomas, accusing him that he had sacrificed certain theses of Christianity to the pagan philosophy of Aristotle. Blondel warns that Justin and Clement of Alexandria had already used the term in that sense.

Gilson's interpretation according to which the term "Christian philosophy" was particularly used by those who opposed Thomas' teachings and supported Augustinianism is without merit as far as Blondel is concerned. He believes that there is no historical evidence to support such claim and that by failing to recognise the true unity and the animating inspiration of Augustinianism, by depriving it of its Catholic and philosophical spirit, one is crippling Thomism in its historical balance and its Christian soul and turning it into a separate philosophy, a certain powerless rationalism. Equally, Gilson's claim that certain authors, in the attempt to raise themselves above the historical plan, see in the Augustinian perspective the possibility of examining man in his concrete situation, including his religious life, is also considered by Blondel as without merit²⁵.

Blondel emphasises that in human being religious life is not naturally found, but only "desiderium naturale inefficax", which represents an important difference. Blondel does not see in what sense a certain philosophy, pre-

25 Blondel, M., *Lettre sur les exigences de la pensée contemporaine en matière d'apologétique*, 1896. *Histoire et dogme*, PUF, Paris, 1956; see Lasić, H., o. c., pp. 130–131.

sumed utterly rational and in notions, may owe in its constitution anything to that which is, presumably as well, given as “irrational” and without notions. Namely, he does not understand how Christianity, whose content passes beyond the cognitive powers of reason, could contribute to contemporary thought, i. e. to the philosophical systems that are entirely rational, both in principle and in method, and on what basis one may say that their existence is substantially linked to the existence of Christian religion.

Equally, Blondel does not believe in the existence of the historical reality that would correspond to the notion of “Christian philosophy” or in the possibility of understanding this problem in the manner proposed by Gilson as the only proper solution, as long as one remained faithful to the notions supplied by reason, because the clash between reason and the content of Christianity is inevitable, whereupon Christianity will become to reason a lethal burden. Gilson’s and Maritain’s idea, according to which Revelation is “the parent of reason”, is not acceptable to Blondel, as long as it cannot be demonstrated that reason is, far from stabilising itself in closed notions, discovering in itself such needs that cannot be appeased by nature. It is, in fact, an irresistible desire for the completion of human being²⁶.

5. *Rationalist Understanding of “Christian Philosophy”*

Blondel does not accept the rationalist starting point, according to which the philosophy of Christianity cannot exist any more than Christian mathematics or physics can (E. Bréhier), because in his view philosophy and religion must not be equated with positive sciences that have a specific area and subject-matter of knowledge, while philosophy and religion apply to all alike; to the meaning of the universal, the mystery of human being and the solution to his determination (fate), to life and to every creature and its world²⁷.

According to Blondel, “Good Message”, the essential message of Christianity, brings into human being the feeling of miraculous novelty and to souls, a reversal of perspective. He believes that from the beginning, there were cultured and thinking men who sought and discovered in “Good Message” partly a spirit, the light of a philosophy that did not terminate intellect, but enabled it to reason. In it they discovered such wisdom as was vastly superior both to the knowledge attained solely by reason, and to the reason’s capacities, and which announced knowledge, providing the principle of universal interpretation, the mystery of fate and the commitments that are necessary to human

26 Blondel, M., *Le problème de la Philosophie catholique*, o. c., p. 128, pp. 133–135; see Lasić, H., o. c., p. 132.

being in order to attain his goal. In Blondel's view, such philosophy, which is the only redeeming philosophy, Justin tried to introduce into the very circle of the rational speculation, while Clement of Alexandria, starting from faith as a fact, tried to build upon it science, the "new philosophy through Christ", which simultaneously fortified reason and piety and attempted to introduce into the Christian gnosis, in which reason seeks to believe and faith seeks to understand, a freely developed and deepened culture of philosophy²⁸. It would be interesting to examine Blondel's notion of Christ, God's Anointed One, Son of God and Man, upon whom Christianity relies, through whom, with whom and in whom Christianity comes to be and persists. However, it is a complex issue, demanding particular attention and analysis.

For Blondel it is understandable that in opposition to the first, even more doubtful, ambiguous and unstable tendencies of Christian philosophy, other uncertain theses emerged, such as the one by Tertulian "credo, quia absurdum est". Equally, Blondel believes it is positive that some have reminded, carried away by their desire to humanise, rationalise and immanise the revealed tenets, that the supernatural, in a way, transcended and disconcerted reason; it is precisely this second view that Blondel considers the basic condition of "Christian philosophy". In Blondel's view, the very act of the recognition of intellectual dependence on the supernatural is reasonable. Therefore, Tertulian in his "credo quia absurdum est" adds his confirmation of the soul naturally Christian, which is in harmony with the rational obedience of the Apostles. As far as Augustine is concerned, Blondel says that he, more than anyone else, protected the love of reason, that he continued to seek because he was convinced he would find, that indeed he has found precisely because he sought infinitely: "intellectus quaerens fidem invenit, quod fides quaerit intellectum". Such exploration of the reason that is thirsty of comprehension, Augustine does not call philosophy but ultimately, that changes nothing in the subject he explores. Augustine's discovery is at the same time founded in the intellectual modesty and the enlightenment by the inner Master. That, in fact, is the meaning of Augustine's philosophy of life: it is the reason why Augustine does not explicitly speak of "Christian philosophy". To him, Christianity is "vera philosophia". Namely, Augustine has in mind the entire man; his intellect, his will, his love and his salvation²⁹.

In view of the identity of formulas and notions, Blondel observes an infinite distance between those who tie themselves to their notions and reason as sufficient and satisfying, and those who thoroughly know their own pov-

27 Blondel, M., o. c., pp. 136–137; see Lasić, H., o. c., pp. 132–133.

28 Blondel, M., o. c., pp. 141–142; see Lasić, H., o. c., pp. 133–134.

29 Blondel, M., o. c., pp. 142–143; see Lasić, H., o. c., p. 134.

erty, incompleteness, the inability to be their own light, their own goal. In fact, it is the abyss that separates all wrong philosophies, regardless of what truths they offer, from the philosophy which, full of trust in reason and at the same time challenged by him, gives to man safety and hope, protecting him from doubtful discouragements and destructive doubt. Such comprehensive mood in the continuation of Tradition truly represents an essential and permanent feature of that, which in opposition to all other may be called “Catholic philosophy”. Here we do not speak of dependence or simple siding of the rational and the Christian order next to each other, but of a certain type of heterogenousness and mutual permeation, the symbiosis of the very immeasurability. It is exactly what Clement of Alexandria tried to define under the name of the “new philosophy through Christ”³⁰.

The thesis according to which Thomas brought philosophy back to itself by separating two different domains: the domain of reason, faithful to Aristotle, and the domain of faith, obedient to the supra-philosophic teachings of Christ, without ever having mentioned “Christian philosophy” but only philosophy, stressing that it was what it was, that one truth could not be opposed to the other, and that faith of the higher order supervised, elevated and complemented reason by confirming its right to autonomy, for Blondel is historically incomprehensible, scientifically incomplete and incorrect. It is true that Saint Thomas paid particular attention to the reason’s own value and the free testimony of philosophy, but it is still wrong to see in Thomas a representative of the separate and self-sufficient philosophy or an advocate of one particular philosophy, and then from there to draw a conclusion that it was the case of incompatibility of rationalism with the entirety of Christian conceptions. That would mean distortion of Thomas’ teachings, because the whole dynamism that permeates his “*Summa contra gentiles*” (particularly, Vol. III), evidences a desire that intrinsically engages the entire reason, but which, at the same time, without the supernatural gift remains unrealisable³¹.

The study of a particular being, of the essence of being or of the one and the same problem that is basic to every being is possible in several ways, even without always mentioning all the views under which the problem is examined. So Blondel in his work “*L’Action*” (1893) treats the problem that has nothing specifically “Christian” and uses only once the term “Christian philosophy”: namely, the religious philosophy, the religion that he dresses in a different guise. It is an original thought of Blondel that one must seek the way to master the order of extrinsic relations by which philosophy and religion came so close that they established religious philosophy. Thus, Blondel’s phi-

30 Lasić, H., o. c., p. 135.

31 Blondel, M., o. c., pp. 145–146; see Lasić, H., o. c., p. 135.

osophy of action is essentially religious, in some respect it is Catholicism itself, which is the only one capable of possessing full and comprehensive philosophy, by encompassing every domain of reality that is accessible to reason. Only the philosophy of action can be compatible with Catholicism because it strives directly to reach and synthesise the two ultimate goals of that which is specifically “Catholic”³².

6. *Possibility and Mode of Existence of “Catholic Philosophy”*

Blondel addressed the issue of the possibility of the existence of “Catholic philosophy”; i. e. in what sense, under what conditions and at what price “Catholic philosophy” was comprehensible and possible. Firstly, he indicates to different states of the existence of actuality, theoretically comprehensible or already existing in reality, in which the contingent beings can exist, either created or invited, elevated by grace or situated according to their answer to the requirements and the engagement of their determination, in order to demonstrate that philosophy is capable, based on the concrete state of being, even in its most authentic spontaneity, of answering in some way to such different states of being. In all of that, Blondel thinks necessary to restrict himself to the observation of the common, significant feature of such states, which is conditioned by the intrinsic truths that rule over every nature created or creatable.

Gradually examining these two very different views of the established problem, Blondel realises that on both sides, although in a different way, this attribute “Catholic”, when applied to philosophy, falls into the danger of becoming a pleonasm, ambiguous and illegal, and that also on both sides, although in a different way, it contains in itself a useful meaning, perhaps legal and permissible, but demanding certain measure of caution. Catholic philosophy invites to a task that should not be ignored. To neglect or dismiss the truths in their stages of development means to cripple philosophy, which is concerned with everything that exists or that has the possibility of becoming. Despite the immutability of principles and directions, the wealth of truth is not exhausted by any systematisation, which must always remain incomplete. The notion of the “eternal” encompasses the past and the future, taking from them everything that is mutable. In that sense, the part of philosophy that is linked to this eternal and reviving element does not need any “epithet” with which to mark the science that is intrinsically established everywhere and forever. Blondel speaks of the permanent philosophy (“*philosophia perennis*”)

32 Blondel, M., o. c., pp. 153–154; see Lasić, H., o. c., pp. 135–136.

precisely in this highest sense, not as one among several philosophies, but the philosophy as such, one and comprehensive in its basic constructedness. The term “Catholic”, in Blondel’s view, can only be applied to such philosophy, so as to emphasise the unity, durability and universality, linked with the spiritual teachings and the disposition of spirit³³.

Starting from the assumption that the “supernatural” is indeed accessible to reason and that in this concrete order the “supernatural” intends to human determination the one and only proper solution, Blondel believes that philosophy must and needs to take that into account, whether it was ignorant or informed of the act which is called “Catholic”. Since every man is invited to the supernatural order, philosophy must not remain aside, it must not fail to seek an answer to that question. Except the “pure philosophy”, the views of which are necessary, permanent and universal, there is, in Blondel’s opinion, a certain type of “mixed philosophy”, the philosophy of possible connections (in the expectation of the one of true relations) between possibilities or essential necessities and realisable possibilities, but the philosophy which is, due to the immeasurability of the orders that cannot easily be linked, subordinated to the protective measures which enable her to be perceived and applied to all the givenness, which in fact is the givenness of the world in which human being lives, and the givenness of his determination to which he is called. And that is in fact the task of philosophy, to adopt the Christian and Catholic mark.

However, Blondel warns that we should not let ourselves be seduced by the term “Catholic philosophy” itself, not even in this real permeation of the two orders that exist and that need to remain separate, because it is in fact the synthesis of the two non-reducible heterogeneousnesses, whose intrinsic correlation should not be abused in order to rationalise Catholicism and to give the notion such meaning which would bring about its secularisation. And this is precisely why the “essential philosophy”, relating to the necessary and universal conditions of spiritual beings, leads to the threshold of the mystery of God and the desired beatific vision. There exists the real philosophy that relates “servatis servandis” to the realised states, partly by our co-operation as well³⁴.

Conclusion

Blondel’s attitude with respect to the existence of “Christian” or “Catholic” philosophy is clear: philosophy in the real state of humanness can and must

33 Lasić, H., o. c., pp. 136–137.

34 Ibid, p. 138.

take into account the facts which, entirely different by origin and nature, in ourselves form life and the infinite determination with the one and only solution. Namely, the natural is intrinsically linked with the supernatural. Therefore, the ambition of those who seek to extend philosophy to the mere study of man, without any correlation with his Source, Creator, is entirely illusory. The idea according to which man is separated from God, i. e. independent of Him, is incorrect. Equally incorrect is the idea of the mystical passivity of man in relation to God. As the separate philosophy is anti-philosophical and anti-Christian, so is humanity unnatural, inhuman and godless, if it withdraws within itself.

Catholicism enables the normal field of research and, according to Blondel, provides the only perspective of "Catholic philosophy". Sharing the view of Cardinal Dechamps, he is convinced that the term or the coinage "Christian philosophy" is more ambiguous and less justified than the term "Catholic philosophy". The latter term is more comprehensible and more restrictive than the former, because, on one hand, it applies to universality, and on the other, it is only Catholicism that succeeds, in Blondel's view, in specifying that which is supernaturally Christian, without opposing itself to that which is entirely reasonable or philosophical³⁵. The true philosophy, without which the study of subjective givenness and contingent acts would be ambiguous and perilous, is a prior determination of the conditions which make it possible; to be, to think and to act with non-necessary beings. For the resolve of these problems, the metaphysics of "the solely necessary" is required, in order to prepare and precisely define the philosophy of the possible and the science of the concrete, while "Catholic philosophy" is necessary in order to escape the ambiguous and to exploit the capacities and existing differences.

Faithful to the Catholic tradition, Blondel continuously insists on the natural human insufficiency in the understanding and practice of moral truths and human virtues. It is the only way for the "essential philosophy" fully and freely to answer to Catholicism, whose name it may take even without losing its own; only in that way, the real and realistic philosophy may, without assumption and without the admixture of philosophies, co-operate with Catholicism. Apart from all of that, bearing in mind the unavoidable but only apparent conflict of philosophy and Catholicism, Blondel believes that "Catholic philosophy" has sense because, despite its original duality and its plurality of views, phases and functions, it presents itself in a debate with rational value, with the principle of organised unity in the understanding of man and his world.

35 Ibid, p. 139.

In fact, Blondel, like Thomas Aquinas, advocates the comprehensive and eternal philosophy (“*philosophia perennis*”), in which prominently features the splendour of Truth (“*Splendor Veritatis*”), the reflection of divine Being — God, who is the source and the beginning of all existence and occurrence³⁶. Owing to the historical fact of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Man, in whom human and divine Wisdom were fully manifested, one may speak of “Christian” or “Catholic” philosophy, which is founded in Christ, the embodied Word of God, by which everything became and is. This means that “Christian philosophy” should be viewed three-dimensionally, because it encompasses the pre-historic, historic and post-historic Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. In that sense, we may say that “Christian philosophy” is universal and essentially metaphysics, the science of the conditions of a priori existence and truth, the science of reason and general rationality, the science of thought in itself and in objects, while its most sublime part is theology, which studies the most divine and the most sublime Being, God embodied in Jesus Christ.

36 Ibid, p. 140.